

THE CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE OF HOME BASED
NURTURING WITH REFERENCE TO WISDOM POEMS IN THE
BOOK OF PROVERBS AND SHONA TRADITIONAL CULTURE

By

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I declare that "The Contemporary Significance of Home Based Nurturing with reference to Wisdom Poems in the Book of Proverbs and Shona Traditional Culture" is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

SIGNATURE
S. S. NDOGA

DATE

For Thalia Tariro Ndogo, my precious daughter, God's timely gift to teach us what it means to *train a child in the way s/he should go, and when s/he is old s/he will not turn from it.* Proverbs 22:6

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ABSTRACT

There is presumed dialogue between the book of Proverbs and Shona wisdom poems in dealing with the subject of home based nurturing towards societal stability. The underlying principle in both approaches, it seems, is that preparation for life begins in the home. Its negligence could account for societal breakdown. This study seeks to explore, on the one hand, the contemporary validity of home based nurturing as observed in these traditional settings, and on the other, to investigate whether this dialogue yields a methodological approach of using Africa to interpret the Old Testament.

The assumption we are taking in this study is that societal stability begins in the home. A socio-rhetorical reading of Proverbs 1-9 seems to reveal that these texts were written from the perspective of a parent-teacher, with years of experience and attained wisdom, which creates a forum to pass on this knowledge to a child-student. The common approach in both traditional settings is that the speaker employs wisdom poems, (memorable compositions) and local sayings (observed phenomena) to illustrate or illumine a given everyday reality as the prescriptive solution for becoming successful in life. Thus, wisdom poems, both biblical and Shona, are almost consistently used to communicate truth and lessons for life. For that reason, the reading of the book of Proverbs and that of Shona wisdom poems demands a novel hermeneutical approach.

ABBREVIATIONS

ALMA	Africa Leadership and Management Academy
BibBh	Bible Bhashyam
BN	Biblische Notizen
BR	Biblical Research
BS	Bibliotheca Sacra
BTB	Biblical Theology Bulletin
BV	Biblical Viewpoint
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
HeyJ	Heythrop Journal
HTS	Hervormde Teologiese Studies
IVP	Inter Varsity Press
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JETS	Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society
JNSL	Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSOT Sup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplementary series
LW	The Living Word
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology

OTE	Old Testament Essays
PANA	Pan-African News Agency
RB	Revue Biblique
Res Q	Restoration Quarterly
ScrB	Scripture Bulletin
VT	Vetus Testamentum
VT Sup	Vetus Testamentum Supplementary Series
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

All quotations are from the NRSV unless otherwise stated.

CHAPTER ONE

PRELIMINARY ISSUES

1. Purpose of study

Societal stability remains a contemporary challenge. Despite the numerous technological advancements that have been introduced to aid us, the complexities that we face have become more worrisome because, it would seem, that these advancements have only made life better technologically. Quality of life in terms of morality, which is the sum total of the content of one's character, has actually deteriorated. Our news coverage is dominated by reports of fraud, corruption, misappropriation of donor funds, nepotism, sexual misconduct and ethnic conflicts to mention but a few examples. The sad reality is that the perpetrators of these misdemeanors are often discovered to be qualified personalities from whom one ironically assumes good behaviour. For a long time, our young people have looked up with admiration and trust to some of these presumed models. Invariably, the damage done as a result of such lamentable behaviour and practice is immeasurable, particularly when such deviation is "normalised" by virtue of its frequency. The question is then who is responsible for nurturing our young people for life?

The purpose of this study is to explore the potentiality of home based nurturing as a platform to prepare our young people for life as well as a strategy for societal stability. At the onset, a few concepts deserve our preliminary qualification. Firstly, home based nurturing in this study refers to the parental responsibility of preparing their children for life. The concept does not necessarily speak of home schooling or some other model of formalised education. In our thinking it is a conscientious effort on the part of the parents, to prepare their children for life and its attendant challenges.

Secondly, the concept "Instruction"¹ is a technical reference to the material found in the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs. For the sake of consistency, whenever that technical nuance is in perspective we will capitalise the word as a signal to that effect.

Thirdly, there are the concepts of family and clan² as represented in Gerstenberger's study (2002). When we think about family, perhaps we have in our minds the concept of Western "nuclear" family, comprising of a parent and children combination. As we will discover later in this study, the biblical conception suggests much more than this, as does the Shona traditional culture. The family environment is critical for our purposes and we shall seek to clarify the applicatory sentiments.

These clarifications arise from the concern that parental authority and the attendant responsibilities deserve to be revisited. Our assumption is that it is short-sighted to prepare children merely for their careers when the more compelling task is to prepare them for life. We seek to argue, in this study, the case for home based nurturing as an ideal that can serve the dual purpose of, on the one hand, preparing our young people for life, and to address societal stability on the other hand.

For these reasons, this study intends to explore the primacy of home-based nurturing, an ideal profoundly valued in traditional practices, and to promote a platform towards its restoration. A projection of this general phenomenon is strikingly evident in the biblical culture, as indicated already, and is equally a valued norm within the Shona

1 This concept "Instruction" will be fully explained in the third chapter of our study in the exegetical analysis of the material contained in the book of Proverbs.

2 The concepts of clan and family will also be fully explained in the second chapter of this study to clarify what we have in mind when we present this as a central concern to this study.

traditional practice. As one closely studies both the book of Proverbs and Shona wisdom poems, home based nurturing does not come across as a strictly formalised exercise, but one undertaken within the informal social exchanges between parents and children. We shall seek to establish this observation a little later on in this study.

2. Projected focus of the study and chapter divisions

This study will commence with an analysis of the Zimbabwean context, which represents familiar territory for the present writer, to be considered from the prospect of both an involved and interested party. The idea would be to register the various factors indicative of societal fragmentation, and to attempt to pinpoint the crux of the matter. This context is understandably representative of the situation on the ground elsewhere, and we will seek to bring such comparative scenarios to attention where possible.

The analysis of the Zimbabwean context and its affinity to other contexts will be followed, in the second chapter, by an introduction to familial issues from which the core concern of the present study resonates. We will particularise the Gerstenberger's (2002) social strata of the family as preparatory ground for our exegetical investigation of the Wisdom poem found in the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs. The book of Proverbs itself will be introduced with specific attention to its setting, subject matter, structure, and sacredness as it relates to our central focus in this study. We will also bring into perspective Shona family setting as we anticipate a dialogue between the two contexts to yield some helpful insights for our purposes.

The study of the family setting will be followed in the third and fourth chapters by the exegesis of selected texts from the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs. The approach would be to investigate the applicability of some guidelines from these texts in terms of home based nurturing as a biblical and traditional ideal for the contemporary context. At this juncture, we ought to mention Robbins' (1996) socio-rhetorical critique as our preferred exegetical approach to the texts we will analyse. Our subject matter demands a multi-disciplinary approach. Such a methodology is necessary in order to comprehensively address our comparative study of the ancient biblical world and the traditional Shona culture, as well as to attain to proper exegetical treatise of the select material for our purposes. Our attempt is to draw out principles undergirding the primacy of the home as the centre of nurturing. With this in mind, perhaps the most satisfactory approach is Vernon K. Robbins' socio-rhetorical criticism as outlined in his book *Exploring the texture of Texts: A guide to socio-rhetorical interpretation* (1996).

To turn our attention back to the projected chapter divisions, the fifth chapter will be an analysis of home based nurturing in the light of Shona wisdom poems. This study considers Shona wisdom texts as secondary to biblical texts. For that reason, we will not treat these texts with the same exegetical intensity as our primary biblical texts. However, a comparison of biblical and Shona wisdom poems is necessary to allow some observations that can be of some assistance to our study of the Old Testament (OT), particularly with regard to the reading of the OT using Africa as the lens. The central focus of this study, home based nurturing, will remain in view throughout this exercise.

The sixth chapter will conclude the study with a summation of findings as well as tabling recommendations. We will now consider a description of our methodological approach highlighted above.

3. Proposed methodological approach

Robbins' socio-rhetorical criticism is "an approach to literature that focuses on values, convictions and beliefs both in the texts we read and in the world in which we live" (1996:1). The label "socio-rhetorical" is purposefully adopted to imply a strategy of reading and rereading texts from various angles, thus incorporating various disciplines, (namely; literary, socio-scientific, rhetorical, postmodern and theological), under a single rubric. The presupposition is that each discipline on its own, in spite of how comprehensively a text may be analysed, is limited, but when used interactively in dialogue with, and in compliment to, other approaches it yields a rich tapestry³ of belief, action and life in the ancient world as well as in the contemporary. Robbins (1996:2) says that the goal of socio-rhetorical criticism is to "bring skills we use on a daily basis into an environment of interpretation that is both intricately sensitive to detail and perceptively attentive to large fields of meaning in the world in which we live".

The conviction pertaining to the reality of multiple textures within a text resonates from yet another presupposition that "words themselves work in complex ways to communicate meanings that we only partially understand" (1996:3). For our study, we

³ The concept 'tapestry' is employed to indicate what Robbins calls various "textures" within a text. In his scheme he presents five different kinds of 'textures' that will be explored even further below. However, he cautions that "no interpreter will ever use all the resources of socio-rhetorical criticism in any one interpretation" (1996:2).

make use of relevant textures in order to achieve “meanings and meaning effects that the words in a given text represent, engage, evoke and ignite” (1996:6).

Firstly, the **Inner Texture** investigates the transaction of interpreting a text by analysing features in the language of the text itself as the medium of communication. This texture engages the reader and the narrator⁴ so as to display the patterns, structures, devices and modes in the text as communication “tools”. While these narrational patterns may sound like an obvious texture, in actuality, it can become complex in determining what the text itself is in contrast to what the reader puts into it. For that reason, socio-rhetorical criticism suggests “implied author” and “implied reader” as a necessary distinction (1996:46).

Secondly, the **Intertexture** investigates the “interaction of the language in the text with ‘outside’ material and physical objects, historical events, texts and customs, values, roles, institutions and systems (1996:3). Here we are dealing with phenomena that lie outside the text, in comparison to the implied world of the text.

Thirdly, the **Social and Cultural texture**, as the title suggests, delineates anthropological and sociological issues via a range of topics. The three topics that this texture employs to support the social reform and withdrawal from the norms are what Robbins calls *specific social topics*. These derive the processes, then *the common social and cultural topics* direct the practices and also the *final cultural categories* deduce priority. Therefore, at the heart of this texture is symbolic action that is socially

4 The voice through which the account unfolds. In first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs, that voice is prominently featured in the persona of the father with occasional portraits of Wisdom persona.

and culturally determined. *Symbolic action* can be derived from the dialogue and actions of the characters in the account as well as the world in the text that the narrator portrays.

Fourthly, the **Ideological texture** indicates how what we say and believe connects with the power structures and power relations of the society in which we live. The social, cultural, individual location, and perspective of the reader are taken into account with the text as the guest to the biases, opinions, preferences, and stereotypes that are consciously or subconsciously brought into play. A concise definition of ideology entails an integrated system of beliefs, assumptions and values that reflect the needs and interests of a group or class at a particular time in history (Robbins 1996:96).

Fifthly, the **Sacred texture** analyses the relation of humans to the divine. This approach enables the exegete to locate ways in which the text speaks about God, or the realms of religious life. In this category, God may exist either in the background, or in a direct position of action and speech in a text. Specific attention is given to individuals who have a special relationship with God or to divine powers. Other interests in this texture include spirit beings, divine history, human redemption and commitment, the formation and nurturing of the religious community, as well as the ethical code by which the community abides.

Robbins' methodology challenges the interpreter to explore a given text in a systematic and broad manner that leads to a rich environment of interpretation and dialogue. For this reason, this study will adopt that approach from the perception that the **inner texture, the intertexture, the social and cultural texture, ideological** as well as

the **sacred texture** provide a rich environment in which to gain a fuller understanding of meanings and meaning effects in a systematic and comprehensive mechanism. The reason for utilising this methodology is that it will allow for close analysis of the text from various angles. This multifaceted analysis is particularly relevant for the poetic and proverbial material that we are primarily dealing with in this study. In addition to this, Robbins' approach is open to being supplemented by other expert knowledge which allows for the interaction with relevant contributions along the way.

With that in mind we now turn our attention to the issues that will shed light on the need for this study, namely the causes for societal collapse.

4. Causes attributed to the fragmentation of the Zimbabwean society

It is our perception that the social and moral fibre of the contemporary Shona society is beginning to fall apart, as the analyses below will reveal. This development is a relatively new phenomenon within the Shona culture⁵ in Zimbabwe.⁶ Traditionally renowned for strong relational values and solid communal ties, the Shona society is

5 "The population of Zimbabwe is culturally and linguistically diverse. There are some 12 indigenous languages spoken throughout the country. These people have, despite their different beliefs, cultures and languages, managed to live harmoniously while preserving their cultural beliefs and values. However, there are two main local languages spoken, that is Shona and Ndebele. The official language is English. The ethnic characteristics of Zimbabweans are diverse. The largest ethnic group are the Shona who are made up of numerous groupings (among them the Karanga, Zezuru, Manyika, Kore-Kore) totalling 65 per cent of the population. Other groups are the Ndebele (15%), Kalanga (5%) and the Sotho, Tonga and Venda who constitute about 1% each. In addition, there are persons of European and Asian origin who constitute about 0.5% and 0.1% of the total population". ©1996-2001 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Geneva, Switzerland

6 Zimbabwe is situated in south-central Africa between the Limpopo and Zambezi Rivers. It is bound by Zambia in the north and north-west, by South Africa in the south; by Mozambique in the east and north-east and in the south-west by Botswana. It covers a total area of 390,245 square kilometres, about three times the size of Britain. Zimbabwe lies wholly to the north of the Tropic of Capricorn and almost the whole country lies more than 330 metres above sea level. The outstanding feature is the central plateau, also known as the highveld which is about 650 kilometres long and 80 kilometres wide. Bounding it on either side is the middleveld which is between 600 and 1,200 metres above sea level. The total population of Zimbabwe is 12 576 742 of whom about 70% and 30% live in the rural and urban areas respectively. The growth rate of the population is approximately 3.0% per annum. ©1996-2001 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Geneva, Switzerland.

deplorably falling apart. This development deserves our attention because at the root of the various deviant acts is a lack of respect for another's person and property. Such deviation, in actuality, signifies a departure from deep seated Shona custom. Moreover, there is the observation that the collapse is gaining ground against the backdrop of technological advancements and innovative developments emblematic of the postmodernist era, which is incongruously designed to improve life.

This scenario is not an exception to the pollution of other African cultures and even beyond. The concern here is indeed a global issue.



Figure 1 : Map of Zimbabwe. Source: CIA Fact book

Predictably, our contention with the notable widespread of delinquency, among other factors, signals the high levels of the deterioration if not the absence of curbing measures. Now as juvenile delinquency⁷ has reached novel and astronomical levels, a

⁷ A South African that surveyed 10 699 teenagers revealed the following: 9% of those surveyed had carried a weapon to school including guns, knives, pangas or kerries; 15% had been threatened or injured at school; 50%

number of causative factors have been attributed to this.⁸ As we highlight a number of the causes that have been forwarded, we need to point out that on the one hand, our concern is not to evaluate these factors as comprehensive, but purely to register our awareness. On the other hand, these factors serve to further advance what we have already suggested as the core issue leading to the breakdown of the society.

4.1 The constraints of urbanisation

The whole matter of urbanisation has ushered in the inescapable change from, in the case of Zimbabwe, Growth Points⁹ to small towns, and predictably into large cities. The process has given rise to a highly impersonal environment and restrictive neighbourhoods, ultimately typified by high walls, electric fences and fierce looking dogs. Whether these measures are justifiable or not, is not our primary concern at this juncture, suffice to point out the adverse and perhaps regrettable effects. This development tells us that there are now some known threats. For that reason, people no longer feel safe. Such security consciousness is a marked departure from what were safe neighbourhoods. In the past people did not even need to lock their doors but knew that respect for others' property was embedded in the community's values among many other ideals. Skolnick and Skolnick (1992:13), even though they are

admitted having had alcohol before turning 13; 9% had used dagga; 17% had been offered, sold or given an illegal drug on school property (Star Dec 10, 2003). The South Africa context represents a close geographical parallel to Zimbabwe

8 Whitehead and Crow sample a number of factors in North America reflective of the dire levels of deterioration that contemporary morality has reached. In their book *Home Education : Rights and Reasons* (1993:34ff), they reveal the astronomical realities of suicidal cases, cheating in school, dress code degeneration, incidences of school shooting, substance abuse, teenage pregnancies, the HIV/Aids pandemic and related STDs. Such pervasions that continue to rise rather drastically signal that something has gone wrong in our society and particularly in our educational system. Because of the idea of a global village these trends in the West tend to find their way into the Third World.

9 A Growth Point in Zimbabwe is a semi-urban development centre that the government identifies and directs resources to make goods and services readily available to the rural population. The name suggests potential for development and by design will draw what is usually a sparsely populated rural lifestyle under a seemingly urban approach.

writing in a first world context, affirm the importance of communal life when they write:

The home was not set off as a private place, a refuge to make up for the deprivations in the world of work. There was no world of work outside the home; family members were fellow workers. Nor did the world outside one's front door consist of strangers or half strangers, as neighbours often are today. Rather, most people lived in a community of people known since childhood and with whom one would expect to have dealings for the rest of one's life. These outsiders could enter the household freely and were entitled, and even obligated, to intervene if relations between parents and children and husbands and wives were not as they should be.

The traditional society, therefore, was conducive to mutual accountability as part of the socialisation process. Urbanisation has uprooted that virtue, although we must say that perhaps, this was not intentional but purely incidental.

There is also, on the one hand, the undeniable infrastructural damage caused by the deteriorating conditions related to human settlement, such as overcrowding, inadequate water supply and sanitation, inadequate refuse collection, poor drainage, inadequate road transport systems and high unemployment levels. On the other hand, the cultural damage is equally noticeable. As many experts in the urbanisation study will confirm, the constraint is apparent in most Sub-Saharan African cities such as Dar es Salaam, Harare, Lusaka, Lagos, Gaborone, Nairobi, and Abuja, to mention a few examples (see www.undp.org). In an article for the Pan African News Agency, Itai Musengenyi comments on the Zimbabwe situation by making the observation that urbanisation, industrialisation, economic hardships, adoption of Western values, and the widening of socio-economic gaps have disrupted family life in a nation which 50 years ago was quite close-knit (PANA October 11 1996). He continues to say that "urbanisation forces people to adopt different cultures, some of which emphasize on

individualism resulting in the erosion of values such as sharing and consultation among relatives” (PANA October 11 1996). His comments are not out of place. Sadly his concern seems to be falling on deaf ears. Similarly, the Report of Human Development in Zimbabwe (2003:6) registers that “the downside of [urban] resettlement was that it further weakened kinship ties as people moved and lived apart from their kin”. The comment is written with the loss of social censorship institutions in mind, where the (rural) community served as the conscience of the individual.

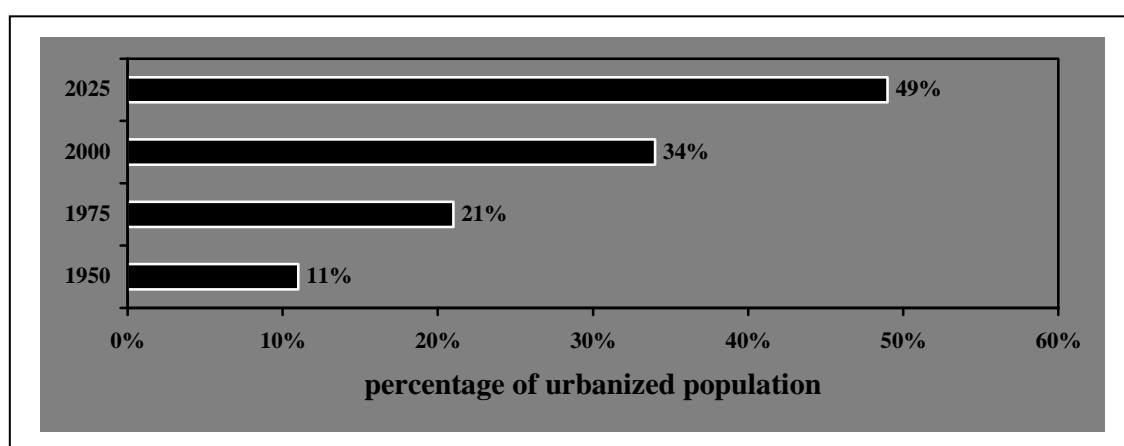


Table 1: Projected Urban Populations in Africa. Source: UNCHS

On the Freedom House webpage, Klaus Töpfer’s (2003), the Undersecretary and Acting Director General of UNCHS (Habitat) opening statement seems to negatively depict urbanisation. He says that “Urban development and planning regulations as applied in many developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America have seemed to fail to provide orderly and sustainable urban development. The result is that squatter settlements and informal sector developments have continued to predominate in spite of officially approved urban development plans”. While these occurrences are unfortunate, what is worse is the inner-city or sub-culture that emanates from these slums bears no affinity to traditional or even modern values. In the light of this reality, urbanisation has introduced, along with these imbalances, delinquents whose reversal

is not an easy task for any governing authority to redress. As the table below shows, urbanisation is on the increase in Zimbabwe nonetheless.

	1969 ¹	1982 ¹	1989 ²	1994	2000
Harare	364,390	656,011	973,444	1,290,444	1,831,140
Bulawayo	236,320	413,814	614,052	814,016	1,155,089
Gweru	46,170	78,918	117,105	155,240	220,286
Mutare	41,970	69,621	103,309	136,952	194,335
Kwekwe	31,390	47,607	70,643	93,648	132,887
Kadoma	24,980	44,613	66,200	87,759	124,530
Hwange	20,190	39,202	58,171	77,115	109,426
Chitungwiza	14,970	172,556	256,053	339,436	481,660
Chinhoyi	13,360	24,322	36,091	47,844	67,891
Masvingo	11,380	30,642	45,469	60,276	85,532
Marondera	10,940	20,263	30,068	39,860	56,561
Chegutu	8,630	19,621	29,115	38,597	54,769
Shurugwi	8,390	13,351	19,811	43,306	61,451
Kariba	3,940	12,387	18,381	26,263	37,267
Redcliff	8,580	22,015	32,668	38,597	54,769
Victoria Falls	3,450	8,114	12,040	24,367	34,577
Total Municipalities	849 050	1 673 057	2 482 620	3 291 084	4 670 060
Other Urban Areas	93 750	268 553	398 561	528 273	749 620
Total Urban	942 800	1 941 610	2 881 121	3 819 357	5 419 680

Table 2: Official Census Data. Source World Bank Mission

The particularisation of urbanisation with all the attending problems that experts in this area have highlighted and continue to wrestle with, only serves to add to what is an even greater problem as we will see below. While urbanisation in its purest form is desirable, it however, has come at heavy cost in non financial terms. When the issue of Human Development Index¹⁰ is brought into perspective, perhaps urbanisation is found wanting in some respects. Of concern in our study, as we will show below, is the fragmentation of our society through the urbanisation process. With that we will turn to the next possibility.

¹⁰ Human Development Index is derived from the quality of life with regards to health, social and economic factors and other forums such as civil, political and religious freedom.

4.2 The challenges of the HIV/AIDS pandemic

The HIV/AIDS Pandemic¹¹ which in Zimbabwe is expressed in the statement "*vanhu vari kuzofa*" (Lit. People are dying). This usually occurs after a long illness. It is well known that HIV/AIDS is a sexually transmitted disease responsible for the majority of adult mortality in Zimbabwe today as it is in much of sub-Saharan Africa. This disease is unique in that it is the only one in history to have a dedicated United Nations organisation, UNAIDS, charged with the single aim of confronting it (see Barnett & Whiteside 2002:4). According to the Zimbabwe Human Development Report (2003:7), the first diagnosis of HIV in Zimbabwe was in 1985 and by 2001 some 2.3 million people were living with AIDS. Since then, Zimbabwe has become the third worst infected country in the world after South Africa and Botswana, with more than 2000 casualties a week attributed to the disease.

The same report reveals that life expectancy dropped from 61 in 1990 to 43 in 2003 (2003:2). Infection rate, which on its own is a hard-hitting reality, in the Southern African region has reached unimaginable levels. Reports indicate that the highest risk rests with the 38% of the population aged 10-24, (Kim *et al*/2001).¹² It can be argued

11 The acronym AIDS stands for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome which basically means that the disease is not genetically determined, but causes depletion of immune system cells until the body is basically defenceless due to illness which presents itself in many forms. Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is the virus that causes AIDS. The concept "pandemic" should be understood from the technical concepts of firstly, an epidemic being a disease that reaches unexpected rate of infection in a relatively short time; secondly, endemic – a disease like malaria that continues to be present in a population but at low or moderate levels; then thirdly pandemic is when an epidemic has reached world-wide proportions such as influenza in 1918 or HIV/AIDS today (see Barnett & Whiteside 2002:25).

12 Whitehead and Crow (1993:14) refer to the standards of 1907 which will embarrass a lot of contemporary educationists. The account is that of an eleven year old Kansas student recalling the questions that qualified here for her eight grade diploma as she reports, "The 'orthography' quiz asked us to spell twenty words including 'abbreviated', 'obscene', 'elucidation', 'assassination', and 'animosity'. In Reading we were required to tell what we knew of the writings of Thomas Jefferson, and for another of the ten questions to 'indicated the pronunciation and give the meaning of the following words: Zenith, deviated, coliseum, misconception, panegyric, Spartan, talisman, eyrie, triton and crypt'. In grammar's ten were two directing us to analyse and diagram: 'There is a tide in the affairs of men, which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune'. In history we were to give a brief account of the colleges, printing and religion in the colonies prior to the American Revolution' to 'name the principal campaigns

that the relatively new prospect of early sexual experimentation which is adding to the high risk of exposure to HIV, points towards the erosion of a traditional structure of sex education. Kim *et al* (2001:11) points out that “Traditionally, aunts, uncles and other extended family members provided sexuality-related information to young people, but as urbanization increases the distance between family members, parents are taking greater responsibility in this area, and many feel uncomfortable in this unaccustomed role”. In the Shona culture, it is not easy for parents to discuss matters pertaining to sexuality without sounding vulgar. That is why other family relations were assigned to address this sensitive subject. In most cases the concept of “family”, within the traditional setting is understood as broadly as possible. While a lot of scholars place this responsibility of sex education as a family responsibility, we must understand that the concept “family” is not that of a western nuclear connotation, but a communal one.

Rivers and Aggleton (1999) correctly observe that in many traditional societies, the family provided the necessary sex education to young people as part of the formalised initiation into adulthood. In the same vein, Aulora Stally (2003), an independent media consultant based in Harare, Zimbabwe, expresses a concern for the high sexually transmitted disease risks among the country’s youth. On her list of possible causes which include early sexual experimentation, limited access to information, harmful cultural practices and economic instability, she points out the loss of traditional support systems. She writes:

The unravelling of families because of urbanization and other factors has affected vital support networks for young people. In some situations, those leaving their villages for

and military leaders of the Civil War’, and to ‘name the principal political questions which have been advocated since the Civil War and the party which advocated each”.

towns and cities include young people who are separating from grandparents and other relatives who had traditionally played a key role in their lives. The 1999 study *Adolescents and AIDS Prevention: A School-Based Approach in Zimbabwe* explains that traditional sources of sex education in Zimbabwe, including the paternal aunt (*tete*) and uncle (*sekuru*), are being lost in the process of urban migration. In Zimbabwean society, grandparents and other extended family members have traditionally passed on sexual and reproductive health information to their younger relatives (2003).

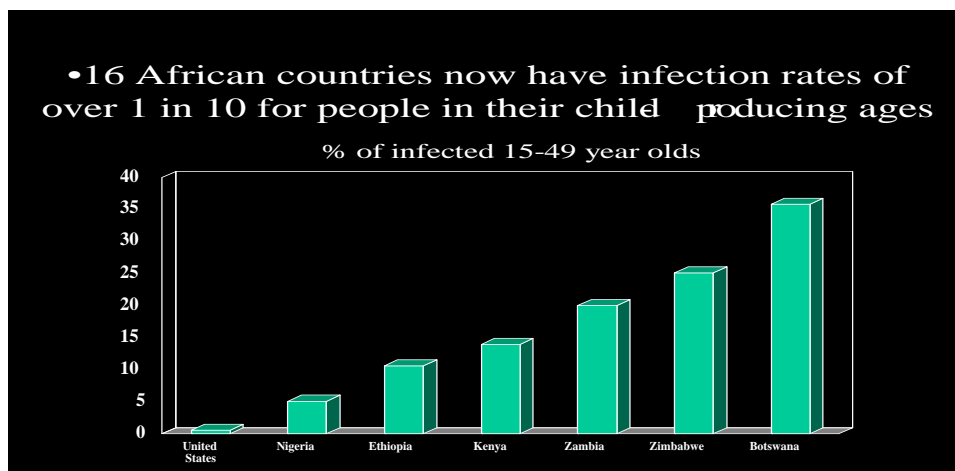


Table 3: Infection rate in Africa. Source: UNAIDS¹³

In the above analysis, it is interesting to note the cross-pollination of urbanisation as a causative factor with the HIV/Aids pandemic. Coupled with that is the rise of sexual offences. Sadly, both perpetrators and victims are becoming younger each time.¹⁴ The trend is pointing towards an even greater problem within our society that cannot

¹³ The percentages here of the African countries in contrast to the United States make the African reality look grimmer, and that is what it is.

¹⁴ Research in Zimbabwe done in 1996 revealed the following statistics: 70% of sexually-abused victims (all girls) were below 13 years of age; 60% of perpetrators were younger than 20 years; 9% of perpetrators were strangers; 29% of perpetrators were family members or relatives; 29% of perpetrators were lodgers; 39% of attacks took place in the victims' homes; 66% of cases took about one year to reach the courts; 57% of cases had enough evidence for a conviction (Khan 2003). The concept of youth takes an even younger definition these days in the light of stark revelations from the article by Angelique Serrao in *The Star* of August 17, 2004. She reports that "The face of sexual abusers is becoming younger, with an increase in the number of children under the age of 14 appearing in courts on rape and other sexual abuse charges. Shaheda Omar, therapeutic manager at Teddy Bear Clinic in Johannesburg, said their statistics showed that 25% of sexual abuse cases are committed by child offenders. Omar said more than 250 child sexual offenders went through their rehabilitation diversion programme last year. The youngest was 6 years old".

be merely addressed by focusing on the HIV/Aids pandemic or even the disturbing increase on the sexual offences, as we will seek to argue further in this study.

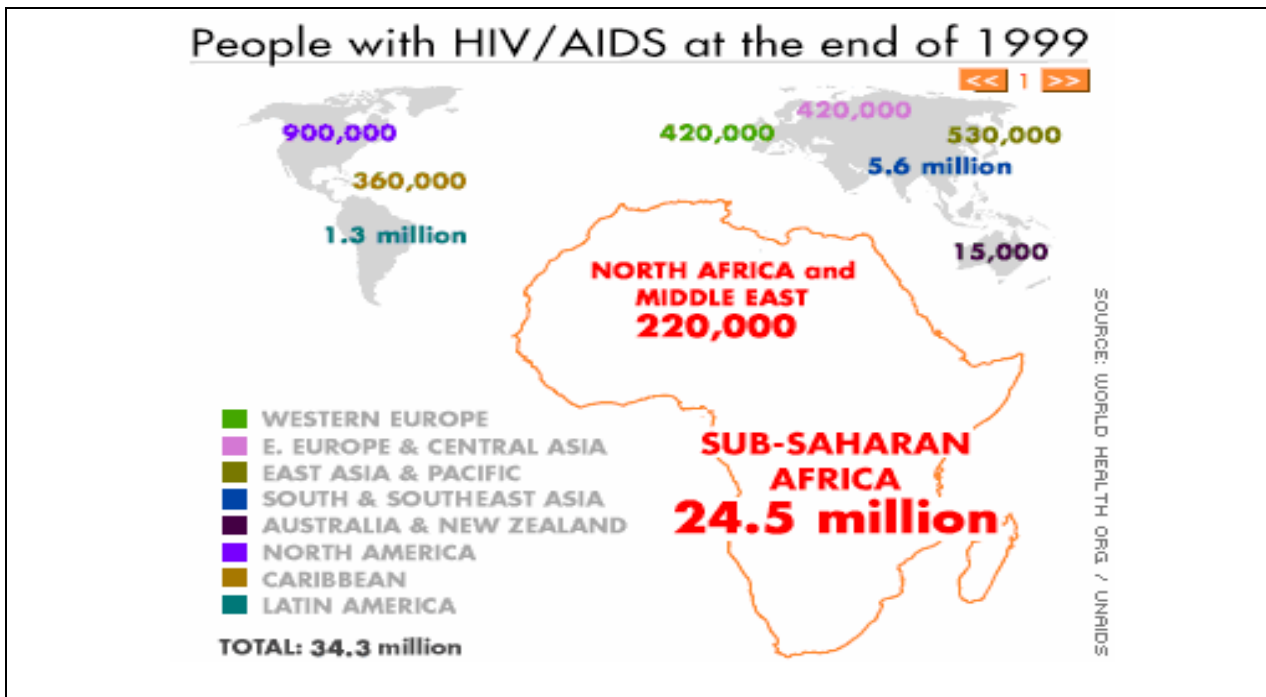


Figure 2: People with HIV/AIDS at the end of 1999. Source: UNAIDS¹⁵

For example, in the sexual promiscuity and teenage pregnancy dilemma, the 'safe sex' campaign, it has been argued, in reality upholds promiscuous behaviour instead of reversing the predicament.¹⁶ Whitehead and Crow (1993:34) remark that "tragically the condom emphasis is breeding a false sense of security among young people in the high risk categories", the high risk in this case is defined as "anyone sexually active outside a mutually monogamous marriage". A headline in the Star newspaper of South Africa sardonically entitled, "Rude Awakening for Parents", Elize Jacobs (2003:1) indicated that 41% of the surveyed South African children as young as 14 are having

¹⁵ As the figure portrays, there are more people with AIDS in sub Saharan Africa than the rest of the world put together. These are 2003 figures and the updated 2004 report presents an even grimmer picture.

¹⁶ The present writer advocates that the 'safe sex' or the call to condomise is a campaign merely precipitating a lesser evil when abstinence and confining sex within a marital context represent a permanent measure to reverse the sorrow state we find ourselves in. Condoms, for example, were originally designed as a contraceptive, not as a disease prevention mechanism. Whitehead and Crow affirm the lack of efficacy in that regard by stating that "research clearly shows that reliance on condoms for safety from HIV [and other STDs] is trifling with death (1993:34). The South African Health Minister in her response to the alarming findings on the survey conducted by the Medical Research Council of a study on youth risk behaviour she reaffirms the need to communicate abstinence as opposed to condoms (Star Dec 10, 2003).

sex. The article reveals that these findings “showed that teen behaviour displays a disturbing mirror image of the social ills afflicting society” particularly with the high prevalence of HIV/Aids pandemic. The article continues to show that of the sexual active 70% had one or more sexual partners and only 10% were reported to have been forced into having sex by other pupils. In her response to this the South African Health Minister retorted, “What would excite me would be if they didn’t engage in sex, and therefore didn’t need condoms. For us to focus on condoms for children aged 13 and 14 is not right” (Star Dec 10, 2003). What we need to point out is our assumption here that the South African realities are a close representation of the Zimbabwean and other African nations, although the statistical entries may vary.

Perhaps another voice that we need to hear is that of Sam Kobia (2001:viii) in his Foreword to *Facing AIDS : The Challenge, the Churches’ Response* where he writes:

The disease of AIDS is a serious invitation for us to reflect on human relations at communal and global levels. Part of the problem is commodification of human relations. Globalisation greatly exacerbates this problem by promoting a consumer mentality whereby sexuality itself is reduced to a commodity that can no longer be separated from a surplus.

This is an important call in that it requires us to consider the restoration of sexual integrity as well as discouraging the tendency to view it as a commodity, which leads to the overemphasis on the technical advice – the use of condoms as opposed to social responsibility. Kobia concludes that a “sufficient and reflective control of AIDS will depend more on the quality of human relations and of our institutions” (2001:viii), a suggestion that needs to be heeded as we consider the home. AIDS does not merely impact an individual, but households and communities.

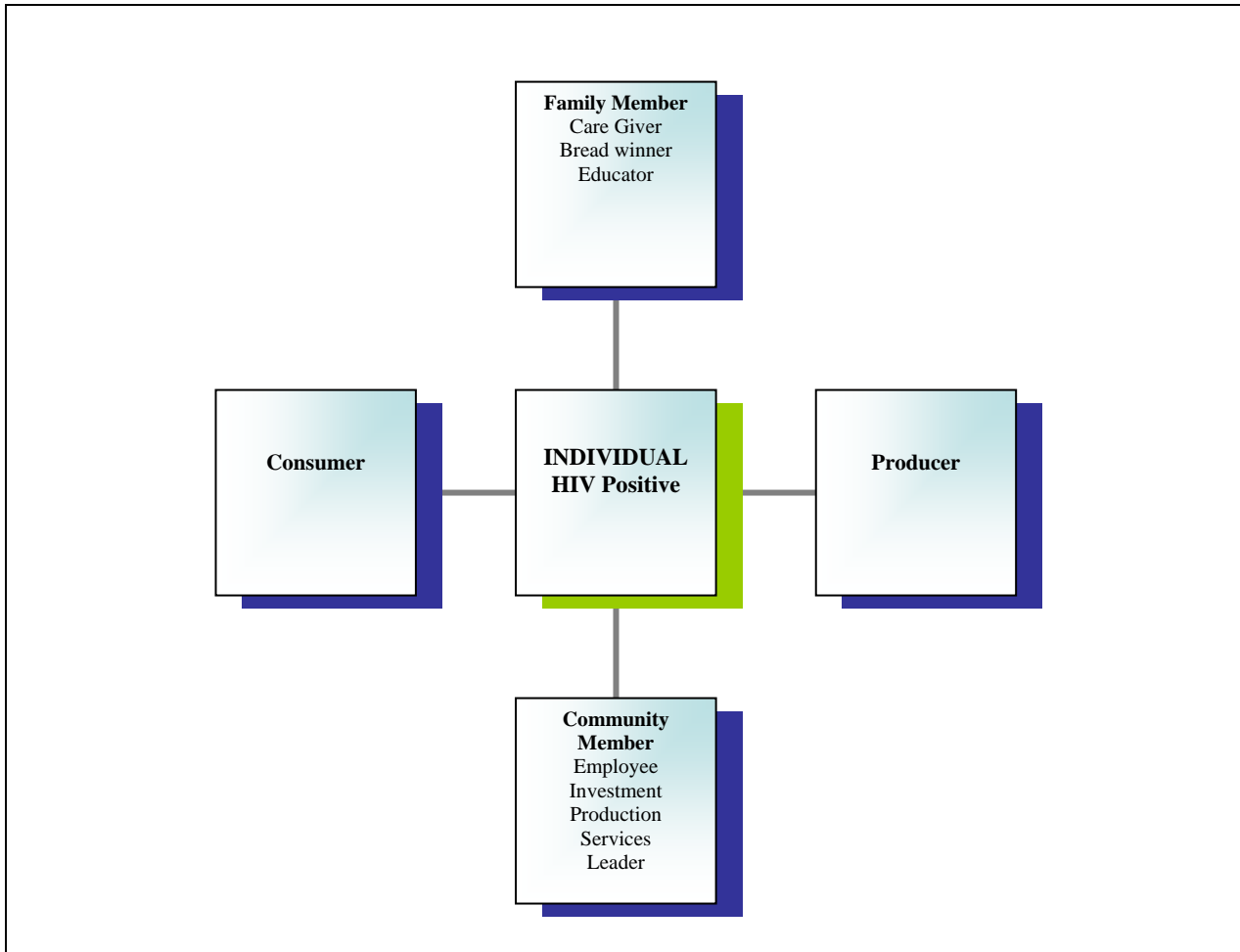


Figure 3: Diagrammatic representation of the impact of HIV/AIDS on society

4.3 The current economical hardships

The current economical environment has taken its toll on the Zimbabwean citizenry. Since 1997 the country was ushered into a harsh economic atmosphere which had adverse effects on the average person. In particular, food and fuel shortages became emblematic of the stark conditions, with long queues for these commodities, at one stage, becoming an everyday experience nationwide. Despite these observable struggles, there has been an even worse outcome of these hardships which is the emergence of relatively 'new' trends namely; street children, street families, child labour, and juvenile prostitution.

A brief look at the economic story of Zimbabwe commences with the first decade after independence which saw a steady rise of the economy. In 1991, in an effort to further boost the economy, due to observable stagnation toward the end of the first decade and at the recommendation of the IMF, the government adopted the Economical Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP).¹⁷ However, ESAP deepened the economical woes by sky-rocketing the cost of living which saw inflation rising dramatically, a decline in wages, job losses, and ultimately a widening of the gap between the rich and poor.

With the new and unprecedented levels of poverty and desperation came the quest for home grown economic programs that replaced ESAP. The first of these was Zimbabwe Program for Economic and Social Transformation (ZIMPREST),¹⁸ introduced in 1998. This program also failed dismally and the Millennium Economic Recovery Program (MERP)¹⁹ replaced it in 2001. During this time, Zimbabwe became involved in the Democratic Republic of Congo's civil war from August 1998. The government estimates of the war expenditure were set at US\$3 million a month while other sources quoted a much higher figure of US\$25 million (see SADC Country Studies 2001:73).²⁰ It also said that some US\$200 million worth of equipment was lost or destroyed during this engagement. Thus the economical story remained unchanged as the vulnerability became more and more pronounced.

17 This programme called for the removal of subsidies on social services and basic commodities, currency devaluation, price controls, labour and commodity market deregulation among others

18 ZIMPREST intended to promote so called indigenous businesses and small scale enterprises. It was preceded by a government announcement that ESAP was no more and a home grown program would replace it. However, the damage done through ESAP and other factors was already a toll order to reverse.

19 MERP was introduced when all the benefits of its predecessors were unfruitful and also without much dialogue between government business and labour. As such it lacked consensus and transparency and its failure was inevitable (see SAPES TRUST : SADC Country Studies Zimbabwe 2001 Report 2001:73).

20 Martin Meredith (2002:148) cites an estimated amount of US\$1 million per day.

To add to the economic woes was the ill timing of and the widely controversial Land Reform Program orchestrated by the violent farm invasions that started in 2000.²¹ The government moved to take over a large percentage of around 6 000 commercial farms. As the predominantly white commercial farmers were replaced by the supposedly landless black farmers, production was largely affected in the mainly agrarian based economy. With that came yet another unprecedented move by the government to offer the once off Z\$50 000 gratuities to the ex-combatants and a Z\$2000 monthly allowance, all of this not budgeted for. At this stage the economical structure of Zimbabwe could not sustain such unplanned expenditure. The Gross Domestic Production fell from US\$2 500 in 1990 to US\$1 600 in June 2000. According to the World Development Indicator CD of 2000, the Zimbabwean economic structure was 56% services, 20% Agriculture, and 24% Industry. According to Meredith (2002:111), commercial farmers prior to their premature exit from the Zimbabwean scenario accounted for three-quarters of the output of the agricultural industry as they grew 90% of the marketed maize, 90% of cotton, virtually all the tobacco and other export crops including wheat, tea coffee and sugar, accounting for one-third of the total exports. Their removal had adverse effects on the economy. All these developments created economic donor apathy and things worsened further. Presently we have the newly launched National Economic Development Priority Programme to be followed by Zimbabwe Economic Development Strategy.

21 The Land Reform Program, dubbed the third *Chimurenga* (Shona word for uprising which began with 1890 attempt to stop white settlers from occupying their land see Martin and Johnson 1981:vii), widely perceived as a political manoeuvre, hence the inherent controversies, was initiated through the invasion of some commercial mainly white commercial farms by so called war veterans which the government did not condemn despite the violent nature of the land takeover. The rationale was to correct the colonial imbalance whereby the 6 000 large scale commercial farmers held 39% of the most fertile land while black small scale farmers owned only 4%. The communal areas where the 4 million lived accounted for 41% of the land where droughts occurred frequently and rainfall patterns unreliable for crop production, while the national parks and State forests accounted for 16% (see Meredith 2002:120).

The rise of street children or children of the street,²² street families, prostitution (both adult and juvenile), are among other unfortunate indicators of the economic hardships in Zimbabwe. Statistics reveal that some 70% of the people now live below the poverty line.²³ These are highlighted for our purposes as a demonstration of yet another factor leading to the breakdown of the family and unavoidably the removal of a nurturing institution.

Another unparalleled development was the large scale departure of professionals in search of greener pastures. The "brain drain" means that the much needed players for economic recovery will not be in the country as the frustration level grows even higher. This development has given rise to further destabilisation of the family as in some cases, the parents or at least one of them go away in search of a better economic situation, leaving the children under the care of the extended family members. "Forex orphans" and widow(er)s are also a new cause for concern as it leads to family breakdown as members leave to go and work abroad to sustain the rest of the family.

4.4 The concerns raised in our educational standards

Our educational standards have deteriorated considerably. The assumption that has been taken for granted about schooling since its inception, to borrow from Mark Hinds' (1998:207) apt description, is that it addressed the necessity of preparing children for adulthood and its attendant responsibilities. On the contrary, there is a large majority of families that are disconcerted by the existing quality of education which some allege

22 Street children and Children of the street have become necessary distinctions for, with regard to the former, children who live on the streets permanently and with regards to the latter, children who come from home to spend time on the streets to beg according to a UNICEF official Mr D. Dube in an interview we had with him.

23 With the inflation rate sitting above 4000%, and with very little being done to reverse that situation, much more suffering is bound to be experienced in the next few years.

leads to mediocrity. A close analysis of the scenario reveals that today's children, comparatively speaking, score the lowest grades in comprehension, creativity and calculation.²⁴

In Zimbabwe, there are good things to be said about our educational system since the attainment of independence. During the colonial era, as with most African countries, the educational system was racially biased where a bottleneck system allowed only 10% to continue with academic education among the blacks. Also, schools were categorised in A-C where A schools were white, B schools were largely run by councils, and C schools were a missionary enterprise. At independence, primary schools became free for all and also adult education was introduced to cater for those whose schooling had been disrupted by the civil war. With this came an increase in both primary and secondary schools as the table below shows:

YEAR	NUMBER OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS	NUMBER OF HIGH SCHOOLS
1980	3 180	197
1990	4 540	1 533
1999	4 723	1548

Table 4: Number of Primary and Secondary Schools in Zimbabwe

By 1998, the adult literacy was 87.2%, with 65% having completed Grade 7-Form 4, and 10% having A level to graduate status. Only 24% accounted for those who had not completed any specific level (see SADC Country Studies 2001:29-30). The

24 Whitehead and Crow (1993:14) refer to the standards of 1907 which will embarrass a lot of contemporary educationists. The account is that of an eleven year old Kansas student recalling the questions that qualified here for her eight grade diploma as she reports, "The 'orthography' quiz asked us to spell twenty words including 'abbreviated', 'obscene', 'elucidation', 'assassination', and 'animosity'. In Reading we were required to tell what we knew of the writings of Thomas Jefferson, and for another of the ten questions to 'indicated the pronunciation and give the meaning of the following words: Zenith, deviated, coliseum, misconception, panegyric, Spartan, talisman, eyrie, triton and crypt'. In grammar's ten were two directing us to analyse and diagram: 'There is a tide in the affairs of men, which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune'. In history we were to give a brief account of the colleges, printing and religion in the colonies prior to the American Revolution' to 'name the principal campaigns and military leaders of the Civil War', and to 'name the principal political questions which have been advocated since the Civil War and the party which advocated each".

University of Zimbabwe had been the only university in the country. However, they year following Independence saw the introduction of six other institutions of higher learning.²⁵

The computer dependency syndrome has really set in,²⁶ and consequently, the principle of education being inseparable from life is slowly being eroded. That in itself has major implications on the ills that plague our society. As a result, some parents have opted for the home-schooling option in an attempt to redress the situation. While home-schooling is an option for single parents or broken homes, it presents an insurmountable challenge that we do not have space to delve into without moving away from our central concern.

Related to the above is not just the increase of private schools but also the preference by many to send their children to these schools with the hope that there is more on offer. The crux of the matter is this, despite the good qualifications a student might attain academically, that process seems to have its shortcomings. In an interview with Dr Charles Mugaviri, the Dean of Students at the University of Zimbabwe, he revealed a concern for a majority of students who, upon graduation and securing a good position in an area of employment, will within the first five years be involved in fraud of one kind or another. That is precisely our concern. This is an important consideration

25 National University of Science and Technology was established in 1990; Africa University, run by the Methodist Church was officially opened in 1993; Solusi University, a Seventh Day Adventist institution came in 1994; the Bindura University was set up in 1997, then after it came the Catholic University and Chinhoyi Technical University in the new millennium. In 1980 university accounted for 2 240 students and in 1999 the figure rose to 8 789. This excludes the Teachers' training colleges and other tertiary institutions. There are two ministerial portfolios designated for the educational system, the Minister of Education, Sport and Culture and then the Minister of Higher Education.

26 We do realise, on the contrary, the critical and positive role computers play in home schooling, for example, where they function as a necessary tool. What we are specifically reacting against is the use of computers such that they replace human contact as much as uncensored hours of television watching can potential do to a family.

that Erricker & Erricker (2000:81) take up in their account when they realise the missing dynamic of moral instruction in the British educational system which is presumably true in our context as they quote the following anonymous letter:

Dear Teacher

I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness: Gas chambers built by learned engineers. Infants killed by trained nurses. Women and babies shot and burned by High school and college graduates. So, I am suspicious of education. My request is: Help your students to become more human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human.

The question is who is responsible for the moral instruction of our children? Is there a way in which we can educate our children so as to reduce, if not annihilate, the likelihood of such negative events ever taking place?

Interestingly, even after the establishment of formal schools in the late nineteenth century, the presumption that family responsibility and control in Western countries remained a parental responsibility, including the right to have children excused from a course or program that parents objected to (Whitehead and Crow 1993:62). Such objections, notably, were on religious grounds, a trend which captivatingly remains to date, specifically in situations where parents are adopting the home education option. A brief analysis of some of the findings on home-based education is worth noting at this point. The abstract to Meighan's (1995:275) article on "Home based Education Effectiveness Research and some of its Implications" asserts the following:

More and more families are taking the option of home-based education in preference to school attendance. Home based education effectiveness research demonstrates that children are usually superior to their school-attending peers in social skills, social maturity, emotional stability,

academic achievement, personal confidence and communication skills and other aspects.²⁷

It seems that home-based education is an alternative paradigm for schooling. Knowles *et al* (1994:271) suggest that because of the "intense dissatisfaction with public school outcomes, philosophies, policies, parent-teacher personality clashes or other perceived events and attitudes", parents are taking the necessary measures to ensure that their children are adequately prepared, not merely academically, but for adulthood. The concerns being raised are best reflected by two sayings, 'Charity begins at home' and 'Manners makes a man'. The concern being raised so far boils down to the following:

Research on parents who have chosen to home educate their children indicates that they fall into two main categories: those who object to the ideology taught or transmitted in the schools (including values) and/or want to strengthen their relationships with their children, and those who object to the quality of education; the first group is slightly larger than the second (Whitehead and Crow 1993:67)

It seems, therefore, that the focal point of concern, to reverse the negative factors affecting our society, lies beyond what we can safely assign to secondary aspects such as urbanisation, the HIV/Aids pandemic, and current educational standards. The problem, it seems, lands squarely on the disintegration of the basic unit of society, the family, as the primary causative factor.

²⁷ In their argument for the superiority of home education as opposed to school, Knowles *et al* list the following among the renowned personalities like William Penn, John Quincy Adams, Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Pearl Buck (1995: 239). Meighan offers a similar list with the following names: Yehudi Menuhin, Patrick Moore, Agatha Christie, Margaret Mead, Thomas Edison, George Bernard Shaw, Noel Coward, C S Lewis, Pearl Buck, Bertrand Russel and John Stuart Mill (1995:276).

4.5 The collapse of the family

Perhaps most precarious of factors leading to the social disintegration is the collapse of the basic unit of society – the family. High divorce rates, the increase of single parent homes, the step family scenario, career affected families and even smaller family preference, are among the many factors that have led to the breakdown of the family. Whitehead and Crow (1993:64) share their insight into how the family is being affected:

Traditionally, extended families provided vital assistance to parents in child-rearing and were an important source in the transmission of values and the socialisation of children. This lack of contact with families, because of the relational vacuum it creates, has greatly increased the influence of schools in the lives of children. Due to a lack of time, energy and resources, many parents have increasingly relied on the schools *and the church* to teach values, socialise and educate their children (my italics).

The lack of quality adult contact and supervision irrevocably imposes the stark reality of peer influence on the child as opposed to parental fostering. As a direct consequence, the generation gap has become more pronounced so that “without children and old people mixing in daily life, a community has no future and no past, only a continuous present”, Whitehead and Crow (1993:13) reveal. They continue by stating that “In fact the name ‘community’ hardly applies to the way we interact with each other. We live in networks not communities” (Whitehead and Crow 1993:13).

The breakdown of family is of particular contemporary concern in that the general phenomenon of home based nurturing, in all respects, is strikingly espoused as a cross cultural occurrence within family contexts. For centuries the learning of children from their parents in preparation for adulthood and the inherent responsibilities herein, was a natural and normal family activity. Knowles *et al* (1994:238) in their study calling for home education as an alternative to institutionalised education, reveal that home based

instruction is traceable in early Judeo-Christian accounts of family life, where the home was the centre of learning. In this setting, however, we should note that education encompassed socio-economic and religious values under a single rubric.

We have considered the various factors that we say play a contributory role towards societal breakdown. As we focus primarily on the family as the core concern, we would like to show how all the other factors impact on this central issue here. The figure below is an attempt to represent our reasoning here:

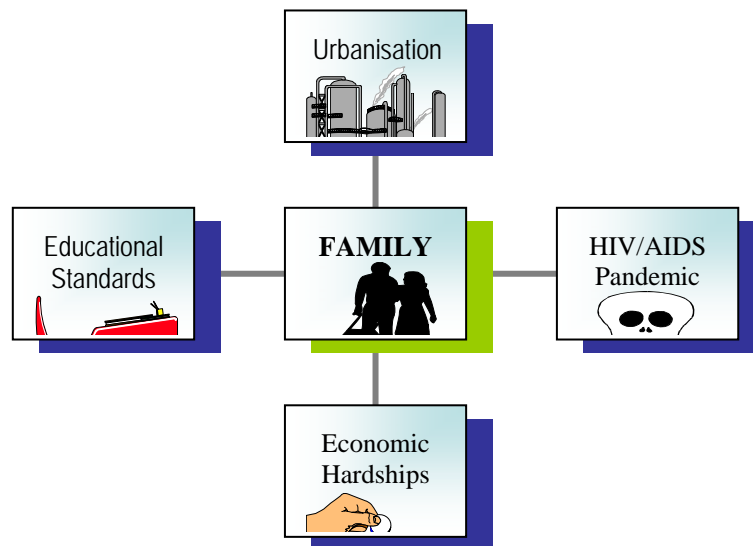


Figure 4: Impact of various factors on the family

This study, therefore, seeks to explore the contemporary validity of home based nurturing, an ideal observed in biblical times and in the Shona traditional practices, as a possible method that has potential to reverse the breakdown of our society. The assumption we are taking is that the family is the backbone of any society and thus, the restoration of family values is key for societal stability. The home should serve as the foundational training ground for life, and this, it seems, was what upheld ancient

communities. Invariably, this ideal is slowly being eroded in our own times. The old adage "Charity begins at home" is a much needed piece of advice, if not a matter of urgency. There is much to be said about this notion if we give it the due attention it deserves.

CHAPTER TWO

DYNAMICS OF THE FAMILY SOCIAL STRATA AND THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

1. Defining the family

This chapter will explore how the family, as the smallest societal unit, plays a great and critical role in social stability. Our point of departure evolves from the fact that activities within the family have a wider external impact away from the nuclear relationships. When Gerstenberger (2002:19) describes the prehistoric period of humankind as a hunter/gatherer age of small groups and hordes of some 10-30 persons, he asserts that out of these came the development of a close clan community managed and focused on acquiring food and whatever else ensured their common survival. Out of sharing all that the group found and acquired emerged theological ideas centred on the family's ongoing existence and the health, happiness and procreation of its members, Gerstenberger (2002:20) continues to reveal.

The point to be realised, from the emergence of this collaboration in all spheres of life, is that this familial ideal became the foundational social strata for life preparation. That ideal of home based nurturing is reflected in the histories of Israelite and Shona traditional societies. We will seek to establish that home based nurturing underlies the language of the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs. In similar vein, Shona wisdom poems offer a parallel portraiture as we will see later in this study. For now we will turn our attention to the development and description of both the Israelite and Shona traditional families, and also bring the book of Proverbs into perspective.

1.1 A Description of the Israelite family setup

The history and development of the Israelite community according to Gerstenberger (2002:20f) can be described in five stages that we present in the table below:

STAGE	DEVELOPMENT	DESCRIPTION
1	Family and Clan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prehistoric period of hunter/gatherer small groups and hordes • 10-30 people comprised kinship horde from which large families with strict genealogy and patriarchal structure would have emerged • Characterised by economic, legal and religious autonomy • A close clan community focused on communal survival
2	Village and Small Town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprised through family divisions • Duties and tasks were family oriented • Economic collaboration, a system of jurisdiction, religion and military sphere
3	Tribal Alliances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed among nomads and sedentary people by extension of the larger families • An overlap of clan and tribe in the exercise of mutual obligations such as security and religion • Connected through the exchange of wives, goods and services
4	Monarchical State	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduced centralised authority with the exercise of governance being realised effectively than the looser and more chaotic tribal structures • Established absolutist authority which appeared as a representative of the deity • Became the most important factor in the formation of religion, security, resources and methods of production
5	Confessional and Parochial Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resulted from the invasion of Israel (Northern Kingdom) by the Assyrians in 722BC and Judah (Southern kingdom) by the Babylonians in 587 BC • Elders and clerical leaders in the Diaspora took over the overall welfare of the Israelite community • In the absence of the state religion, the family became the prominent place for the instruction of sacred requirements • Came to an end in the Persian period when licence to return and rebuild was finally granted

Table 5: History and development of Israelite community

Each of these stages of development basically emphasised the development of a communal life for Israel as a people, a sense of belonging best illustrated in the

religious and economic spheres. Throughout these stages, the family remained at the centre as one's role in life was determined at that level. We will now turn our attention to reveal some of these dynamics.

1.1.1 The Israelite family setup

Firstly, the Israelite family could not exist outside of a communal setting. The family was the principal socio-economic unit which could never be viewed outside of the community. Matthews (1988:67) sees this social organisation of the Israelite family "from the time of the exodus through the settlement period [which] was based on the extended family". A man determined his lineage first through his father, then his clan, his tribe, and finally through his people. Thus, the family was the focus of life, with clusters of multiple family compounds organised into a village. In this setting then, the family head was the oldest active member, whose home would have formed the physical and social centre of a cluster of dwellings (Matthews 1988:68). The village in Gerstenberger's scheme (2002:20) is associated very closely with the small town. That association is significant in showing the close affinity of the subsequent developments to the family setting. When things became dysfunctional at all other levels, there was the family to rely on, as in the case of the collapse of the state religion when the family became the centre of religious instruction (see Gerstenberger 2002:57).

We refer to Block's (2003:35) portrait of the traditional Israelite family in the diagram below in which people refer to a national identity. At the top we have people as in national identity, followed by tribal groups, which subdivided into clans and family households (see Numbers 1):

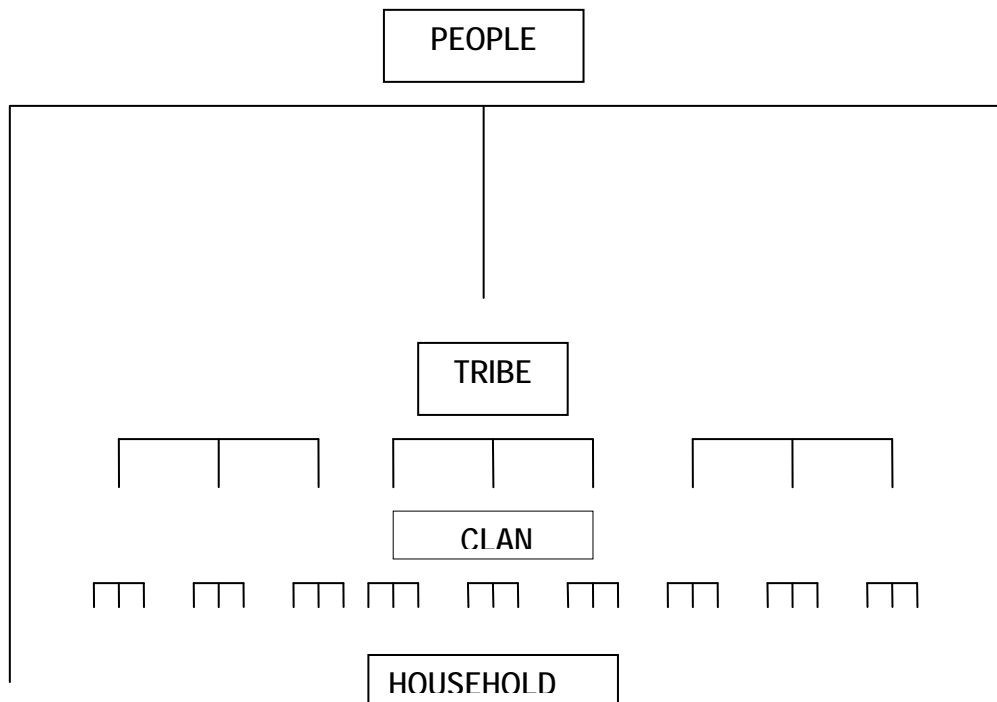


Figure 5: Traditional Israelite family structure

Block (2003:36) concedes that “despite the Israelites’ clear sense of tribal identification, the everyday life of an individual Israelite was determined more by the next two levels of hierarchy, the clan and the local household”.

Secondly, the family outlook seemed others centred as opposed to being purely self centred. As a result of the close relational and dwelling proximity, Gerstenberger (2002:25) suggests that “the productive activities of wife and husband, children and the elderly in the family association were directed together to one goal, making possible the survival of the group and thus of each of its individual members”. There was a strong sense of community in which the principal source of income, being land, (cf. Westbrook 1991:11), was shared in common. As we will discover, in reading other parts of the OT, there was special link between property and family as well as protecting that source of economic survival. We can then agree with Gerstenberger (2002:25) who highlights that “there was no legal distinction between ‘mine’ and

'yours', or at most this distinction was rudimentary and limited to specific functional spheres, even if to outsiders the head of the family could appear as the 'owner' of all the family possessions including land, house, women, children, male and female slaves, herds etc". Thus, to be egocentric in this setup would not only be abnormal, but would negatively affect the community. Beyond the household, the elders collectively exercised authority at a village level.

Thirdly, survival within the community of families depended on loyalty. Westermann (1995:24) is correct in pointing out that this intricate relational organisation is not necessarily brought out to the fore in the book of Proverbs. He writes, "[the book of Proverbs] deals with the subjects of family, family proceedings, relationships between family members, or family problems in very few instances. Only in the sphere of instruction does the family play any significant role. Outside of this, the few proverbs that allude to family do not offer much occasion to speak of 'family ethic'". Loyalty to the family and community were, therefore, a much celebrated ideal, hence the portraiture we have in the book of Proverbs 1-9.

Fourthly, the survival of the community ideal zeroed in on the quality of its individual members. For that reason, the upbringing of children and delegating responsibility according to Matthews (1988:74) was undertaken as soon as the concerned children were able to take directions. Westermann (1995:26) concurs with that sentiment as he says that "in an important group of texts there is conformity among all sayings, inasmuch as they speak to the relationship between children and their parents. However, they are interested in just one aspect of this relationship : upbringing" (see Pr. 1:8; 6:20; 10:1; 15:20; 17:25; 19:13; 23:2-20; 29:3). We can understand why

Israelite children were expected to be respectful and obedient to their parents (Ex. 20:12; Pr. 2:1; 3:1; 4:1; 5:1). A disobedient child was a disgrace to the family and the community (1 Sam. 2:22-25; Pr. 17:25; 19:26; 22:6, 15).

Fifthly, family life was ultimately inconceivable outside of God. Gerstenberger (2002:31) says that when we speak of family religion, this is primarily "a theology of the elementary needs of life". Religion governed the way the family lived in all aspects of life. Hence, we have in Proverbs 3:27-31 instructions on how to relate to a neighbour (a close relation in the traditional family set up) embedded with religious overtones Proverbs 3:32-35. Gerstenberger's (2002:34) perspective deserves further attention when he writes:

It should be noted that at the family level various religious dimensions open up - in the struggle for elementary provision of food, in the construction and preservation of an internal order, which is capable of functioning, in communication with and the demarcation from other groups. Religious relations usually with a particular deity, are closely connected with the patterns of life and the command experiences of the small group and, embedded in it, the individual member of the group. Because at that time more than today life was played out in small family circle and had its deepest emotional and social roots there, we are to assume that quite essential forces of religious impulses for faith, also proceeded from the family.

The observation that the family was responsible for religious impulses is clearly depicted in the book of Proverbs, on the premise that religion was, in Gerstenberger's view, also about elementary things of life. However, this subject of faith within the family context deserves separate attention and we will now consider some of the fundamental issues that are significant for our purposes.

1.1.2 Scope of faith within the Israelite family

Firstly, family solidarity was determined by a reference to “family faith” as the necessary forum to protect the life of the intimate group. Gerstenberger (2002:27) says that the theological horizon of the family was governed and limited by its own existence. In the family the individual members knew that they were safe, and could focus their energy towards prosperity and fortune because they operated within a common framework. Parental instructions towards such an ideal were therefore important, hence the command to honour one’s parents (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16; Eph. 6:2-3). Gerstenberger (2002:27) qualifies this family faith, which, as we said earlier, serves to satisfy the basic needs of life, and had as its first obligation, the family God, fully incorporated into the family alliance. He concludes (2002:29), “thus family theology is primarily the theology of basic human needs, which in higher forms of community may be taken up sporadically or continuously when circumstances change, but can probably never completely lose its reference to family”.

Secondly, the development of ideas about God takes a familial orientation. The reference to God as “Father” suggests an intimacy with God that parallels the human ideal (Ps. 103:13; Pr. 3:12; Is. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 3:19 and Mal. 1:6). What is peculiar to some of the key the Old Testament references of God as Father is that it is in the context of absence or failure of a human father that God assumes this role (Ps. 27:10; 68:5). Many of these designations according to Gerstenberger (2002:57), as expressed in individual songs of lamentations and thanksgiving which use intimate descriptions for God, are largely to be regarded as a legacy of family theology.

More significant to all that Gerstenberger (2002:57) reveals is his indication that the title "father" also suggests a return to family religion after the collapse of the State religion. In his scheme of the family development, he situates family or at a return to family based instructions to the time of the confessional and parochial communities when the Israelites were exiled. In the absence and collapse of State religion as reflected in Psalm 137 it is conceivable that the family took the centre stage in the preservation of Israel's faith. This idea ties in well with the date that some scholars ascribe to the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs as a post-exilic development, or at least as the youngest of all the collections therein.

An additional point to be made about the development of the ideas of God is that of the personal names, in the Bible and outside of it which are "theophoric". Gerstenberger (2002:59) defines theophoric names as those composed of a verb or noun plus a designation of God. Again these names are indicative of family faith or individual reflections of specific experiences, such as the name "Eliezer" which means God is (my) help, an expression of deliverance and help during a difficult birth. Clearly, these are not experiences of deliverance relating specifically to Israel but rather originate family thought. Gerstenberger (2002:59) even shows varied designations of God which typify family religion where the deity is designated 'father', brother or uncle ('*am*) e.g. *Abiram* = my brother is exalted; *Amminadab* = my uncle has urged on; *Abida* = my father knows. Similar familial ideas could also be said of the anthropomorphisms which speak of God in human terms to bring him even closer to humanity. The ultimate indicator of all this is the incarnation of Jesus Christ when God became man and dwelt among us (see John 1).

When we consider the development of family faith, as well as the accompanying ideas about God within the sphere of the family, the reflection of the experiences and the world in which family functions, we begin to see the significance given to this foundational societal group. However, our considerations would be incomplete without the inclusion of the ethic family and clan which details the way in which the family ethos was shaped. We now turn to that.

1.1.3 The Israelite family ethics

Firstly, we need to realise that the handing down of norms of life, whatever was deemed good and right, began in the family sphere where it had its deepest and most significant foundations. Gerstenberger (2002:62) calls this process "osmotic communication" which, from the adult perspective, we call "education" or as in our study "nurturing". He (2002:62) identifies the biblical genres where such information can be found when he writes:

The sources for our knowledge of biblical family morality are narratives, wisdom traditions and those parts of the legal tradition of Israel which with great probability can be derived from the socialisation of children: the so called prohibitives.

From the narrative genre we could mention passages such as Exodus 20:12-17; 23:1-9; Leviticus 19:13-18, as a few examples among many of this type of communication. In wisdom literature there are numerous supporting passages from the book of Proverbs 1:10-15; 3:5, 7, 11; 27-31; 4:14-15; 6:25; 7:25.

Secondly, and closely related to the above, is a clear statement within biblical material that the instructional responsibility in terms of family ethics and the clan rested

squarely on the shoulders of the parents. The scripture that comes to mind is Deuteronomy 6:1-9 which reads:

1 Now this is the commandment the statutes and the ordinances-- that the LORD your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, 2 so that you and your children and your children's children may fear the LORD your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. 3 Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has promised you. 4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. 6 Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. 7 Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. 8 Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, 9 and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

The establishment of Israel as a community, as well as their security in the Promised Land dwelt on their observation of the divine law. Within the stipulations of divine law, this was regarded as the greatest command to Israel. The Lord spells out the need to instruct children to ensure the future survival of Israel as a people. The parental role in the education of their children is evident in the rest of the biblical world and not merely confined to the foundational stages. For example, the commonly referred to concept in Proverbs 22:6 which reads, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (NIV), as Ted Hildebrandt (1988:3) will argue, calls for a fresh lexical and contextual consideration to issue a home based instruction to prepare for one's entrance into adult society. Correspondingly, there is the Pauline sentiment in Ephesians 6:1-3, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother which is the first commandment with a promise that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth". Parental responsibility as a

seriously undertaken prerogative seems inherent in the young minister Timothy, whom Paul highly commends as follows:

I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. ⁴ Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. ⁵ I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also (2 Timothy 1:3-5 NIV)

The critical role of parents in preparing their children for all of life's challenges in that context is clearly understood. Gerstenberger (2002:62) qualifies these observations as follows:

The family is the community which is necessary for life: mutual solidarity alone holds the social organism together; identification with is completely in the interest of the individual and individuals. Thus upbringing can start from these basic data. Family-self respect, the mutual solidarity of all, an alliance to provide protection and resistance against the outsiders, are basic values. However, is also necessary to recognise and avert everything that puts these values in question or endangers them. So admonitions are given to young people, (moreover all over the world) in the form of prohibitions.

Gerstenberger's observations here underscore the foundational role that the family plays in preparing children for life. This is done through the concept of mutual solidarity which fosters at an early age, respect for others and inevitably for property. We can understand in the light of this that self dignity is also attained as part of the value system. Thus, the prohibitives safeguard one against overstepping moral/societal boundaries.

Thirdly, the instructional process within the Israelite family socialisation, was achieved through the use of exemplary stories, proverbs and the wisdom poem. Gerstenberger's (2002:64) survey of wisdom literature views Song of Songs as possibly rooted deeply in

family wedding customs. By the same token, the book of Proverbs is concerned with minor matters of life creatively situated within a family setting by its use of various literary genres. The Proverbs, for example, generally praise good behaviour by making the object of praise very obvious and attractive. They are designed to appeal to reason based on the observable phenomena presented in a conclusive principle. This appeal usually works in the sense that contrary action incurs the contempt and punishment of family and community (see Pr. 10:1; 15:20-21; 17:23; 18:1; 24:1-2; 27:10).

In the Wisdom poem, the material found in the first nine chapters, a predominance of a vocabulary emphasising children's obedience to their parents, locates this material within a family setting. In many situations the son is required to obey through words like "listen" (1:8; 4:1, 10), "do not forsake" (1:8; 6:20) "accept" (2:1; 4:10), "keep" (3:1; 6:20; 7:1), "pay attention" (4:1, 20; 5:1), "bind" (1:9; 7:3), to cite a few examples. Alan Moss (1997:426) treats the material as (informal) parental teaching. He suggests that "wisdom is presented as the equivalent of parental teaching and that this understanding of wisdom lends topical unity to the first section of the book of Proverbs". Likewise, Robert Chisholm Jr (2000:397), a Professor of Old Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, offers an exegetical analysis of Proverbs 5:15-26 in which he introduces the speaker as the "father-teacher" and the addressee as the "son-pupil" on how to live skilfully or successfully.

Fourthly, one is made aware that both parents are mentioned as participating in this conscious work of educating the children. The opening Instruction in the book of Proverbs appropriately sets both the father and mother at the centre stage of the instructional exercise (1:8 cf. 6:20; 10:1; 23:22, 25; 30:17). This idea is presumably

applicable to other instances where the mother is not specified. Gerstenberger (2002:67) comments:

Amazingly, both parents are specifically mentioned even in later strata of the Old Testament: father and mother, once even mother and father (Lev. 19:13); are both equally, though with slightly different intensity, described as the representatives of deity who do his will towards the children. That means that the prohibitives handed on in the family which basically define the group identity are meant to safeguard the existence of the group by defining the limits of what is not allowed and are regarded as sanctioned by God.

We would like to underscore that there is so much significance attached to group identity here since an individual would never live in splendid isolation at any stage in life. At this level of parental participation the preparation of an even greater level of societal awareness and responsibility is necessary. Gerstenberger (2002:67) continues to write by saying the following:

What is quite understandable as the existence of the group is the supreme good for the people of the time, and what is supremely good is always given a religious explanation: it is transfigured and protected by religion. Even in the late texts, parents are wholly bound into the Israelite system, whether this is primeval recollection of the autonomy of the family in the period before the state or a rediscovery of the family traditions at one time of the century of exile or later, when the state no longer existed.

His comments here bring out yet another significant aspect that we now point out.

Fifthly, it is significant that the Israelite family and clan ethic were religiously determined. The important things in life, if not all of life, as far as the Israelite ethical culture is concerned had religious legislation. For example, the fact that sexual relations were viewed as a potential source of communal unrest, reflects a family origin according to Gerstenberger (2002:69). However, in the communication of the biblical injunctions requiring abstinence on the part of the unmarried and marital faithfulness

for the married, bring God into perspective (Lev. 18:6-23; Pr. 5:1-23). Gerstenberger (2002:69) points out further that "at all events within the intention of the Deuteronomists also make the family the stronghold of belief in Yahweh; the appointment of parents or the head of the family as the guardians of faith (cf. Deut 13:7-12). Such a development can only build on old rights and customs, that is, on the fact that the family was a religious unit and that the leading figures in the small group had responsibility for family religion". To add to that, we also find within biblical traditions, clear-cut statements on religious convictions as founded within a family setting (Ex. 3:15, 16; Jos. 24:2-4; Acts 16:31).

Finally, the Israelite family and clan ethics of home based nurturing seems to match that of her neighbours. Situating the whole instructional exercise within the family, or at least presupposing it, is an interesting general development. Nili Shupak (1990) advocates that the *Sitz im Leben* of the book of Proverbs is influenced by Egyptian Wisdom literature used in formal schools. In the light of that, he argues that the book of Proverbs would similarly be a textbook used in formal Israelite schools. Shupak (1990:100) comments:

Our study shows that in Hebrew and Egyptian wisdom literature concepts and terms are typical of this genre expressing its perceptions and outlook on the world are constantly repeated. The appearance of such terms and idioms in literary contexts other than wisdom compositions raises grounds for assuming an influence of wisdom tradition.

To support his thesis, Shupak categorises words into two groupings: firstly, that of words found only in wisdom literature and appear in no other literary contexts and secondly, words with a higher distribution in biblical wisdom than in other genres. From his findings pertaining to the first category, he deduces that the language of

Hebrew literature has parallels in the lexicon of Egyptian schools to prove that Hebrew wisdom was connected with education either an official or unofficial kind (1990:103). However, Shupak (1990:103) admits that there is neither archaeological, nor biblical evidence to substantiate his claim besides allusion. He also acknowledges that "what we may be dealing with is the phenomenon of independent parallel development in both languages".

Whether we accept the formal schooling setting or not, there is an undeniable connection between wisdom instruction and the home setting as Gerstenberger (2002:65) points out:

Although of course proverbs, like jokes, anecdotes and other minor literary genres, circulate in the wider community, we note many themes which originally communicate responsibility and purpose. No wonder that the genre of "teaching about life", which was markedly developed in ancient Egypt, but which also left behind its traces in Old Testament Wisdom, basically presupposes the institution of the family. Father and mother together, also individually, instruct the son and daughter about their duties in the small group and in life generally.

In the final analysis we have to agree with Gerstenberger that teaching about life presupposes the home, at least in its portraiture, in the book of Proverbs. With reference to the ancient cultures he (2002:83) points out that "the state god of a city is concerned with the increase and protection of the royal house and the territories ruled by it ... A direct human relationship with the community of God of the exile and post exilic period is, though, both conceivable and demonstrable, but it comes from the family tradition, to which we are thus referred back". It was our intention to show how the family as the smallest unit of the ancient Israelite society played a central role in all important matters of life.

1.2. A description of the Shona family setup

Can a similar role be conceivable in a non-biblical culture? This is an important question to ask since the development of the Israelite family structure commenced prior to the signing of the covenant that prescribed the distinctive practices we read of in the scriptures. Gerstenberger's study seems to project values prior to a formalised religious-ethical code of the Sinai covenant. For that reason, a comparative study of other cultures in their formative years should yield some peculiarities. Let us consider the Shona traditional family.

1.2.1 The Shona family setup

Firstly, the traditional Shona community was built around patrilineal kinship through which a person determined his or her identity as in the Israelite clan/tribal system. The village setting allowed for grandparents, parents and children to live together. The oldest surviving male member of the family was the family head as it were. Siblings then made their homesteads around the setting, and so the clan expanded as it were within the same locality. The village was also comprised of people in some ways related to one another. Where exceptions existed to this rule, there was the viable option of marriage since people tended to be married to those closest to them by geographical boundaries (see Kabweza 1979:40-41).

Hamutyinei (1979:85-89) describes ways in which these relational ties expressed themselves in the much idealised concept of community. With extension of kinsmen as widespread as possible, it is alleged that it was possible for people to also go on a journey and encounter relatives. However, close relations remained much guarded as well. Bourdillon (1976:29) presents the following diagram to clarify the relational map:

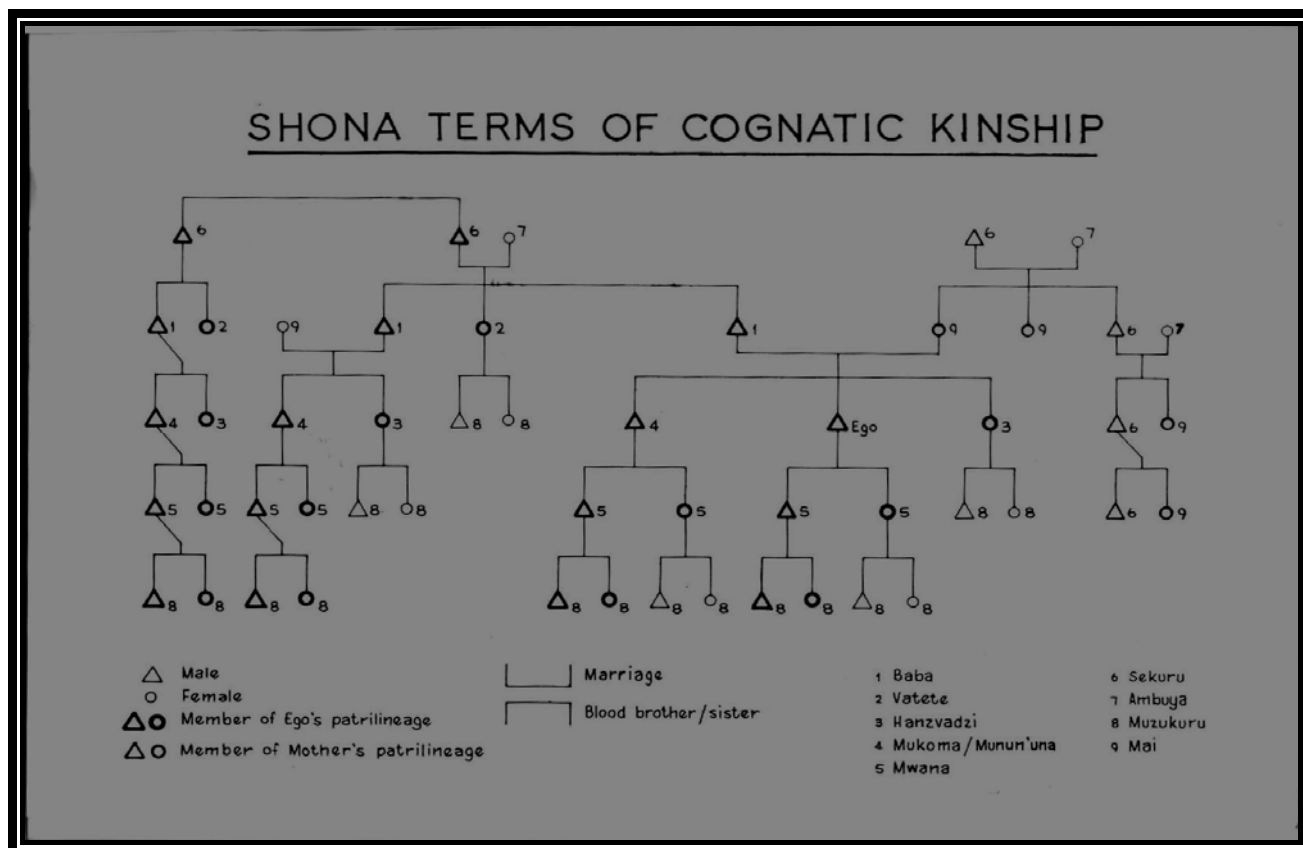


Figure 6: Traditional Shona family structure.²⁸

The clan²⁹ name (*mutupo*) identified that lineage, as much as a sub-clan name (*chidao*), would locate a person within a specific geographical area (Bourdillon 1976:240). An individual's first name was hardly used particularly, after they got married as it played second fiddle to the surname (family name) or clan name. That alone instilled a communal identity over and above that of the individual. It was not uncommon for children not to know their father's or mother's first name.

Secondly, because of the strong communal emphasis, people lived among their own and a sub-section in a village was usually named after a family. No one could escape

28 The following relations are cited in this figure: *Baba* – father; *Vatete* – paternal aunt; *Hanzvadzi* – sister; *Mukoma/Munun'una* – brother; *mwana* – child; *sekuru* – grandfather; *ambuya* – grandmother; *muzukuru* – grandchild; *mai* – mother. To a greater extent these are the significant relationships within the traditional educational structure.

29 Bourdillon explains that the word “clan” is perhaps a misnomer since in the Shona context it refers to an amorphous and scattered group of people who only identify as a group in a common clan name. Perhaps this is true in view of migrations and urbanisation.

that communal identity as a result. To date, people still ask where a person comes from since their name and village are usually associated or at least would assist with placing them in within a community. We need to emphasise that this setup is not necessarily true today since, even in the rural areas, with the introduction of growth points, homesteads are now assigned by a centralised authority with some aspect of deliberate (modern style) planning also in view.

Thirdly, economic survival was linked to the family land and property - usually in the form of herds. The land in particular from which people earned a living through subsistence farming, was the most important asset. When it came to work, nearly everyone had a role to play, just as in the Israelite setting discussed above. To survive as an individual traditionally speaking was difficult. Even when it came to marriage, the bride price was settled by one's parents who hopefully had accumulated enough wealth for such a purpose. It also meant that the family had a lot of say in the choice of a marriage candidate (see Bourdillon 1976:40-43).

Fourthly, instruction of young ones was an important dynamic in the traditional setting.

Gelfand (1979:85) describes the educational programme as follows:

From the age of six the Shona child is continually instructed directly and indirectly through listening to wise sayings, such as proverbs, being presented with riddles (*zvira*) to answer, puzzles to solve, songs to sing and especially games to play. Most of these activities take place all through the year and anywhere children happen to be ... However, a good deal of this informal instruction takes place after the evening meal at the *dare* (men's meeting place), where the grandfather relates stories to the boys or tells them proverbs and what taboos they should know, or asks them riddles. In the same way the grandmother talks to her granddaughters around the fireplace in the hut.

It is interesting that wisdom was a subject of attention in these exchanges. The content of the wisdom genre and its being chosen here, is because of its instructional content on matters of life. Through these pronouncements, learners were left in no doubt as to what was expected of them.

Fifthly, like the Israelites, the Shona could not speak of life outside of God since they were traditionally speaking very religious. That religious outlook has remarkably remained a trademark among the Shona people in the contemporary setting. Of interest, is the family religious practice bound by the spirit of the deceased head of the family since he was believed to attain powers through which he would retain his responsibility for the group he founded during life (Bourdillon 1976:227). At the same time he became a medium who could take family concerns to the next spiritual level. Without getting lost in the many aspects of this spirit world, in their own religious conception, the Shona were monotheistic, believed in the mediatory role played by one's ancestors and believed that one's fortunes were religiously connected. The question is how were these aspects communicated with the Shona traditional culture?

1.2.2 The Shona family/clan ethic

Firstly, the Shona traditional culture is based on a deep-seated loyalty to the family and its extended members. Loyalty to the family became the means through which ethical requirements were espoused. The strong relational value that closely links members of the same lineage is even more peculiar within the family unit. Michael Gelfand (1973:5), a respected researcher on the Shona culture, in the preface to one of his publications, writes in open admiration of the traditional practices:

The rich beauty of the Shona ethical code stands in sharp contrast to the material individualism of the West. The Shona possesses much that is worth retaining and the prospects are that they will save a good deal of it for succeeding generations. They will have to devise means of blending this with what the West has brought them. The concept of brotherhood, the love of a good family life with close support for its members and good neighbourliness, are the pillars of Shona culture. Africa has something to offer the world in human behaviour and this the Shona can offer to the world by their fine example.

As Gelfand speaks in admiration of the Shona traditional culture, there is obviously something to be learnt from their practices that we ought to preserve and pass on to generations to come.

Secondly, instructions within the Shona traditional society were home based. A closer analysis of the traditional Shona family reveals that the status of a husband and wife within the society depended, among other things, on the quantity and quality of their offspring. For that reason, children were severely disciplined to ensure that they learnt the best behaviour possible (Gelfand 1973:24). The supervision of children, while it was primarily a maternal preoccupation, remained a joint venture. In addition, in his other publication, *Growing up in the Shona Society*, Gelfand (1992:1) reveals the role of the extended family who were consulted on various matters pertaining to the upbringing of children. This structure allowed for the supervision of children by the extended family as well, at all stages for proper behaviour and to honour the various relations within the family circle. The proverb that 'It takes a whole village to raise a child' was truly applicable and widely acceptable in this setting.³⁰

³⁰ Most children today are no longer raised in a village situation at least in the original conception of the remark. However, the ideal of village life as in taking communal responsibility can still be revisited in the contemporary setting towards the establishment of applicable principles and practices.

Thirdly, there was widespread use of proverbial wisdom, stories, songs, and, poems to instruct children towards the determination of what was right. In a context of marginal changes within Shona contemporary practices that inevitably signal a departure from the traditional system, proverbial sayings and wisdom poems remain an informative wealth of information in the instructional context. A lot has been lost through along the way through urbanisation and the inevitable disturbance of the cultural practices through which this material was orally passed on. For that reason, collected sayings and poems, in written form, have provided us with, not merely a functional substitute, but an adequate wealth of information reflective of what has been lost.

To validate our point, John Mbiti (1995:1) describes how proverbial sayings come into existence:

Proverbs are one of the ways in which the people become creators of their total ways in which they think, they speak, they produce artistic expressions in which they celebrate and agonise with its problems.

To substantiate Mbiti's description, Mutasa (1999:38) adds that "Proverbs communicate much about culture ... they are pearls of wisdom handed down from generation to generation which summarise the belief, the ethics, the morals and values, the spirit and mentality of a people". Logically, in the absence of contemporary ideals of valid traditional practices of home-based education as we pointed out earlier on, the analysis of Shona proverbial sayings that are effectively a memorabilia of the rich traditions, is an indispensable exercise.

In a parallel study on the use of Malawian proverbs, David Mphande (1996) made the compelling observation that, prior to the introduction of Islam and Christianity in Africa,

indigenous educational processes emphasised social responsibility, job orientation, political participation, spiritual and moral values. A closer look at the sampled areas of focus in indigenous education reveals an emphasis on practical aspects of life as opposed to academic. Invariably, it is in these practical aspects that our society is considerably failing. For example in Mphande's context the challenges are made obvious through problematic early marriages, unplanned and unwanted parenthood, unemployment, rural-urban migration, increased occurrence of HIV/AIDS and STDs, substance, and drug abuse. These are relatively speaking 'new' challenges that are not as well pronounced in the past, as they are today. The dilemma is that "many parents, teachers, religious and social workers are inadequately prepared to counsel young people. Consequently many young people grow up without the knowledge of basic skills in life". It is interesting that Mphande's list cites parental or domestic vacuum ahead of the rest of the available or possible instructional avenues. Whether deliberate or otherwise, this is an important comment about the primacy of the home.

The proposed solution to these challenges seems twofold. On the one hand, our contemporary society would benefit from exposure to ancient proverbial wisdom both biblical and cultural to bring about a familiarisation with customary values. Mutasa (1999:31) reminds us of the value of that exercise when he writes:

The proverb is regarded as a summary of the experiences of a given people. However, these witty sayings (proverbs) are pots that contain age-old wisdom of traditional people. They are philosophical and moral expressions shrunk into a few words. They contain truths about life in general and human nature in particular, which people have observed.

On the other, we need to strive towards a practical implementation of these values progressively leading to the biblical and indigenous educational practices that were

home based. Admittedly, this is easier said than done. However, the ultimate purpose of this study, while seeking to argue for an organisational structure demonstrated within the biblical world and similarly displayed within the Shona traditional practice, is that these are ideals that imperatively demand fresh perspectival analysis. With that in mind we now turn our attention specifically to the book of Proverbs.

2. Introduction to the book of Proverbs

Our first observation is that the book of Proverbs particularly intimates the parent-child relationship as an environment conducive for the passing on of principles for life, what Derek Kidner calls "a life well managed" (1985:3). By the same token, we have already considered evidence within Shona traditional practice and some proverbial wisdom that endorse home-based nurturing. We observe that the book of Proverbs seems to embody a pedagogical approach that is deliberately home-based in order to foster the most responsive action. A case in point is stated in 1:8-9, which reads, "Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck".

Secondly, within the (informal) dialogues that the account portrays, we can detect a movement from childhood through the constant use of "my son/child" (1:10, 15; 2:1; 3:1, 11, 21; 4:10, 20; 5:1, 7, 20; 6:1, 3, 20; 7:1; 19:22; 23:15, 19, 26; 24:13, 21; 27:11; 31:2). It seems that the parents are preparing their child for an important role, hence the dedication and ongoing input that one observes in these exchanges. Mark Hinds (1998:213) affirms that perspective. When he writes with particular reference to the first nine chapters he says:

Thus within the implied narrative of Proverbs 1-9, the reader discerns a grand movement of a young person's journey from immaturity to maturity; from the context of the home to the call to assume responsibility within a wider context; and from the authority of parents to the friendship and counsel of Wisdom, fully acknowledging the difficulty on discerning the difference between wisdom and folly.

The same movement can also be discerned through the choice and development of subject matter, a matter we will take up below as a separate and crucial aspect.

Thirdly, the down-to-earth nature of the subject matter addressed in the book of Proverbs contributes to the confinement of the exchanges within a domestic setting. These are the sort of things that parents would be concerned about for their children. These are not the sort of things that one would hear about in the wider society. Greg Parsons (1993:151), while admitting to the complexity of the doubts and debates around the setting of the book, opens his article by lamenting the limited sermonic treatise of this rather practical account. In the guidelines that he offers for the understanding and proclaiming the book of Proverbs, supposedly in an effort to promote a wider readership, of particular interest is his submission that the material is targeted at an "inexperienced youth" who is being advised on "moral prudence" and "mental discernment" in order to assume a leadership position (1993:153-4). He adds that "the individual sayings reflect the family (or clan) wisdom of centuries past handed down from father to son throughout the generations" (1993:154), again affirming our domestic setting for the book of Proverbs. Let us look at this more closely.

2.1 Setting of the book of Proverbs

The question of the setting of the book of Proverbs must not be confused with that of the origin. The former is primarily concerned with the platform in which the book was

communicated, while the latter has to do with how the book was composed. The composition of the book of Proverbs as the authorship discussion in the next chapter will reveal, took many years. Although we do not have a specific date as to when the wisdom poems or sentence started to be composed in biblical texts, we assume that the activity is as old as human history itself. However, the recording of the material in the present fashion was heightened from around the time of Solomon onwards. It should be clear from the above discussion that the wisdom movement was primarily concerned with the quest for the meaning of life. Anderson (1993:566) links it with our modern concept of philosophy as derived from the Greek words, "philo" which means love and "sophia" which means wisdom. Similarly, Goldsworthy (1995:15) says that the concept "suggests a concern for the way we think and the way we use our minds or intellect". To add to that Robert Cate (1987:462) offers yet another description of a wise person who exemplifies the ancient concept of the wisdom movement, in an endorsement of this notion when he writes:

One who had seriously pondered what was necessary to have 'the good life' and based upon his or her experience as well as being founded upon the experience of the ages, arrived at conclusions.

While the intellectual capacity and its exercise are undeniably critical in the development of the wisdom movement, its ultimate expression, however, had to do with practical issues of 'the good life' as cited above. John Drane (1993:266) describes wisdom as being linked with technical, relational or productive skills which are needed to be successful in life. The initial evidence of this movement is marked by the occurrence of proverbs, riddles, fables and parables in the Old Testament. What is also interesting about the group of wise people, the sages, is that they were among those who could write, according to Cate (1987:462). Thus, with the passage of time the

reflections of men such as Solomon began to be collected in written form. There are three possible settings of the book with each one commanding considerable support by scholars.

The first train of thought presumes a royal setting for the book of Proverbs. The association of the book with the name of king Solomon is the most obvious form of support for this conception. This thought is further elucidated by the fact that the description of king Solomon in 1 Kings 4:29-34, cited earlier, presents him as a champion *par excellence*. This description, in Anderson's words (1993:572), presents Solomon as the fountainhead of wisdom like Moses was to the Law and David to the Psalms. In the same way, the reference to royal protocol in the account further furnishes the book with royal flavour.

Other scholars argue that the royal setting for the book of Proverbs necessitated contact with foreign sources of wisdom, as Williams argues (1994:25). He writes:

The royal setting for wisdom will dictate a certain perspective on the wisdom literature. It may lead us to think that wisdom as an occupation of the intellectual elite in Israel. In their hands, wisdom would have political overtones of the establishment rather than reforms. For them, a sense of order and control was necessary for the smooth running of the affairs of the state (1994:25-6).

To add to all this is the fact that these wise personalities are identified as sources of guidance in the same breath as the priests and prophets, who were undoubtedly key players in the socio-political and religious arenas. A key passage to this effect is Jeremiah 18:18 which reads:

They said, "Come, let's make plans against Jeremiah; for the teaching of the law by the priest will not be lost, nor will counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophets. So

come, let's attack him with our tongues and pay no attention to anything he says."

In Anderson's words (1993:572), "the prophet, who claimed to have stood in the heavenly council, spoke the word of Yahweh for concrete situations. The priest gave the people torah or instruction, based on Mosaic tradition. The sage, however, gave counsel, with the insight derived from keen observation of life, from years of experience, and from wide acquaintance with the fund of ancient wisdom". This then places the counsel of the wise within its proper perspective in relationship to the other key arenas of guidance in the ancient world. In the light of this revelation, it would seem that the sages were inescapably connected with royal members (see 2 Samuel 8:16; 14:2; 17:1-12 and 1 Kings 4:5), hence the suggested royal setting. However, even if the royal setting could be further justified, the focal point of wisdom had to do with life in general. Thus, wisdom and particularly the book of Proverbs cannot be limited to the royal world in terms of its setting.

The second train of thought, closely connected with the above, suggests a formal school setting for the book of Proverbs. Hill and Walton (1991:257) observe that some biblical scholars who endorse this idea say that "the wisdom of Proverbs was in effect a school textbook for the royal family and the elite society. They were trained in wisdom so that in future they might be wise and productive leaders of the next generation of Israelites". According to Shupak (1987:103, cf. Soggin 1989:441), the language of the Hebrew wisdom literature has parallels to the lexicon of the Egyptian schools. It is possible then, in view of this similarity, that there might have been a connection of either an official or unofficial kind. Although there is no reference in biblical writings to

a formal school, other observers insist that it would be hard to imagine Israel without a formal educational system. In line with this, Williams (1994:26) writes:

Although the Hebrew expression for a school, *beit ha-midrash* or house of study, is not mentioned in biblical literature, and indeed only appears in the book of Sirach (ca 180 BCE), it is difficult to imagine any society maintaining its cultural continuity over the centuries as Israel did without educational institutions.³¹

Williams' comment which dwells more on speculation than fact then goes on to suggest that even though there could not have been actual school buildings, formal education could have taken place in alternative venues, such as the house of a community leader, the Temple or a quiet corner in the market place.³²

Additional leaning towards a formal school setting can be gleaned from the instructional tone that the book takes (Goldsworthy 1995:77 and 1993:42). Ceresko (1999:8) talks about the possible evolution of scribal schools within the royal court responsible for producing administrative documents, and perhaps also responsible for educational texts for instructional purposes. The "men of Hezekiah" responsible for copies of Solomon's proverbs in chapters 25-29 would be an example of some formal arrangement, although we are not told for sure about their real intent with regards to the material they produced. Murphy (1998:xx) insists that on the contrary, that there is no hard-nosed archeological evidence for what might be called 'schools'.

31 However, the reference to formal schooling is explicitly connected with Jesus ben Sirach author of Ecclesiasticus as head of one such school (see Soggin 1987/89:441). Although the present author does not recognize this writing as canonical, we make reference to it purely for comparative purposes.

32 On the contrary, the place where education seems an organised forum, whether formal or otherwise, was in the home (cf. Deuteronomy 6:1-6; Pro. 1:8; 4:3-4; 22:6). What we need to bear in mind is that while the instructions of this nature seem to be confined to the religious aspect, Israelite religion could not be separated from other areas of life, it encompassed all of life.

The third train of thought is derived from the observation of wisdom and clan structure of ancient Israel as fertile ground for the setting of the book of Proverbs. One needs to appreciate that information exchange was mostly transmitted orally. The material in the book of Proverbs would have been no exception in terms of its being handed down initially from one generation to the next, prior to editorial recording, blending and arrangement in the final form we have it. Williams (1994:26) explains:

In time-honoured tradition, generations were raised to maturity by the wisdom of the father, the absolute head of the household. Women had authority in the home over their children, both male and female; a mother's word was considered authoritative. The additional role for male heads of households was a public one. The powerful heads of local clan "elders" took their places at the city gate to mediate disputes and render judgments for the common good.

The parental role in the raising of generations referred to here makes sense when connected with the general orientation of the book of Proverbs towards the young. Goldsworthy (1993:22) introduces his analysis of the material in the book of Proverbs as "A guide for the uninitiated" to highlight the seemingly deliberate focus on the young. Kidner (1985:16) calls chapters 1-9, "A fatherly approach : exhortation for the young". Murphy (1998:3) suggests that several references to "father" and "mother" imply that Wisdom lore was communicated in the family (see Proverbs 10:1; 15:20; 20:20; 23:22, 25; 30:11, 17). Perdue (1981:114), by the same token, argues for the home as the possible social setting for Wisdom instruction. He writes that "the question of the social function of Wisdom literature is intrinsic to the matter of social setting, but in general one most frequently encounters the remark that much of the literature appears didactic in nature and function. Consequently, the wise incorporated their values, customs and world-views into the various wisdom genres and transmitted them by means of instruction". Garrett (1993:23) asserts that it is important to

recognize that “many passages in Proverbs imply that wisdom was a family matter. The book frequently addresses its reader as ‘my son’ and urges him to adhere to the teachings of his father and mother (e.g. 1:8). We therefore have wide evidence endorsing the home setting.

To build up on the “Instructional” nature of wisdom material, the idea was not merely to pass on information but to ensure formation of character in line with the various instructions being issued. Perdue’s (1981:125) concluding remark then makes sense when he says:

Near Eastern instruction which, in their tradition histories, have been linked to narratives, have the same setting: an aged father approaching death, instructs his son³³ who is to be elevated to the father’s social position.

Others would like to suggest that, with particular reference to the book of Proverbs, the mention of a parental figure may have been a fatherly manner of speaking in order to depict the wisdom teachers in that metaphoric label (cf. Kidner 1985:19). In this thinking then, teachers as well as students appear in many guises, and parents are just one of the many personae of the Israelite sage (Williams 1994:23). However, having said all this, it seems reasonable to see the home setting for the book of Proverbs, which is emphasized internally to underscore inner motivation to do what is right, as a way of ensuring the stability of the family itself, hence the conclusion of the book with instruction on how to find a good wife in Proverbs 31:10-31.

In the final analysis, there is scope for all three schools of thought as the setting for the book of Proverbs (see Ceresko 1999:18-21 and Williams 1994:127). For our

³³ In this case an adult perhaps running his own household already, but nevertheless would have been trained from an early age in preparation for this moment.

purposes, we argue that the use of the parental voice in the exhortation of a child has much to say about the primary platform conducive for the passing on of such wisdom and that is the home. Otherwise it would be difficult to account for such a stance. This is particularly true of the first nine chapters where "Instruction" (Goldsworthy 1995:76) or what Parson (1993:156) refers to as the "admonition"³⁴ (cf Garrett 1993:29) is the *modus operandi*. The technical reference to "the Instruction" is qualified by Goldsworthy (1995:76ff) where there is the predominant use of the imperative, supported by the motive and affirmed by the consequence clause. An example of this is seen with the statement in Proverbs 1:10-16 (NIV):

The Address	{	"My son"
The Imperative	{	<p>PR 1:10 My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them.</p> <p>¹¹ If they say, "Come along with us; let's lie in wait for someone's blood, let's waylay some harmless soul;</p> <p>¹² let's swallow them alive, like the grave, and whole, like those who go down to the pit;</p> <p>¹³ we will get all sorts of valuable things and fill our houses with plunder;</p> <p>¹⁴ throw in your lot with us, and we will share a common purse"--</p> <p>¹⁵ my son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths;</p>
The Motive	{	<p>PR 1:16 for their feet rush into sin, they are swift to shed blood.</p> <p>PR 1:17 How useless to spread a net in full view of all the birds!</p>
The Consequence	{	<p>PR 1:18 These men lie in wait for their own blood; they waylay only themselves!</p> <p>PR 1:19 Such is the end of all who go after ill-gotten gain; it takes away the lives of those who get it.</p>

³⁴ Parsons (1993:156) observes that the admonition occurs in the imperative mood (either in the second or third person) and mostly concentrated in 1-9 and 22:17-24:22.

The frequent use of the prohibitive in the pattern represented above, then makes home based setup more favourable for such instruction, since it pertains to guidance in specific areas of life, not necessarily to wisdom as the ultimate attainment. Fee and Stuart (1993:210) affirm that "wisdom has always been taught in the home more than in any other setting". They add that "modern parents teach their children all sorts of virtues everyday, often without realizing it, as they try to help them make choices in life". Although such interactions may not be classified as wisdom exchanges, the point is that they are representative of the ancient setting. Therefore, what we are suggesting is not in any way far-fetched, but is emblematic of our own society. Garrett (1993:23) concludes:

Neither family wisdom nor royal wisdom was unique to Israel. Every culture has traditional values and teachings, and the family is always the first arena in which those teachings are passed down ... Certainly the family was the first locus of wisdom in Israelite culture, and it continued to play an important role through Hebrew history. Consequently, under divine guidance a great deal of traditional family wisdom has been incorporated into the text of Proverbs. The family, rather than the school, is everywhere presented as the primary place of training.

The setting of the book with specific reference to the first nine chapters seems to favour a home based forum from reasons highlighted above. We seek to argue for this case even more from the exegetical analysis in the next chapter. With that in mind, we now turn to the actual subject matter of the account which could yield more supportive information.

2.2 Subject matter of the book of proverbs

The first critical concept towards an understanding of the subject matter in the book of Proverbs is the Hebrew concept **hmkh** “wisdom”.³⁵ The first nine chapters are poetic in form. According to Walton (1991:248), the concept implies “skills in living that combined the powers of observation, the capacities of human intellect and the appreciation of knowledge and experience to daily life”. For Ceresko (1999:8) wisdom is the result of the fruits of reflection leading to the formalisation of a coherent set of assumptions and conclusions based on experience and observation, for the purpose of preparing the young for life’s challenges. In short, wisdom is a synonym for knowledge (cf. Goldsworthy 1993:43). Dyrness (1977:189) suggests that “wisdom is the intensely practical art of being skilful and successful in life. It is knowledge in the service of life (Pr. 1:5). The seat of wisdom is the heart which is the centre of moral and intellectual decision (1 Ks. 3:9, 12). If the cult is the form of worship in the temple or tabernacle, wisdom is the life of worship extended to the home and marketplace. Wisdom is religion outside the church”.

What is common in these descriptions is that wisdom was based on experience and observations of phenomena which was then expressed either reflectively as commentary purely on truth (cf. Pr. 30:24-28), or instructional for direct application (Pr. 1:8-18). Wisdom was therefore insight available to all matters of life as a whole. The prologue to the book of Proverbs 1:2-7, analysed in the next chapter, is indicative of the compass of the comprehensive nature of the subject matter. The books of Job,

³⁵ The concept **hmkx** “wisdom” occurs some 39 times in the book of Proverb, while **~kx** “wise” occurs some 47 times. This frequency should enable us to perceive how significant the concept is towards an understanding of the book of Proverbs. And therefore some space should be given a comprehensive understanding.

part of Psalms,³⁶ Proverbs and Ecclesiastes fall under the Wisdom Literature rubric. The main categories of wisdom material hinted at above, are well pronounced in these accounts. The first category is "Reflective literature" characterized by a probing into the depth of the human anguish about the meaning of life, often expressed in a skeptical mood but also in comparatively longer sentences (see Anderson 1993:569).³⁷ Examples of the Reflective Literature are the Egyptian account entitled "Dispute over Suicide", the Babylonian account "I will Praise the lord of wisdom", and of course the biblical accounts of Job and Ecclesiastes.

The second category is the "Prudential literature" composed of practical advice to the young on how to attain a successful and good life, packaged in short sayings.³⁸ The Egyptian "Teaching of Amen-em-opet" as well as the Babylonian "Counsel of wisdom" fall under this category and so does the Book of Proverbs. Some scholars classify this under the rubric "Instruction".³⁹ Collins (1980:10) perceives the nature of this material as retrospective expressions and conclusions based on observation.

The second key concept in understanding the subject matter of the book of Proverbs is related to the opening word *lvm* "proverb". The root meaning of the word has the

36 See also Ezekiel 7:26 and Isaiah 29:14 for a similar portraiture of the role of the wise in offering guidance. This seems to indicate a function that the sages played for kings, nations, key individuals and so. Other examples include 2 Samuel 8:16; 20:23-26; 1 Kings 4:1-6; Jeremiah 8:8-9.

37 Anderson (1993:570) submits the following as wisdom Psalms: 32, 34, 37, 49, 112 and 128. In this estimation, these Psalms satisfy the description of wrestling with some aspect of life which is typical of all wisdom literature. The apocryphal books of The Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus also called the Wisdom of Jesus the son of Sirach also fall under this category. The apocryphal accounts will not be treated by the present writer in similar vein as the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Psalms.

38 Cate (1987:462) describes this category as "the carefully thought-out philosophies of the ancients, generally dealing with the issues of suffering, justice, death and the good life". This represents more of a person's wrestling with the question pertaining to the meaning of life without necessarily providing the answers to the struggle. The key concept here is the word "reflective".

39 "Instruction" material in the book of Proverbs particularly in the first nine chapters of the account will be our main focus.

connotation of a comparison, analogy, or metaphor (Hels 1994:15). Graham-Taylor (2001:11) says the concept incorporates the idea of a parable or illustration. Williams (1980:37) alleges that the Hebrew concept has a wide range of meanings to include allegory, riddle or taunt song, although the core idea is that of comparison or likeness. Hill and Walton (1991:257) similarly espouse that the basic unit of Hebrew wisdom is the proverb which is, "merely an analogy attempting to uncover basic truth about life by means of comparison". Hels (1994:15) endorses this diversity when she comments:

Although it is usually translated into the English word for *proverb* the term *mashal* is applied throughout the Hebrew Bible to literary forms as diverse as songs, poetry, instruction, and even prophetic oracles. In some cases, it was even used to describe people who are said to be a 'byword' (see Job 17:6; Ps. 69:11; Jer. 24:9).

In generic terms, therefore, the concept is not limited or restricted to the book of Proverbs (cf. 1 Sam. 10:11-12; Ez. 18:2). However, in the book of Proverbs, and specifically in the first nine chapters, the subject is moral and ethical instruction dealing with many aspects of life (Buzzel 1988:901). Dumbrell (1988/91:223) says that the book of Proverbs "concentrates on everyday life ... it focuses on the usual, the regular rather than the unique". Dyrness (1977:192) adds his voice and says that the curriculum of the school of wisdom within the book of Proverbs was, really all of life as learnt by older members of the community and passed on to the younger.

The choice of the "proverb" as the means of communication for such a significant matter has been raised by others. Hels (1994:14) asks "How can biblical wisdom as a whole, be so heavily dependent on one short form of expression?" By nature, proverbs demand reflection, as would wisdom poems and other literary forms under the *mashal* rubric. Hill and Walton (1991:257) respond that "characteristically, the proverb is a

popular saying expressing in pithy terms certain observed regularities in the external world of nature or in human behaviour".⁴⁰ The extrapolated observation is then formulated as an embodiment of general truth, hence the description by Osborne (1991:194) of a proverb as a "compressed" parable. In other words, what could have been represented in an extended form is carefully crafted through word economy into a powerful statement enabling both memorisation and effect. He explains:

I believe that wisdom is first a way of life and then a genre. Primarily wisdom is a theological pattern of thinking that applies the wisdom of God to practical issues of life (1991:191).

However, we take cognisance of the fact that the material in the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs, which comprise our exegetical focus, is wisdom poetry, not necessarily "proverb" in the sense we would understand it in the English language. It does however, contain some proverbs as we will see in our exegesis. The concept of "proverb" is much broader than a mere statement that would be emblematic of much more, as seen in Osborne's explanation above of a compressed analogy (1991:194). In other words, there is a lot more behind a proverbial statement that we need to bear in mind – a story, an experience, a song, a poem, and perhaps more.

With that wide array in mind, we would like to bring into perspective Murphy's (1998:10) opinion when he estimates that the wisdom poem is a consecutive piece of poetry, not simply a few lines, but sayings and admonitions. They reflect the nature of instruction by highlighting the context in which the instructions apply. In contrast to

⁴⁰ In the book *Enjoying the Proverbs* by William MacDonald (1965/82), he has more than 40 classifications of some of the subjects in the book of Proverbs, a majority of them with some of further qualified into subsections to make the heading coverage even more comprehensive. While his attempt is not at all intended to be exhaustive, it however, gives us an idea of the wide range of subjects, "from the spanking of a child to ruling a kingdom" that one discovers in the book of Proverbs (1965/82:60. Similarly, Kathy C Miller (1997) has categorised the various proverbs into thirty-seven different headings which she says represents a practical and spiritual resource for everyday challenges.

that, proverbs in their written/collected form do not necessarily reflect the original context in which they applied. That way proverb meaning ultimately emerges from a proverb's use in a specific context and that it is not the meaning of the proverb *per se* that need to be our central concern but the meaning of the proverb performance (Penfield 1981:119). Murphy (1998:10) comments:

Because a proverb gains currency among a broad group, there is tendency to overestimate its power. But in fact a proverb presents only a narrow slice of reality: much depends upon its context ... What is needed is the proper context in which they are pertinent. This relationship to context is called 'proverb performance'. The proverb 'performs' when it is in line with the context from which it arises ... as shift from context can provide another level of meaning.

However, wisdom poems reflect the context in which they arise and ought to apply in their instructional endeavour. For example, when the proverb that occurs in Proverbs 1:17 is mentioned, that citation is within the context of the futile efforts of the wicked men. Similarly, the proverbs cited in Proverbs 3:33-35 are within the context of the instructions on how to be neighbourly. In written wisdom poetry, therefore, the contextual constraint that is common to written proverbs is overcome.

To sum up, the two key concepts that occur in the book of Proverbs, "wisdom" and "proverbs" play a pivotal role towards an exegetical analysis of the material in the biblical account. The subject matter will be revisited briefly in the next chapter. However, this ushers us into the next sub-section of our inquiry, the structure of the book of Proverbs, which is also a contentious issue.

2.3 Structure of the book of Proverbs

The question of the structure of this book continues to attract what would be conceived as an enigmatic approach because no one claims to get it right *per se*. The common disposition is to surrender to what seems to be an illogical arrangement of material. Hill and Walton (1994:288) describe the book as a collection of collections. For that reason, it is not easy to discern a systematic arrangement of the material therein. Goldsworthy (1995:75) also endorses the fact that the account is indeed a collection with little obvious order. With regards to this perception it is not surprising that structural attempts made by most scholars tend to be limited and prescribed by the collections assigned to various composers. In this case, most structural presentations recognise the seven collections in the book as determining of the arrangement. A sample structure of the account would be as follows:

- Prologue 1:1-7
- Various Instructions 1:8-9:18
- Solomon's Collection 10:1-22:16
- Anonymous Collection 22:17-24:34
- Collection copied by Hezekiah's men 25:1-29:27
- Agur's collection 30:1-14
- No superscription 30:15-33
- Lemuel's Collection 31:1-9
- No superscription 31:10-31⁴¹

Our response pertaining to the structural order of the material in the book of Proverbs is that the final redactor presumably had an organising principle for the material

41 See Farmer (1991:15-16), Fox (1982:vi-viii), Clifford (1999:1-2) Whybray (1995:v-vi) for just but a few examples of this type of treatment. The sections attributed "No superscription" are derived from Crenshaw's scheme (1998:60).

therein. Perhaps, discovering that organising principle, should be considered as a challenge to contemporary scholarship.

The first nine chapters which are our primary exegetical interest cover the following subjects:

SCOPE OF SUBJECTS	RELATED PASSAGES
Quest for wisdom	1:1-7; 2:1-22; 3:1-12; 4:1-9;
Avoid Wicked company	1:8-19; 2:12-15; 4:10-19
Personification	1:20-33; 3:13-24; 8:1-36; 9:1-18
Avoid Adultery	2:16-19; 5:1-23; 6:20-35; 7:1-27
On Being Neighbourly	3:27-35; 6:1-5; 6:12-19
Personal Qualities	4:20-27
Shun laziness	6:6-11

Table 6: Subjects that occur in Proverbs 1-9

Most scholars subscribe to the notion that the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs make up a single unit. There are two main scholarly camps regarding the content comprising this unit. The first considers the material to be of an educational program – whether it is formal or not remains debatable. The second regards the material to be largely informal and home based. Some voices in the first camp include that of Derek Kidner who describes the scope of this unity as a fatherly approach, thus, as in the exhortation of the young (1985:19). He purports that the repeated expression “my son” in this unit “need amount to no more than a teacher’s fatherly way of speaking to a pupil, as in the Old Egyptian instruction manuals and one must hear in the mind the wide readership that the author obviously has in view” (1985:19). This perspective is influenced by a comparative study of Egyptian wisdom material which is

similar to the biblical accounts in some sections.⁴² Hill and Walton (1991:251) reproduce Proverbs 22:22-23 in comparison to a text found in Amenemope which we show in the table below as follows:

PROVERBS 22:22-33	AMENEMOPE
Do not exploit the poor because they are poor; and do not crush the need in court. Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered.	Guard yourself from robbing the poor, from being violent to the weak; Do not associate with the rash man nor approach him in conversation.

Table 7: Comparison of Proverb text and Amenemope.

Garrett (1993:67) similarly ascribes a generic tone to the unit as primarily geared towards instruction of the young. For that reason he subscribes to the educational forum. Estes (1997:13) boldly claims that “even a cursory reading of the book of Proverbs reveals that it is dominated by the subject of education”.⁴³ To this list we add Murphy (1990:16), who perceives parental instruction as a metaphor for the wisdom teachers. How he reaches that conclusion is not clear.

The question is why did the redactor of this material adopt this approach if all s/he intended was a general appeal? Why not speak as a teacher in a classroom setup, or at least make it obvious and not hide under the guise of a parent? What literary role does this approach play in advancing the proverbial genre? These are some of the important questions that we raise against the first school of thought as we feel the proponents are not addressed to our satisfaction.

42 See John Day’s (1995:55-70) discussion on the possible Semitic influences on the wisdom of Israel; Dell (1997:26-31) who sees some relational connections but is unsure about a school context let alone an administrative orientation in terms of the intended audience; Davies (1997:17-29)’s discussion on Egyptian literature.

43 The word “education” whether it is understood and applied in a formal setting as in the contemporary remains to be established. For that reason, the claim of a teacher-student scenario leaves a lot to be desired unless explained further.

On the contrary, the home setting seems to be deliberately intended as the forum for the passing on of these instructions mostly, especially social skills, in order to be successful in life. Firstly, there is not enough archaeological evidence for the existence of schools in ancient Israel to warrant a formalised system. Murphy (1998:xx) submits to this verdict even though he suggests a teacher-pupil approach (see above) and adds that the original transmission of the material was oral and within the home set-up. John Drane (1993:267) explains:

Nowadays most people learn these social skills in school. There is some evidence that the Canaanite city states had a formal education system. But in Israel, the family was the main influence in the life of a growing child. Young people would learn most of what they needed to know from their parents, grandparents and the village elders.

Having said that, Fox (1996:229) cautions us about considering the lack of evidence for the existence of schools as being conclusive.⁴⁴ However, he suggests that the internal material in the books of Proverbs maintains the father-son discourse throughout. That alone is fertile ground for espousing a home based setting.

Secondly, the subject matter is personal in nature and also deviates from the approach employed in the rest of the account. A helpful analysis of the difference in ethos of the first nine chapters in contrast to the remainder (10-31), is summed up by Rappel (1999:361) in the abstract to his article.⁴⁵ He advocates that in the former, the praise is directed towards wisdom as an ideal, while in the latter, praise is directed to the wise

44 The sentiments are also reflected in Davies' (1997:199-221) paper that asks and answers the question, "Were there schools in ancient Israel?" in which he concludes that there is currently insufficient evidence for envisaging a widespread educational system despite the influence on Israel of Egyptian wisdom writings.

45 Rappel's article "Chapters 1-9 of the Book of Proverbs : A book of Educational Guidance" focuses specifically on the material therein as designed to coincide with the developmental stages of the young man from adolescence to maturity (1999:369).

person as the champion. That rationale is worth noting in view of Murphy's comment (1990:15) that the real intent of the account in the chapters 1-9 is to specifically "train a person to form character, to show what life is really like and how best to cope with it ... It does not command so much as it seeks to persuade, to tease the reader into a way of life" and he adds "although it must be admitted that chapters 1-9 are much more dogmatic in style than the rest of the work". That dogmatic style, we argue, resonates from the authoritative but affectionate father as he offers guidelines for life to his son. David Bland (1998:221) picks up on the theme of character formation as a task taken seriously in the book of Proverbs. While it was largely informal and set within the home, it was, however, central to the life of Israel from her inception as a means to pass on her faith to the next generation. Bland expands:

While there was no set form that Israelite households followed in carrying out their responsibility to instruct, it seems probable that different social strata implemented the educational task differently (1998:221).

To the type of material found in chapters 1-9, McKane gives the technical term "Instruction", as opposed to chapters 10-31, which he labels the "Wisdom Sentence" (1970:262). That is a valid distinction in that it influences our perception of the nature of the material that the book itself will, in our opinion, prescribe.

Thirdly, the home setting is implied in this section particularly with reference to "father" and/or "mother" (Pr. 1:8; 3:12; 4:1, 3; 6:20; 10:1;) and also in the subsequent sections (13:1; 15:5, 20; 17:21, 25; 19:13, 26; 20:20; 23:22; 27:10; 28:7, 24; 29:3; 30:17). The mention of both parents is a significant aspect in this account because at certain points only the voice of the mother is heard (Pr. 31:1-9). In so doing, she exercises equal authority to that of the father. It must be pointed out that this

motherly perspective or occurrence, is not commented upon by the former school of thought and is observably missing in the Egyptian manuals. An appropriate commentary of Proverbs 31:1-9 has been forwarded by Kuntz (2001:35) who writes that the mother's voice "serves admirably as artful and persuasive reinforcement of previously communicated lessons in the book of Proverbs ... The impact of this unit on Proverbs is twofold. In the first place, it saliently enhances the role of the mother as teacher within the family setting ... as she independently mounts the task of dispensing wisdom. Her words are both candid and compelling. In the second place, by forthrightly alerting the king to his obligation" her authority is equally compelling. Thus, the mother's voice, as much as the father's, plays a pivotal role in this account in reinforcing the home setting.

To come back to that domestic setting, the home is later portrayed as part of a strong tradition in Proverbs 4:3-4:

3 When I was a son with my father, tender, and my mother's favorite, 4 he taught me, and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live.

The speaker reveals that he personally went through a similar exercise that he now prescribes for his own son (see also Pr. 17:6). In line with this, Kidner (1985:20) arrives at the conclusion that "not only in these early chapters, but in every section of the book [see references cited above] it is assumed that the truth is to be learnt first at home, instilled there with firmness [hence the dogmatic approach] and affection as lessons for the mind and training for the character ... the home remains the place from which this teaching emanates, and whatever threatens its integrity is viewed here with profound concern". To that end Drane (1993:268) adds that "it is not surprising that

this should be a basic concern in Proverbs, since many of its precepts almost certainly originated in the context of advice handed on from one generation to another”.

Fourthly, at the heart of the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs is the very survival of the family itself as projected through the concern for the children. Of critical importance in this endeavour were the young inexperienced individuals who needed coaching, hence the responsibility taken by one generation (i.e. – parents) for the next (viz. children). That is why there are a number of references that discuss the upbringing of children and emphasising the subject of discipline (1:2, 7; 3:11; 5:12; 6:23 cf. 10:1, 17; 12:1; 13:1, 18, 24; 15:5, 10, 20, 32; 17:20; 19:13, 18, 25; 22:15; 23:15, 24-28; 28:7; 29:3). The impression one gets from the emphasis of discipline is that it was intended to ensure quality control. Westermann (1995:26) underscores this concern as he says that “in an important group of texts there is conformity among all sayings, inasmuch as they speak to the relationship between children and their parents. However, they are interested in just one aspect of this relationship: upbringing”. Also Proverbs 22:6 also comes to mind:

Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray

In his book, *Hard Sayings of the Old Testament*, Walter C. Kaiser (1988:179-181) cautions that while this verse is not to be taken as a promise without exception to all godly parents, he states however, that it is a parental calling.⁴⁶ In other words, at the heart of it all, it is the quality of one’s offspring which really matters as we read in Proverbs 10:1:

⁴⁶ Kaiser (1988:180-1) explains that the phrase “in the way he should go” literally means “according to the mouth of” which indicates the child’s own personality and particular traits. In other words, the training means ought to be conformed to the nature of the child and regulate itself according to the stage of life. Kaiser concludes that this verse like any other proverb tells us only what generally takes place without implying there are no exceptions to the rule. Jaeggli (1999:41) echoes similar sentiments that one cannot just take the Proverbs 22:6 instructional statement as a true ironclad promise as there are hermeneutical considerations before one can reach a conclusion.

A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son grief to his mother.

We can therefore safely deduce on the basis of these factors, that there is an implied primacy of the home in the book of Proverbs as the favourable platform for the exchanges that take place. With that in mind, we now turn to the sacredness of the book of Proverbs.

2.4 Sacredness of the book of Proverbs

Wisdom poems, just like secular ones, address various matters of life. So the same secular definition of wisdom is in that sense, applicable to biblical ones. Stein (1994:83) defines a proverb as a "short pithy saying, frequently using metaphorical language, which expresses a general truth". By the end of his article the definition is adjusted to the following:

A biblical proverb is a short, pithy saying that expresses a wise, general truth concerning life from a divine perspective (1994:88).⁴⁷

What is interesting about this statement is the connection between the human observation and divine perspective. Even so, what is peculiar about the book of Proverbs are the missing dynamics so typical of biblical literature. Indeed it can be seen that the language itself has changed. As Dillard and Longman III (1994:235) observe, the book of Proverbs in sense deviates from the mainstream of the Old Testament in that there is no reference to the covenant, there is no explicit talk about God. Equally omitted in the account other than the Mosaic law, is "Israel's epic story of liberation from slavery in Egypt and the pilgrimage to the Promised Land" (Hels 1994:14). What seems more apparent according to Hels (1994:14), is the absence of

⁴⁷ This is a working definition adopted here for a general application. It does not, however, apply to all biblical proverbs all the time as we have cases of some proverbs that are deconstructed in the Bible itself (see Ez. 18:22; Ecc. 4:4-6).

biographical material relating to the composers of this material. She writes that “the most troublesome thing, perhaps, is that there are no stories about the wise men and women of Israel themselves. In fact, in the period in which Israel’s classic literature was being collected and compiled, what we think as the biblical period, neither they nor their schools make any direct appearance” (1994:14). We already appreciate that the account is an anthology composed of a number of texts from different authors from various time periods (cf. Dillard & Longman III 1994:235). By the same token, Kidner (1985:11) writes that “in the Wisdom books, the tone of voice and even the speakers have changed. The blunt ‘thou shalt’ nor ‘shalt not’ of the Law, and the urgent ‘Thus saith the Lord’ of the prophets are joined now by the cooler comments of the teacher and the often anguished question of the learner”.

The absence of typical Old Testament religious features has led some to speak of the content of the book of Proverbs as secular wisdom. In fact, when comparisons are made with parallel texts of the Ancient Near East, as highlighted earlier, in some instances the exact wording occurs in both accounts. How then do we account for the book of Proverbs among the sacred writings in the Bible?

Firstly, we need to be aware that “wisdom” in the biblical framework under which the book of Proverbs operates is inconceivable outside of God. Fee and Stuart’s (1993:201) qualification is helpful at this point, that wisdom, “as the Bible defines it, has nothing to do with IQ. It is not a matter of cleverness and quickness or skill in expressing, or age, even though personal experience is a valuable teacher if interpreted in light of revealed truth”. While human observations are the starting point of wisdom, and indeed that is the impression we seem to get in terms of origin of wisdom,

however, "it is a matter of orientation to God" (Fee & Stuart 1993:201) out of which the ability to attain wisdom is realised. The concentration on everyday life that the book of Proverbs portrays is not solely based on human observations.

In his own endorsement of the divine orientation that is pertinent to biblical wisdom, Dumbrell (1985/91:228) observes that "living right is the theme of the book of Proverbs. True wisdom depends upon an understanding of God's purposes in creation, which have been particularised, as we know, in salvation history". He continues:

We cannot be satisfied, however, with a view which converts wisdom into a mere search for order, for such a view would make the concept mechanistic and depersonalised. In the final analysis, wisdom is a gift, but it cannot be limited to the subjective apprehension of the gift. As gift, wisdom is potentially available to all within the domain of creation. Thus it is not merely God's order of this world, but it is a knowledge of divine order and the implication of such knowledge (1985/91:229).

Dumbrell's comments basically endorse what we have said in the first place, that the wisdom portrayed in the Bible is inconceivable outside of God. In other words, God provides the world view in which that kind of wisdom operates. Dyrness (1977:195) captures similar sentiments when he describes wisdom as "common sense derived from experience". Then he continues this qualification by stating that "pride goes before a fall did not come from reflection on the nature of pride, but the simple observation of proud people who stumbled. The difference between Greek thinking and Hebrew is the clearest just at this point: the Greek intended to begin with ideas, the Hebrew with experience. Their observation was obviously long and loving. The comments on ants, badgers, locusts and lizards (Pr. 30:24-28) suggest a curiosity that is foundational for natural science and marks back to God's intention at creation" (1977:195). Another voice worth paying attention to is that of Goldsworthy (2000:186) when he writes:

Wisdom, then, has to do with a right perception and understanding of reality. It presupposes that there is a divinely ordained order in the universe that can be perceived. It directly contradicts the relativism of postmodernism, for wisdom assumes the coherence of God's created order. The book of Proverbs is characterised by the assumption that, given the right start with the fear of the Lord, a person is able to develop a perception of the created order through observation and instruction in a way that makes for the good life.

Perhaps no one captures this thought like Graham-Taylor (2001:11) does when he defines a proverb as "spiritual wisdom and truth couched in worldly phraseology". Inevitably, the intention of biblical wisdom is not intellectual, although there is an aspect of it, but godly. Osborne (1991:191) adds that "I believe that wisdom is first a way of life and then a genre. Primarily wisdom is a theological pattern of thinking that applies the 'wisdom' of God to practical issues of life". For that reason we need to pay attention to the statement, in Proverbs 1:7 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge..."⁴⁸ The key to wisdom and indeed to the book of Proverbs is the God factor (cf. Pr. 2:6 and 29:13). In a line, to be wise you have to be godly (cf. Kidner 1985:32).

Secondly, we ought to recognise that the while the book of Proverbs is indelibly Israelite, what it describes is undeniably human. Although it departs from the norms of other Old Testament accounts, there is no question about the origin of the proverbial material therein.⁴⁹ This is important to point out because when it comes to our

48 The statement of Proverbs 1:7 which is so significant in the understanding of biblical wisdom will be given more attention in the succeeding chapter when the exegetical analysis will be pursued. However, that statement is key to the book of Proverbs since it occurs in the prologue of the account, an attempt by the original compiler to prepare us for what is to come in this account.

49 Psalm 78:1-4 is an interesting Psalm in that it employs **ytrwt** "my teaching" or "my instruction" from which we get **hrwt** (*tôrâ*) law as well as **lvmb** "parable" or "proverb" both concepts in the same unit perhaps to demonstrate the interrelationship of the two concepts that we may not always appreciate.

exegetical analysis of the material, proverbial statements are conditioned by contextual situations in which these observations took place. In that case, what was categorically deduced from the given observation in the original setting in principle as opposed to practice is what would be universally true. Similarly, the wisdom poems resonate from a fatherly concern for his son as he speaks from experience and from his faith.

A good example of this is the statement in Proverbs 22:6 which we looked at above. The question is whether this is an unconditional statement of fact or not. The contention has been with children raised in ideal circumstances that a Christian home offers and invariably grows up to abandon their faith. How does this affect our interpretation of this proverb?⁵⁰ However, Parsons (1993:153) assists us in this regard by making the valid distinction between what is described and what is prescribed. In other words, because "proverbs are wise observations based on experience, they must not be understood as unconditional promises, but as pragmatic principles or procedures to follow" (Parsons 1993:157). Some commentators of the proverbial genre observe that the most common error made by most exegetes is to regard these statements as legal guarantees from God. What we need to bear in mind is the original setting of these observations as contained in the biblical statements that we have. In the light of that then they are deliberately "Israelite" as Hels (1994:15) points out:

If they are to survive, proverbs and stories require that individual people cultivate the ability to remember them and the motivation to pass them on. The effect of this activity is to build a community of people who know who they are and where they stand in the world.

⁵⁰ The exegetical issues of Proverbs 22:6 will be looked at in more detail later as this is a pertinent issue to our studies.

Hels points out, on the one hand, that the material was designed in such a way as to enable the original hearers to immediately capture the principle being described, since in actuality a proverb is a compressed parable, as Virkler (1981:157) aptly puts it. On the other hand, the high retention inevitably became the motivating factor for the passing on of the proverbial statement and simultaneously the principle. Despite what will be evidently "Israelite" peculiarities, we insist that these statements have a universal appeal. In the final analysis, however, our part is to extrapolate the principle in a given proverb for our purposes. In that case, the exegetical guideline, as Parsons suggests (1993:169), is to utilise the characteristic and nature of proverbial wisdom as a foundation for graphic communication of timeless principles.

Thirdly, the book of Proverbs continues to have an appeal in the contemporary culture. Kidner (1985:19) says that proverbs are "designed not to spoon-feed the reader but to prick him into thought, whether by their vivid pictures and analogies or by the sharpness of their brevity and their teasing refusal to explain themselves". In other words, biblical proverbs invite reader participation not only because of the terseness and subtlety, but also because of their practical nature. Hels (1994:17) similarly observes that the proverb is compact and subtle in that it leaves things out and in so doing it may not mean what it seems to at first. That intentionally oblique nature is a deliberate design to invite the hearer's participation. In view of that aspect, Goldsworthy (1995:73-4) correctly observes the appeal that the book of Proverbs retains in the contemporary:

The book of Proverbs has a distinct appeal to Christians which many other books of the Old Testament do not have. This is partly due to its lack of reference to Israel's history which would tend to tie it to events of Israel's experience. It is also lacking in any specific reference to the seemingly

irrelevant, if not boring, legal material of the law of Moses. Christians have little problem relating to the moral content of the law, but the rules of cultic practice and of Israel's social structures seem remote and unrelated to our lives. For this reason, Proverbs has the immediate appeal of dealing with life in terms that are often apparently unaffected by the gap in time and culture that separates us from ancient Israel.

To summarise, the sacredness of the book of Proverbs could easily be argued from the fact that the book of Proverbs is among the *Hagiographa*⁵¹ – the sacred writings of the Hebrew Bible. However, since questions have been raised about the difference between the sacred and the secular because of their similarities, taking this time to settle the canonical questions pertaining to the book of Proverbs is important. For that reason, the consideration that wisdom is inconceivable outside of God cannot be over-emphasised. Similarly, the fact that the book of Proverbs addresses what is universally human makes it timeless in terms of its appeal. To add to that, the fact that proverbs invite readers' participation means that these statements will remain current in the contemporary as new perspectives are brought into dialogue and ongoing debates. We agree with Atkinson (1996:22) who comments:

Proverbs weaves together threads of moral and religious colours with others which are more concerned with getting on, doing well and being happy ... There is no split between what is 'sacred' and what is 'secular'. Life is divided to the full before God, and the proverbs give some pointers about how to manage and how to cope.

It is important to point out the sacred nature of the book of Proverbs and, in particular, the comprehensive nature in which life is viewed. It is however, significant for the purposes of this study to also consider the issue of family and the book of Proverbs, to which we now turn our attention.

51 The books of Psalms, Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Ruth Lamentations, Esther, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel belong to this category.

2.5 The family in the book of Proverbs

We want to register Gerstenberger's notion (2002:68) that with the collapse of the State religion, the family played an important role in retaining religious instructions. For this reason, the book of Proverbs is a classic example of the used of wisdom as a teaching tool within the family setting. There were perhaps other means of instruction within the family setting. In this study, we are interested in what our analysis of the book of Proverbs will yield pertaining to the family motif.

When we think about "family" in the book of Proverbs, to our mind no one has given attention to this matter as Kathrine Dell in publication, *The book of Proverbs in social and theological context* (2006). In terms of the family, Dell's work makes use of chapters 10 onwards of the book of Proverbs to argue for the family setting. Although she hints to some occurrences in the first nine chapters, she gives more attention to this particular focus in her analysis of the latter chapters. For this reason, we will concentrate our efforts on the wisdom poems found in the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs.

As one reads the first nine chapters, after the prologue of the book of Proverbs (1:2-7), there is an undeniable family motif beginning with the opening address which particularises father, mother and son (1:8-19), which seems suspended in the Wisdom's poem 1:20-33 but picked up again by the vocative "my son" in 2:1-22; 3:1-35; 4:1-27; 5:1-23; 6:1-35 and 7:1-27. As in the previous personification account, the family motif is not very clear in 8:1-36 and 9:1-18. However, we shall seek to argue how these passages contribute to the general purpose of the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs.

With that we now turn to the next chapter which will be an exegetical analysis of select passages in our endeavour to demonstrate the primacy of the home as the centre of instruction in the biblical world and also in the traditional Shona culture.

CHAPTER THREE

PORTRAITS OF HOME BASED NURTURING IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

1. The primacy of the home as the centre for instruction

In this chapter we are primarily interested in how the various texts project the home as the centre of instruction. In the previous chapter we considered the dynamics of the family social strata with specific reference to the Israelite and Shona cultures as guided by Gerstenberger (2002). We also introduced the book of Proverbs which is our main exegetical text that we now turn more attention to. Before we engage ourselves in a close analysis of these texts we would like to run a preliminary analysis of how the home is particularised in the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs. This will be followed by a brief description of the material and selection criterion of texts to be analysed closely.

1.1 Particularisation of the Home in Proverbs 1-9

We are principally interested in the situation within the home setting of the instructional exchanges that take place in the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs. These will remain in the foreground of our exegetical analysis of selected texts within the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs.

1.1.1 Specific indications to the Home in Proverbs 1-9

Firstly, we have the general indication of an orientation towards the young in 1:4; cf. 4:3; which is maintained throughout the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs. At various points in our texts, particular nouns are employed that retain the juvenile point of reference. The simple, the mockers and the foolish (1:4, 22, 32; 7:7; 8:5; 9:4, 16)

represent the different levels of gullibility emblematic of the primal audience. We will explore further the precise meanings of these various groups, but at this juncture it is sufficient to say that they seem to be young.

Secondly and closely related to the above, we have the specification of “my son” in 1:8 which not only indicates the commencement of a new address in the majority of occurrences, but also intimates the father-son relationship it represents. In the first nine chapters, this vocative occurs some seventeen times and is a subject of concern in another twenty-seven instances in the rest of the book of Proverbs. Dell (2006:51ff) argues in her account for the family as the social setting for chapters 10-22 of the book of Proverbs. She certainly makes inference to that effect for the first nine chapters as well (see Dell 2006: 1-50). Moss makes a more comprehensive statement pertaining to the home setting when he writes:

In Pr. 1-9 a wise parent gives numerous instructions in the second person address to a ‘son’ or ‘sons’, and the parent refers to his or her teaching as wisdom (2:2; 3:13; 4:5-9; 5:1; 7:4). On this account the aim of Pr. 1-9 seems to locate wisdom within the Israelite household. When the household is understood to be the setting of the instructions, and the parents as the teachers, then the poems featuring personified speaking Wisdom (1:20-22; 8:1-26; 9:1-6) reinforce the teachings the parents give.

Thirdly, we see the appearance of both parents in 1:8 (cf. 4:3; 6:20) and elsewhere as involved in the instructional exercise that we have in the first nine chapters. It is noteworthy to have this appearance in the very first address as it carries implications through the rest of the account. Outside of the first nine chapters, the father/mother parallel occurs few times (Pr. 10:1; 15:20; 19:26; 20:20; 23:22, 25; 28:24; 30:7). Pezhumkattil (1994:69) alleges that the “relationship between man and woman,

especially between husband and wife is presented in the wisdom books to give moral and ethical discipline to people with a view to create harmony and fear of God in families and in society". We can therefore appreciate the appearance of both parents in this exercise as they play a key role. We think it is the precise mentioning of both parents here that demands consideration of the home setting at face value. There is also something to be said about the importance of family instructions in the post exilic era in which it is perceived that the material in Proverbs 1-9 was written (see Bland 1998:222).

Fourthly, reference to family reminded us of the home setting as the generic setting within which these exchanges occur. With respect to that, Proverbs 4:1 contains the first occurrence of "my sons" in the plural form (cf. 5:7; 7:24; 8:32) which indicates a father speaking to more than just one of his sons. In the same instance in 4:3-4 there occurs a retrospective allusion to a similar parent-child exchange that the father now undertakes with his own son. This indicates that these exchanges had become an established tradition within Israelite experience. This brings to mind the various passages where parents are given the responsibility to instruct their children (Deut. 6:4-9; Pr. 22:6). In his comments about the meaning of the phrase "train up" used in Pr. 22:6, Hildebrandt (1988:5) says what is meant is "the careful nurturing, instructing and disciplining of the child in an attempt to inculcate a wise and moral character" (cf. Pr. 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15, 17). The responsibility here also realises the necessity of the command to honour one's parents (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16) because of the understanding that they would be one's instructors in matters of life.

1.1.2 Allusions to the Home in Proverbs 1-9

In a similar vein, we also mention other familial allusions that occur in these texts that are worth mentioning. Firstly, in Proverbs 7:4, the statement to regard wisdom as one's sister is paralleled to regarding understanding as one's kinsman. Clearly family relationships are in mind here. These injunctions suggest that there is some positive perception about family relationships that the speaker has in mind in making this pronouncement.

Secondly, in the numerical statement of 6:16-19 the list concludes with what we think is the emphasised item which is against a person who stirs up dissension among brothers/family. The highlighted antisocial behaviour is given a divine perspective when introduced as things that God abhors. Bland (1998:228) comments:

Thus in Proverbs, the anthropocentric focus and the theocentric foundation unite to accomplish a common goal: instruction in the formation of moral character. Through the gift of wisdom, the human dimension yields to the divine will to enable the divine to do its work in the lives of individuals who have nurtured a "listening ear". The parent provides the initial instruction to youth. Yahweh empowers those who incline their heart to understanding (2:1-22). Proverbs is a collection of sayings, experiences, and insights written primarily to equip youth to contribute to the well-being of the community.

The well-being of the community remains a crucial point of emphasis throughout the various texts of the book of Proverbs as we will see in our exegetical analysis.

Thirdly, the subjects that are selected in these exchanges are reflective of what would be of more concern to a parent's heart as opposed to the common concerns of a teacher in a school setting. In these exchanges, there is much said regarding a concern for yielding to the adulteress (2:16-19; 5:3-23; 6:20-35; 7:5-27). In the

instructions issued in 5:3-14 against the adulteress, these are followed by a statement in 5:15-23 that comments on the ideal of enjoying one's wife which the father persuasively presents. The theme of a good wife is taken up a few times in the rest of the book of Proverbs (12:4; 18:22; 19:4) ending with the well known and much loved poem of a virtuous wife in 31:10-31.

Still on the subject matter taken up in the book of Proverbs, there is also the concern against yielding to the temptations of the wicked men – which is described today as peer pressure. It is interesting that this concern is raised as the first matter (1:10-15) and is brought up again in 2:12-15 and 4:14-19. This frequency tells us that not only is the subject important, it is a serious concern. This may also indicate that it is a potential area of vulnerability as far as the son is concerned.

Another subject of concern to a parent is that of communal relationships. At the core of this is the premise that an individual will relate well with others based on the content of his/her character. A parent would surely dwell on moral behaviour of the child. Hence we have the austere warnings concerning the implications of nonstandard behaviour (6:3, 19, 29, 33-35; 7:24-27). Bland (1998:236) says that "those who are given solid moral training in the home become responsible citizens in the community even when many in that community are corrupt. The development of moral character is not for the sake of having skills for one's personal success. Moral instruction however, is about preparing youth to serve the larger community". This speaks of a trained young person who will grow up to live responsibly within the family and society.

1.1.3 Criterion for text selection in Proverbs 1-9

In this chapter we would like to exegete texts that are strictly speaking "Instruction". According to McKane (1970:3) "the most important distinction between Instruction and the Wisdom sentence is that the imperative is the proper to the first and the indicative to the second". However, the use of the imperative exists to command and exhort as it seeks justification for its directive. That justification or rationale is usually contained in the subordinate clauses typified by the motive particle *y^lk* along with final and consequential clauses. These texts are marked by direct address with the specific agenda to command or persuade through well reasoned arguments that appeal to the addressee. In contrast, the wisdom sentence tends to be rather impersonal in its presentation of observable truth and does not necessarily seek to exhort or persuade (see McKane 1970:6). Passages that would strictly speaking belong to this category are 1:8-19; 3:1-12; 3:21-26; 3:27-35; 4:1-27; 5:1-23; 6:1-5, 20-35; 7:1-5, 24-27. Of these we would like to show the subject matter covered which will assist with our selection of some passages:

PASSAGE	SUBJECT	CORRESPONDENCE
1:1-19	Against wicked company	
3:1-12	Quest for Wisdom	
3:21-26	Sound judgment and discernment	
4:1-19	Quest for wisdom/Wicked company	
4:20-27	Personal qualities	implied
5:1-23	Against the adulteress	
6:1-5	Against surety	
6:20-35	Against the adulteress	
7:1-5	Against the adulteress	

Table 8: Passages that exhibit Instruction distinctiveness

The brackets here show the passages that correspond within this category. The straight line indicates the absence of a corresponding passage within this category but

could be implied elsewhere within these texts or in the next category we will examine below. Of these we will then analyse 1:8-19; 3:1-12; 3:27-35; and 6:1-5.

Besides these are passages that, according to McKane (1970:7), represent a slackening of the formal structure of the Instruction. In this case, the element of command is minimized and in some cases even absent (2:1-22; 6:6-11, 12-15 and 16-19). The presentation seeks to win the listener over through use of imaginative description in order to inculcate authoritative instruction rather than the didactic employment of the imperative (see 6:6-11; 7:6-23).

PASSAGE	SUBJECT MATTER	CORRESPONDENCE
2:1-22	Quest for Wisdom	3:1-12; 4:1-19
2:12-15	Wicked men	1:8-19; 4:1-19
2:16-19	The adulteress	5:1-23; 6:20-35
6:6-11	The sluggard	None
6:12-15	The malevolent character	None
6:16-19	Abominable conduct	None
7:6-23	The adulteress	2:16-19

Table 9: Passages that are not strictly speaking Instruction

In this category, some of the subject matter will have been covered in the previous one of the strictly speaking Instruction characteristic. What we have done is to select those that have subjects that we have not considered and given preference to those. Of these we will consider 2:1-22; 6:6-11; 6:12-15; and 6:16-19.

There is a third category that McKane does not refer to as a distinct body. This is one where there is use of invitation to Wisdom or by Wisdom, or as in 9:13-18, by Wisdom's nemesis "Woman Folly". In these passages, Wisdom is celebrated as the giver of life and disregarding her invitation would be to surrender oneself to death.

Passages that belong to this category are 1:20-33; 3:13-20; 8:1-36; and 9:1-18. Of these we have selected 1:20-33 and 9:1-18 for our consideration.

2. Exegetical approach

We will commence our exegetical analysis with the prologue (1:1-7) which is perceived to be the introduction to the first nine chapters if not the entire account. While our analysis will not pursue a strict chronological analysis of the passages as they occur in the book of Proverbs but will rather be guided by the highlighted categories, we will, however, attempt to close our exercise with chapter 9, as it reiterates the principle of the book first mentioned in 1:7 to form an inclusion.

2.1 The Prologue 1:1-7

The prologue contains what Gomez (1998:407) calls the pedagogical dimension of the book. From it we will realise the ethos, the ethics, purpose, and value of the book. For these reasons, this short introduction is actually critically important in providing the hermeneutical key for our purposes. As such it requires comprehensive analysis.

2.1.1 Text

t[;d;l' z`laer'f.yI %l,m, dwID'-!b, hmol{v. ylv
`hn"ybi yrem.ai !ybih'l. rs'WmW hm'k.x'
`~yrIv'ymeW jP'v.miW qd,c, lKef.h; rs;Wm tx;q;l' 3
`hM'zIm.W t[;D; r[;n:l. hm'r>[' ~yIat'p.li ttel' 4
tAlBux.T; !Abn"w> xq;l, @s,Ayw> ~k'x' [m;v.yI 5
`hn<q.yI
`~t'doyxiw> ~ymik'x] yreb.DI hc'ylim.W lv'm' !ybih'l. 6
rs'WmW hm'k.x' t[;D' tyviare hw"hy> ta;r>yI 7@ `WzB'
~yliywIa/

2.1.2 Translation

1 The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: 2 For learning about wisdom and instruction, for understanding words of insight, 3 for gaining instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice, and equity; 4 to teach shrewdness to the simple, knowledge and prudence to the young-- 5 Let the wise also hear and gain in learning, and the discerning acquire skill, 6 to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles. 7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

2.1.3 Commentary

The opening paragraph prepares the reader for what is to come. For a book that, to the average reader, appears disjointed and seems to shift from one theme to the next, the opening paragraph is an important feature. It establishes the core issues that the discussion that ensues will focus on. Murphy (1998:5) comments:

This is an imposing preface to the book. It is also quite unusual that no other biblical work begins with a statement of purpose as clear as this. At the same time it hides more than it reveals. One need only read the rest of the book and assess the wisdom tradition to appreciate how 'proverbs' open up vast issues in every corner of ancient and modern life.

Murphy's comment assists us in realising that the individual unit within the book of Proverbs cannot be read in isolation. The full spectrum of the proverbial thesis can truly be appreciated when the anthology is viewed in its entirety. That, it seems, was the original intention of the final redactor who compiled the material in the fashion we have it under the guise of a Solomonic composition, as we will discuss below.

To begin with, there are three observations we would like to note in terms of the prologue, namely; the patron of the book, the purpose of the book and the principle of the book, to which we now turn our attention.

2.1.4 Patron of the book 1:1

A first reading of this superscription makes a claim to Solomonic authorship in the superscription of the account. In brief, firstly, this could be supported by the very first word in the Hebrew text, *ylvm* “the proverbs” which appears in the plural construct, to validate Solomon’s alleged prowess in this genre as implied in 1 Kings 3:7-10 and affirmed in 1 Kings 4:29-34.⁵² We have no questions as to which person the proper noun *hmlv* “Solomon” speaks of since it is qualified by the phrase *dwd-!b* “the son of David”. As far as we can establish, no one else is known by this name in the biblical account except for the king of Israel.

Secondly, the claim to Solomonic authorship could equally be strengthened by the perception that wisdom was a royal preoccupation and thus confined within the palace courts. Now with Solomon himself introduced as *larfy \$lm* “the king of Israel” (1:1), as well as the *allusion* to king Hezekiah⁵³ (25:1-29:27) and also king Lemuel (31:1)⁵⁴ one could easily arrive at that conclusion. The association of these royal

52 The first passage is about Solomon having been granted by the Lord the opportunity of a lifetime to ask for anything he wished for and he asked for wisdom as he confessed his inexperience and inadequacy to govern the people of God. The Lord granted his request as is immediately evident in 1 Ks. 3:16-28 in the case of two prostitutes making claims to the same baby. Again in 1 Ks. 4:29-34 is a detailed description of his giftedness:

^{1KI 4:29} God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. ³⁰ Solomon’s wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. ³¹ He was wiser than any other man, including Ethan the Ezrahite--wiser than Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol. And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations. ³² He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. ³³ He described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. ³⁴ Men of all nations came to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.

53 The *allusion* to king Hezekiah is stated here since the reference indicates that it was his scribes involved in the task perhaps with his permission. However, the royal setting is implied and that is the point we are making.

54 King Lemuel whose name means “belonging to God,” is not known *per se* although there are speculative details such as that being the name that Bathsheba gave to Solomon (Ryrie 1994:981). No one really knows who this character is other than his royal identity.

figures with wisdom is perhaps the strongest evidence for the possibility of wisdom as a formalised establishment in the palace (cf. Humphreys 1990:93). Others allege that the mention of "men of Hezekiah" (Pr. 25:1) as copyist of Solomon's compositions points to the existence of a Scribal School within the royal palace. The scribes would have been among the few, if not exclusively, literate people at that time. Other than keeping royal records, they would have been responsible, as the above reference implies, for the tabulation of wisdom material. It would seem valid to view the recording of Wisdom material as an act of royal sponsorship in putting together the various independent collections under a single rubric, as opposed to the actual existence of a Wisdom school. Michael Fox (1996:229) makes the important distinction that scribal school is not Wisdom school, neither is education which is the goal of Wisdom, identical with schooling. He then goes on to depict the home setting as the ancient setting for the passing on of wisdom from parents to children.

Thirdly, Solomonic authorship could also be maintained by virtue of the appearance of some proverbs within the book under his name (see Pr. 10:1-24:34). Perhaps the strongest advocacy for Solomonic authorship in modern studies has been forwarded by Steinmann (2000:659-674). His premise is that the book of Proverbs is one of two Old Testament books that self-admit the author's name (2000:659). He dismisses the popular notion that regard Proverbs 1-9 as a later composition, or as an introduction for the whole even in view of the fact that this section reflects a more developed theological framework compared to the shorter sayings in the rest of the account (2000:660). As such, he forwards his thesis to back Solomonic authorship based on three factors that are common to all three sections (1:1-9:18; 10:1-22:16; 25:1-29:26)

supposedly written by Solomon; namely vocabulary, thought and modes of expression as he explains:

Different works in differing styles and with differing concerns by the same author should not be expected to match each other completely. However, vocabulary, thoughts and expressions should be somewhat similar, especially in work included in Proverbs that are all wisdom literature (2000:662).

Steinmann presents that, for example, the dominant thought in the book of Proverbs, that is “the fear of the Lord” only occurs in Solomonic sections.⁵⁵

However, there are other compelling reasons to think differently about Solomonic authorship. Firstly, there are proverbs within the book itself clearly ascribed to others as shown in the table below:

SECTION	AUTHOR
1:1-9:18	Solomon?
10:1-22:16	Solomon
22:17-24:34	Wise men
25:1-29:26	Solomon (copied by Hezekiah’s men)
30:1-33	Agur
31:1-9	Lemuel
31:10-31	Anonymous

Table 10: Composition of the Book of Proverbs

In disputing the Solomonic authorship for the whole account, Murphy (1998:xx) says that “there are no available means to identify any proverbs as ‘Solomonic’ and that includes the vocabulary, thoughts and modes of expression. It seems to be the nature of ancient proverbs that they lose their ‘author’ as they become popular and perhaps even improved in the process”.

⁵⁵ The phrase is found in 1:7; 2:5; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:27; 15:33; 19:23 and 22:4. Its occurrence in 31:30 as the only exception is placed there as a framing device to form an *inclusio*.

Secondly, the proverbs that are in the book in general lack what one might call a royal flavour since the subject matter is on life in general. Other than occasional remarks about the king (Pr. 14:35; 16:10; 20:8, 26, 28; 22:11; 24:21; 29:4, 14; 30:22, 27, 31), one does not sense a deliberate focus on royal matters. On the contrary, the contents point us in a different direction altogether. Ceresko's (1999:8) comment on the emergence of Wisdom Literature in the Ancient World could be a valid point at this juncture when he says that "as communities formed in ancient times and struggled to survive, they would gather the fruits of reflection on their experience". Thus, the exercise was not strictly speaking confined to royalty since the transmission was mostly oral. Perhaps the royal effort was in the sponsorship of written records. Other than the lack of royal flavour, Solomon's life does not match the monogamous and family ideals that are particularised in this account (cf. Moss 2002:199).

Thirdly, in view of the above, it would be logical to view Solomon as a "patron", a concept borrowed from Goldsworthy (1993:43). He explains:

It would be wrong to see this work as the activity of one idle rich. Wisdom is concerned with the details of life as they relate to the sense of goal and purpose in human existence. Solomon was no dilettante amusing himself in a new form of literary activity, but a creative theologian anxious to show that life could be lived in a meaningful and fulfilling way with the framework of the covenant (1993:28).

Under the same token, Atkinson (1996:21) says that there is good reason (and many Old Testament specialists are returning to this view) to suggest that when Proverbs ascribes material to Solomon, this may be taken at face value and not simply ascribed to this traditional patronage of wisdom. The book itself, by virtue of identifying other contributors, distances itself from a one man authorship. It would be best to regard the work as a "collection of collections, probably having passed through the hands of

several editors and several editions from different sources and times, brought together as another resource, alongside the law, prophecies and the histories in the Old Testament, by which the people of God could be helped to learn something of the ways and wisdom of God”, to use Atkinson’s words (1996:21).

At the same time, titles in ancient writings were attributed to the memory of a celebrated personality, and in this case the association of Solomon and wisdom. Allan Moss (2002:204) reveals that “historically speaking, superscriptions are additions to the texts, and their use has a sociological background that can be explained”. He further comments:

I am suggesting that in defining the relation of Solomon to the book of Proverbs, we are able to proceed one step further than historical criticism. Historically speaking, Solomon’s royal name and reputation for wisdom were important to the final editors of the book. However, if we re-introduce Solomon into the book as its author, we find that the Solomon who emerges from the pages of Proverbs 1-9 is a king only in name. As a family-teacher he diverts himself of his royal panoply in order to strenuously uphold family values in a series of instruction expressed in rhetoric of reasoned appeal ... In Proverbs 1-9 the royal and uniquely wise Solomon is depicted as every Israelite teaching parent (2002:207).

Similar sentiments have been said of the Song of Songs which is traditionally regarded as a Solomonic composition (see Ndogo 1998:44-48). Feminist studies, in particular, have shed some light on the possibility of other hands (see Fontaine 2002 and Tribble 1995). A more conclusive statement is forwarded by Koptak (2003:32) who proposes the following:

[T]here is no compelling reason to doubt that Solomon is to be associated with much of the book as author and patron; even as we recognise that is not possible to discern by any scholarly criteria what is directly attributable to Solomon and what is the work of later hands who carried on his tradition of wisdom.

He goes on to explain that “so it is that his name appears first, perhaps as tribute and dedication, the way Webster’s name appear on today’s editions of dictionary he wrote long ago” (2003:32).

Fourthly, there is allegedly the important difference between a Scribal school and a Wisdom school. Michael Fox (1996:229) is one of the advocates of this view. A scribal school existed chiefly to train those who were enrolled in royal service for administrative and record keeping roles. Kathrine Dell (1997:29) says that these administrators “would have been educated in schools based on the Egyptian model”. Their involvement with wisdom literature perhaps coincided with a royal figure who had an interest in the collection of that material hence the alleged sponsorship by kings such as Solomon and Hezekiah. By the same token, other kings who were not particularly interested in this material are not mentioned as playing an active role as both composers and collectors.

However, Wisdom schools, or the “sages” as they would become, provided a different service altogether. Perhaps a comprehensive analysis of the identity and occupation of the sages is Morgan’s 2002 publication *The Making of the Sages*. He attempts to identify the sages from the biblical period and also in the contemporary. His comments below are helpful in providing some perspective to our discussion:

The following scenario aptly describes a search for wisdom, whether in the biblical period or the modern day. Someone, usually in relationship to a particular community with a set of common values (to live well, to be wise, to be rich and successful, to be slim and strong, or some variation on one or more of these themes), searches for wisdom and finds it. At least he thinks he has. And this wisdom is more often than not a combination of old and new, of things tried in times past and of new insights especially pertinent to the present day. If the

wisdom found actually allows the community to live well and according to its stated values and purpose of life, then the searcher is often considered a sage (2002:xv-xvi).

Morgan's comments pinpoint the specific preoccupation of the sages which was a quest for what would guide a given community in the meaning of life and to pass on those findings. He goes on to indicate that the sages of old remained largely anonymous but what we know is that the process by which they chose to make their findings known was "not by publishing a best-seller or by utilizing any other means of widespread distribution but rather by teaching – to their families, to their students in a school setting, to leaders in the state or religious establishment" (2002:xvi). What becomes apparent in this description is that the sages were not in royal service *per se*. It is more likely that royal figures were mostly recipients of the sages' findings. At the same time, the sages' chosen means of passing on findings in Morgan's thesis places the family at the forefront of the various forums. This is so because the family was a ready-made audience that did not need any protocol for one to gain the much needed attention.

To come back to our contention of Solomonic authorship, it makes sense to regard him as a patron which also assists us with the dating of the work generally speaking. The date of authorship should also be linked with the other titles in the book as Ross (1995:39) correctly says. However, we also need to make a distinction between date of composition and date of compilation. The composition was over a vast period of time⁵⁶ from the founding of Israel as a people until the time of Hezekiah the king of Judah who is placed around 715-678 BC (Drane 1993:102) and possibly beyond.

⁵⁶ Goldsworthy (1993:22) says that the lateness in the emergence of Israelite wisdom may be explained by the relationship of true human wisdom to the revelation of the wisdom of God. This on its own was a historical process stretching for a number of years. Thus during the monarchy a measure of completeness would have been achieved and by the time of Solomon the need to record these reflections were promoted from the highest office in the land.

Although there is no consensus in terms of the actual date of compilation⁵⁷, the first unit 10:1-22:16 attributed to Solomon is made up of 375 proverbs dated around his time. The second unit also attributed to Solomon but linked to king Hezekiah's redactional activity (25:1-29:27), is, because of that link, dated around the eighth century BC (see Cate 1987:481). The problem remains on how to date the anonymous work (22:17-24:34) as well as the works by Agur and Lemuel of whom no one knows much about. The same is true about the wisdom poems found in chapters 1-9. What seems progressive is to view the development of Wisdom literature as a human activity right from the beginning, and the time of Solomon onwards, to use Goldsworthy's terminology, as the "flowering" of that pursuit (2000:184). He closes with this sentiment, "The nature of wisdom is such that a precise dating is neither possible nor necessary" (2000:184). Related to that is the precise statement by Koptak (2003:32) that the people of Israel are the collective authors of the book of Proverbs. To close our discussion on this we refer to Fox (2000:56-57) who writes:

Historically, it is improbable that many – if any – of the proverbs were written by Solomon. The social background implied by the sayings is quite varied. The proverbs do not usually bespeak the concerns of the royal court and never speak from the perspective of a monarch. Moreover, many of the teachings would not make sense as Solomon's tutelage of his son ...And though many proverbs teach a royalist ideology, none has a specifically Davidic message.

2.1.5 Purpose of the Book 1:2-6

The book of Proverbs unlike most biblical accounts clearly prepares the reader for what is to come. The *exordium* 1:2-6, which some scholars believe to be the latest

⁵⁷ Drane (1993:102) suggests a completion date around the third century BC; Dillard and Longman (1994:237) allude that it is virtually impossible to date the work since it was written over a long period of time. They also suggest that 1:9-9:18 is the latest part of the book; Harrison (1969:1018) taking into account the names linked with the collection suggests that the work would have been completed at any period from 700 BC onwards; Hill and Walton (1991:248) suggest a date between the 10th to 6th century BC.

composition of the account, is a redactional rendition to set out the purpose of the entire collection.⁵⁸ As such, it assists in providing the answer to the question of what this book is all about. It commences with the speaker who is not necessarily introduced to us, even though Solomon is *implied* in the superscription. As the poem unfolds, we should be able to determine that voice as well as the *implied* audience along with the important question raised above.

The **inner texture** as the first arena of textual analysis reveals the opening poem as a long sentence sustained on the one hand by the infinitival clauses which are recognised by the consonant **l** before each verb in verses 2, 3, 4 and 6.⁵⁹ On the other hand, the sustenance of the sentence is via what appears to be synonyms of the initial noun **hmkx** "wisdom". Hubbard (1989:45) identifies eight synonyms in total that are described as "an instance of the use of repetition by Hebrew authors to expand, reinforce and enrich the meaning of a concept". In this case each synonym, while connected with wisdom, uniquely adds value to the intended understanding or meaning as we will see below. However, the culmination of these synonyms is expressed in 1:7 which serves as the resolution of the introductory notion as well as the thematic summation of the anthology. All this should further elucidate the intended purpose of this account.

58 Farmer 1991:25; Goldsworthy 1993:42; Atkinson 1996: 29; and Murphy 1998:5 all concur with the primacy of the opening poem in setting out the purpose of the editor. McKane 1970:262 regards the 1:1-7 as a prior indication of the range of material in the book.

59 Verses 5 and 7 deviate from this infinitival construct for reasons that are worth exploring which we will look at below.

The opening poem also reveals a number of significant devices that serve to further advance the **inner texture**. Firstly, one notes the *repetitive pattern* of the word **hmkx**⁶⁰ (wisdom) in 1:2 and 1:7, where in both instances it is paired with the concept **rswmw**⁶¹ (instruction). The word occurs some seventy-seven times in the Old Testament and of those, twenty-nine occur are in the book of Proverbs alone. This frequency on its own sheds some light on the necessity of investigation to the meaning of the concept in this account, as we have already alluded.

In line with that investigation Murphy (1998:3) sees this *repetitive* pattern of the phrase **rswmw hmkx** “wisdom and instruction” in 1:2a and 1:7b as forming a *strophic inclusio* which serves to delimit the poem at this stage (Watson 1995:284-5).

The concept **rswm** “instruction” which occurs thrice in the short poem (1:2, 3 and 7) is indicative of its significance in this account because of such frequency at the introductory stages and its occurrences over twenty-two times in the remainder of the book.⁶² Another concept repeated in this opening unit is **!ybhl** “to understand” in 1:2b and 1:6 where in both instances it seems to imply an intellectual process, hence

60 The concept **hmkx** occurs some seventy-seven times in the Old Testament, and of these thirty-one times are in the book of Proverbs (1:2,7; 2:6,10; 3:13; 4:5,7, 11; 8:1, 11, 12; 9:10; 10:13, 31; 11:2; 13:10; 14:6,33; 15:33; 16:16; 17:16,24; 18:4; 21:30; 23:23; 24:14; 29:3,15; 30:3). **~kx** generally means to be wise, or act wise(ly). Sometimes the word is translated as “shrewdly” in some versions. However, **~kx** refers to a wise (man).

61 Other than 1:2, 7 the concept occurs two other places in the book of Proverbs in 16:22 and 23:23. The **w** should be taken more as a conjunction. The word **rswm** is a noun common masculine singular absolute from the root **rsy** which according to Murphy (1998:3) means instruction broadly speaking, although narrowly it has the idea of discipline or to chasten. If the implied reader is young, then the implied author has to be older which validates our proposition of a parental orientation in this account.

62 The following passages would be of comparative interest to see how the concept is utilised in the book of Proverbs; 1:8; 3:11; 4:1; 5:12, 23; 6:23; 7:22; 8:33; 10:17; 12:1; 13:1, 18, 24; 15:5, 10, 32, 33; 19:20, 27; 22:15; 23:13; 24:32.

the formal education motif that some scholars associate this book with (see 5:12-13). However, even in the informal setting an intellectual process can be engaged. Of interest is the fact that in half the occurrences of the word רִשׁוּמִים “instruction” in the book, the concept is associated with parental activity (see 1:8; 3:11; 4:1; 8:33; 13:1, 24; 15:5; 19:27; 22:15; 23:13). “Instruction” is technically the rubric for the material found in 1:1-9:18 (Koptak 2003:23; Goldsworthy 1993:42). By the same token, we realise that the meaning of the clause in 1:2b can be determined by its being paralleled to 1:2a, a phenomenon common to Hebrew poetry with the juxtaposition of ideas.⁶³

To come back to our text, we notice that as the purpose of the account is being uncovered, there is a discernable arrangement of this unit in terms of the *opening-middle-closing texture*. In actuality, 1:2-7 stands as the *opening* for the whole the account where the pertinent issues are being raised or introduced for further exploration throughout the rest of the account 1:8-31:9, and the resolution has to be 31:10-31.⁶⁴ In addition, the fact that 1:2-6, as Murphy (1998:4) correctly observes, is a single sentence, indicates that this passage is *progressively* sustained by the verbs and nouns that overlap in meaning and thereby pausing translational challenges. For

63 Pertaining to this literary device which we will refer to frequently in our exegetical analysis, Berlin (1997:27) offers an explanatory remark which we need to pay attention to as he explains “Parallelism juxtaposes lines that are, from a linguistic perspective, equivalent on one level while being different on another. Parallel lines contain grammatical and semantic equivalents but are rarely identical. They are the same and yet different and it is the productive tension between the sameness and the difference that makes parallelism so effective”.

64 The proposed reading scheme for the book of Proverbs by the present writer seeks to argue for the existence of an organising principle by the final redactor of this account in the fashion we have it thereby presenting 1:2-7 as the *opening*, 1:8-31:9 as the *middle* and 31:10-31 as the *end*, despite the apparent logical flow of thought that the material pauses in the overall perspective, a concern we will discuss. The question obviously is what resolution is reached by that *ending*? This is an important question to ask which we would like to suggest for further investigation. However, Hawkins’ study (1995) of this final unit which he perceives as the climatic personification of wisdom in which he sees parallels in the language prescribed to Lady Wisdom of 1:20-33 and 9:1-6, particularly with the reiteration of the “fear of the Lord” motif. Similarly, Hurowitz’s (2001) structural analysis of Proverbs 31 reveals that the carefully arranged unit is intentionally placed where it is by the hand of the final editor, although that reason is not given in this article. If we are to agree that the account is addressed to a relatively young person, and ends on this notion, could this be advice that, at the stage of his developmental journey, he needs?

some scholars, however, the first chapter in its entirety forms the *opening* for this collection (see Harris 2000)⁶⁵ and for others who regard Chapters 1-9 as the introduction (see Estes 1997:17).⁶⁶ Both positions seem unlikely since 1:2-7 functions well to introduce the anthology. In that brief unit enough substance is raised to anticipate further discussion. The remainder of the first chapter to the end of ninth, the discussion shifts from an introductory level to exploratory or more precisely instructional.

At the same time it could be argued that this unit has its own *opening* 1:2-4; its own *middle* 1:5-6 and *closing* 1:7. The introductory remarks 1:2-4 are realised through a series of infinitive verbs, *t[dl* “to know” (cf. 4:1) *!ybhl* “to consider” repeated in 1:6, *txql*⁶⁷ “to receive” (cf. 1:5; 4:2; 7:20; 9:7,9; 16:21,23; 20:16), *ttl* “to give”. There is a form of *alliteration* (Watson 1995:228) in these lines, as pointed out earlier on, through the commencement with the same consonant *l* which in its prepositional function could also add to the intended *mnemonic* effect.⁶⁸ This is particularized by the fact that all above verbs, because of their affinity, are a deliberate form of *rhetorical elaboration* that collectively imply an educational or instructional forum as the necessary means to an end.⁶⁹ This is further sustained by the various nouns that the

65 Harris (2000) argues that in similar fashion as Psalm 1 and 2 serve as an introduction to the Psalter, so would Proverbs 1:8-19, 20-33 to this anthology. 1:1-7 in this scheme is a preface.

66 Estes (1997:17), among other scholars, argues that chapters 1-9 thematically serve as a general overview of the subject matter that 10-31 explores in specific detail.

67 *hql* has a wide range of connotations such as take (get, fetch), lay hold of (seize), receive, acquire (buy), bring, marry (take a wife), snatch (take away). But in this context the concept is better understood as in the learning environment hence the translation to receive or to learn.

68 This is when alliteration serves to assist with memorization as opposed to other possible effects.

69 Garrett (1993:6-8) shows that other arenas other than the intellectual are also implied *viz.* practical, moral and mysterious. In other biblical accounts the educational or instructional exercise that is at the core of the book of Proverbs are not, strictly speaking, the implied forum. As Williams (1994:24), in historical books wisdom is

above verbs moderate. As in the case with the verbs, these are closely connected nouns, or what Fox (1997a:115)⁷⁰ would prefer to call “synonyms of wisdom”, since what we call “wisdom” in the English understanding of the concept may not necessarily be what the text implies, as we will see below. Farmer (1991:25) sees 1:2-4 as constituted by dependent clauses which hang on the advice given in 1:5. Similarly, 1:6 is dependent on 1:7 for the completion of thought. This would typify to some extent, what Robbins (1996:59) calls an *enthymeme* in which an argument being raised follows a *protasis-apodosis* form or “if ... then” pattern, as we will see in Proverbs 2:1-11. In this case the infinitive verbs in 1:2-4 raise the condition and in 1:5 the consequence where the infinitive verb is suspended.

In the remainder of the unit 1:6, the infinitival verb is reintroduced in relationship to how one can handle what Hubbard (1989:47) calls “wisdom’s genres”. The reason for the particularization of these literary forms shows the impressive array of key terminology showing the didactic nature of the material therein. The key that unlocks that rich heritage is then given in 1:7 where we have perhaps the most significant phrase in this account *t[ḏ tyvar hwhy tary* “The fear of the Lord is the culmination of knowledge”. The same phrase is reiterated in 9:10 and 31:30 to form, as most scholars correctly assert (see Koptak 2003:61), an *inclusio*. This “enveloping” effect is significant in that it suggests a deliberate arrangement of material by the final redactor which is perhaps indicative of the intention for this anthology to be read as a

generally refers to skill and artistry of the craftsman; in prophetic books wisdom may connote specialised knowledge of foreign peoples.

⁷⁰ Clifford (1999:34) is of the same persuasion that there is an accumulation of synonyms in this unit that describe what wisdom is about and possibly its attainment.

whole. Other than the title, this is yet another indication that the account was intended to be viewed as a coherent composition.⁷¹

To assist us further with answering the question pertaining to the purpose of the account, the second arena of our exegetical analysis, **intertextuality**, comes into play. In the opening poem, we can already sense the *cultural intertexture* with the *reference* to king Solomon in the superscription, whose patronage is linked with “wisdom”, a key concept in the account as we pointed out already. Robbins’ *social intertexture* (1996:115) assist us with the introduction of **hmkx** “wisdom” and perhaps the synonyms that follow. As pointed out in the previous chapter “wisdom” was a preoccupation of the ancient cultures. Wyse and Prinsloo (1996:139) perceive that “there is the axiomatic understanding in the Old Testament studies that Israel participated in the international wisdom thinking of its day. The ‘wisdom’ found in Proverbs, and elsewhere in the Old Testament, was not unique in kind to Israel ... Israel was able to add to or incorporate into its understanding of Yahweh aspects of how others viewed the world”. Bruce Waltke (1995:49) echoes such sentiments as he concedes that the comparison made in 1 Kings 4:29-34 between Solomon’s wisdom and that of the ancient Near Eastern sages strongly implies that his proverbs were part of an international, pan-oriental, wisdom literature. These comments, however, do not necessarily reveal the purpose of the book of Proverbs other than to place it on the international map. Perhaps someone who moves a step closer towards yielding that information is Scott (1995:67) who writes:

71 Bullock (1995:20) regards the title to have been set for the book upon the completion of the work of the final redactor. While we recognise the different hands responsible to the individual compositions in the account, someone was else aware of all of these was responsible for the final anthology.

If Francis Bacon was right, that “the genius, the wit and the spirit of a nation are discovered in its proverbs”, the book of Proverbs should be one of the most interesting parts of the Bible.

Having made such a significant statement, Scott goes on to specify the material was intended for instructional purposes. This becomes obvious from the synonyms of wisdom that are presented in the opening poem which serves as a hermeneutical hint for what the book intends to achieve. The synonyms, as Waltke (2004:175) correctly puts it, unpack wisdom, which according to Hubbard (1989:45) is a broad and most inclusive term in its Hebrew construct.⁷² Let us consider these synonyms as we now turn to the **social and cultural texture** which focuses on the precursor that every meaning has a context (Robbins 1996:144).

The first synonym **ʾšwm** “instruction” in 1:2a is paired with **hmkx** “wisdom” twice in this opening poem (1:7). In the first instance the pair are qualified by the verb **t[dl]** “to know”, which in that verse is paralleled to the verb **!ybhl** “to consider”. What that suggests about the pairing is that the one noun cannot be separated from the other. Similarly, the synonymous parallelism of the 1:2a to 1:2b implies an identical meaning. However, in the second instance, 1:7, the pair are used in association with unwillingness to attain knowledge which is what “fools” do.⁷³ As pointed out above, the concept is associated, in this account, with parental activity. Waltke (2004:175)

⁷² Hubbard (1989:45) writes that **hmkx** is “the broadest, most inclusive term available to depict the combination of observation, obedience, careful planning, prudent conduct, and sensitivity to God’s will that Israel’s wise treasured and taught; it is the only term used when wisdom is treated as a person whose calls, claims and promises are quoted directly”. Some of these connotations will come to light as we analyse the various synonyms of wisdom.

⁷³ The biblical definition of a ‘fool’ is not equivalent to the generic conception of it as in the Webster dictionary thought of “an idiot, or a person with little judgement or common sense, sill person or simpleton” (1964:563). We will come back to the biblical concept in our exegetical analysis of 1:7 below.

defines it as a chastening lesson, or to correct a moral fault, which “connotes an authority to whom the [learner] must submit”. He also acknowledges the alternative nuance, that is to “discipline”. Dans (2000:19) suggests similar meanings of instruction or correction which in her opinion allege an early warning that wisdom is not easy to come by, and as such demands commitment, we add, on the part of the learner as well as the instructor. Fox (2000:57) adds to the ideas of discipline, correction and instruction, as well as the idea of admonition. However, in his translation of 1:2, he prefers the word “correction”. His conception of these terms arises out of the overall purpose of the material being a textbook in teaching the young as an aid in an advanced education, the curriculum being “character education” (2000:57).

Koptak (2003:58) describes wisdom as acquired learning that helps one to know how to respond to a given situation. Ross (1991:905) describes that attainment as “skillful living”, which is the ability to make responsible choices and to live successfully according to the moral standards of a community. For that reason, the pairing of **hmkx** “wisdom” and **rswm** “instruction” is valid in that the former concept assumes a product and the latter a process. Thus, the noun translated “instruction” according to Ross (1991:905) is “the necessary companion of wisdom, ... training of the moral nature, involving the correcting of waywardness toward folly and the development of awareness of the Lord and personal integrity”. McKane (1970:262) presumes that the exercise is indicative of a strenuous educational discipline which is productive of rigorous intellectual attitudes. He sees the forum for such training as being within a home, as there is a demand for receptivity and submission to authority, which parents, mentioned in 1:8, are most suited to facilitate in this context. The significance of

rswm is important by virtue of the repetition in 1:3 and 1:8 (cf. 3:11; 4:1; 5:12, 23; 6:27; 7:22; 8:33) particularly as parental activity. This association established at such an early stage in the account is important for the purposes of this study.

The second synonym in 1:2b is the phrase **hnyb yrma** “words of understanding” qualified by the verb **!ybhl** “to consider” which implies a discerning ability. Delitzsch (1978:53) perceives this as a statement that is objective not only to initiate the reader into wisdom instruction but also to guide his/her understanding. As in the previous case, he sees an intellectual reception implied in this synonym. Because the lines in 1:2 are synonymously paralleled (Buzzel 1988:902), it then stems to reason that the thought initiated therein is being sustained. In fact, Farmer (1991:25) sees 1:2-4 as made up of dependent clauses which hang on the advice to be given in 1:5. To all these perceptions we add Hubbard’s remarks (1989:45) where he sees the concept as implying the ability to look at the heart of an issue in order to discern the differences at stake in the choices being weighed. What we need to point out is that whatever we decide as the context for 1:2a should be true of 1:2b because of the parallelism. Therefore, if the first synonym “instruction” is mostly connected with parental activity, the same should be true of the third synonym “words of understanding”.

The third synonym found in 1:3 is **lkfh rswm** “instruction in understanding.”⁷⁴ and qualified by the verb **txql** “to receive” or “to lay hold of”. The word **lkfh**

⁷⁴ The concept **lkfh** hipihil infinitive absolute, emphasizes established character or set patterns as the desirable end in a person’s life. The concept also has the idea or connotation of “prosperity” hence the picture of success as the RSV tends to implore.

“understanding” is used only thrice in this construct in the Old Testament.⁷⁵ Hubbard (1989:45) describes this phrase as the ability to look at the heart of an issue, to discern the differences at stake in the choices being made. Along the same lines Koptak (2003:58-9) suggests the ability to size up a situation and respond accordingly. Fox (2000:59) introduces the novel idea of taking to heart, or to absorb, by taking a cue from Jeremiah 3:15 and Job 34:35. Again, we have implied in all these statements, a high level of maturity in dealing with various contextual challenges. This is more apparent in that there is a triad of virtues that are appositional to the synonym “instruction in understanding” as discussed below.

Connected with this synonym is a triad of virtues, *qdc* “righteousness”,⁷⁶ *jpvm* “judgment” and *~yrvymw* “equity”. “Righteousness” according to Ross (1995a:171), refers to conformity to a standard, “justice” speaks of what is proper and “equity” describes what is upright or straight. The three virtues are also used in 2:9 as the second consequence of wisdom in that context. Clifford 1999:35 (cf. McKane 1970:264) regards these virtues as spelling out the ethical dimensions of wisdom in terms of how to act rightly. Ellen Davis (2000:26) correctly identifies them as relational virtues mandatory for communal life. That is a significant identification in terms of the main thesis of this study of home based nurturing which is relationally determined.

⁷⁵ The two other places where “understanding” occurs in the same construct in Proverbs 21:16 and Jeremiah 9:23. In the former, the subject is a man who wanders from the path of “understanding” and death is pronounced as the punishment for such deviation. In the latter, “understanding” is paired with knowledge of the Lord in contrast to placing confidence in man-made wisdom, strength and riches. This helps us to realise how the concept is employed to depict a level of maturity or discernment as the source of the highest blessing.

⁷⁶ In Deuteronomy 25:15, righteousness is described in reference to weight and measures as part of the conformity to such a known standard. Interestingly, in Deuteronomy 16:18-20 the same concept is stipulated according to God’s law. The same reference links righteousness to justice as an inseparable pair, and also a common feature in the Old Testament (cf. Ps. 9:8; Is. 1:21, 27; 9:7; Jer. 9:24; Hos. 2:19; Amos 5:7, 24). To add “equity” to that list can only speak of the highest of qualities.

Interestingly, however, the language typifies prophetic oracles (cf. Hosea 10:12; Zechariah 8:16). Equally so, the psalmist echoes these virtues perhaps to underscore Koptak's (2003:59) perspective as description of what characterizes the ideals that one should abide by. In this conception, these virtues are purposefully linked to the divine throne. As such they carry a compulsory notion on the part of the subjects (see Ps. 9:8; 33:5; 89:14; 96:10; 97:2; 103:17).

The fourth synonym, which occurs in 1:4, is **hmr**["prudence", which conveys the idea of shrewdness, cleverness or even cunning. Goldsworthy (1993:43) describes prudence as implying the ability to see what is not openly obvious in meanings and relationships. His description seems to connote a deeper engagement of the mental process for one to come to the point of being prudent, as he later describes prudence as "shrewdness of thinking in making the right decisions" (1993:43). What makes this peculiar is the person to whom this is intended spelt out here as **~ytpl** "to the simple". This noun is in the plural form⁷⁷ and in this verse is paralleled to **r[nl]**⁷⁸ "to the youths" which alludes to inexperience and vulnerability. Clifford (1999:35) suggests that such vulnerability is peculiar in view of being liable to seduction by the smooth talker (Pr. 2:16-19). Similar gullibility is evident in the invitation from the gangsters (Pr. 1:8-19).

77 This plural form is taken by some as a way of "democratising" the anthology to appeal to as many as possible since "the simple" are also paralleled to "the wise" in this verse.

78 This concept is occurs some 14 times in the Old Testament but in a variety of ways. (see Gen. 24:57; Duet. 22:20, 26; Jud. 13:8; I Sam. 3:8; 4:21; 9:27; 20:21; 2 Sam. 18:5, 29, 32; 1 Ks. 14:3; Pr. 22:6). The concept **r[n]** is use in some biblical settings to speak of a boy (Jer. 33:25; Pr. 29:21), or to prescribe youthfulness. That concept is paralleled to **~yatp** "to the simple" which is not a reference to low IQ but, as Murphy (1998:3) puts it, a sense of being naïve or untutored; or as Goldsworthy (1993:43) a lack of experience in life which leaves one vulnerable.

The fifth synonym, in 1:4 **t[*d*** “knowledge”, is a pivotal concept because of its frequent occurrence in this account, some twenty-five times,⁷⁹ and also due to its association in 1:7; 1:29; and 9:10 with yet another crucial phrase, “the fear of the Lord”. It also occurs in 1:2 as a verb in the infinitive construct, which again adds to its significance. Waltke (2004:175) suggests that the concept is associated with “becoming conscious of” or “to be aware of”. His suggestion appears to paint an experiential process of realization or perception or what he calls “personal internalization”. In the majority of places where the concept **t[*d*** occurs in the book of Proverbs, the common feature is its being compared or contrasted to foolishness or a fool. We ought to bear in mind that the biblical or proverbial concept of a fool is not necessarily inability to learn or gain knowledge, but utter refusal or despising of knowledge.

It is helpful then to put into perspective Hubbard (1989:46) who points out that its related nouns that appear over seventy times indicate the centrality and scope of knowledge in the divine scheme of requirements. In other words, failure on the part of the young to gain knowledge condemns them to an inappropriate relationship with God as 1:7 clearly espouses. In this way, the attainment or possession of knowledge becomes a distinguishing feature that prescribes, not an intellectual status, but relational capacity with respect to God. We should add Garrett’s (1993:8) voice to this discussion at this junction as he says “this is not to say that “knowledge” here refers to science as we understand it. Rather, the wise man of the Bible seeks to understand the principles that govern the world, and no rigid boundary between natural science

79 A quick reading of the following references where the concept **t[*d*** occurs reveals an interesting pattern on the intended meaning of it (1:4, 7, 22, 29; 2:6; 8:9; 10:14; 12:1, 23; 14:7,18; 15:2, 7,14; 15:2, 7, 14; 17:27; 18:15; 19:2, 25; 27; 20:15; 21:11; 22:12; 23:12; 24:5; 29:7).

and ethical categories is maintained". This, in our opinion and possibly that of the entire book of Proverbs, is the primary duty of parents in upbringing godly children.

The fifth synonym, also in 1:4, is *hmzmw* "and discretion". In this occurrence it is coupled with "knowledge" as one of the indispensable attributes for the young. A similar coupling occurs in Proverbs 3:21 and in this instance it is stated as a parental appeal. In its negative usage the word indicates wicked scheming or to plot, plan or devise as in Proverbs 12:2 (cf. 14:17 and 24:8 NIV):

A good man obtains favor from the LORD, but the LORD condemns a crafty man.

In its positive sense the word describes the ability to make plans. Goldingay (1994a:586) says that discretion "suggests the resourcefulness of the practical person who knows how to get things done and is not put off by a problem". Delitzsch (1978:56) adds to that by revealing an allusion to "mental concentration ... the capability of comprehending the right purposes, of seizing the right measures, of projecting the right plans". These comments are particularly interesting when weighed against the subjects who happen to be what McKane (1970:267) calls "raw youth" or in Hubbard's (1989:46) denotation "the tenderfeet, the apprentices on the curriculum of wisdom". Fox describes them as the "uninformed, gullible youth capable of gaining wisdom" (2000:60). In these descriptions we begin to detect the necessity of the early influence of success as McKane (1970:268) comments:

The home is a primary educational agency, and it is there that the foundations of civilized behaviour and general excellence are laid. The son who learns from his parents is already beginning to lose rawness and to present a pleasing presence to the world. Parental instruction embellishes and adorns and promotes an attractiveness of manner and bearing.

The developing of mature intellectual attitudes that McKane describes here did not happen over night, nor would it be something to be left until late. What we are advocating here is a reminder that the concept, "discretion", as is employed in this situation has an orientation towards the young, something we could easily lose in the detail of defining the concept which naturally evokes a mature state of being.

The sixth synonym, in 1:5, is xql "learning" which we saw in the infinitival construct in 1:3. The concept evokes a variety of descriptions that include, to lay hold of, to receive, to acquire, to fetch or take. The central meaning remains intact and that is having a full comprehension of truth in order to be able to pass it on, to use Hubbard's words (1989:46). The concept occurs in the book of Proverbs in 4:2; 9:9; 16:21, 23 where the above description is underscored. In 1:5 as in 9:9; 16:21 and 23; the concept, interestingly, is used with reference to the $\sim\text{kx}$ "the wise". The "wise" stand in direct contrast to the young and inexperienced in 1:4 as well as the fools in 1:7. It seems in view of this that the term "wise" describes an openness to learning as opposed to not adding to learning. While only in 4:2 is learning used in a parent-child exchange, the need for learning seems to be the emphasis. Thus, in all cases, learning is presented as a continuing prospect. This position is supported by McKane (1970:267) and Murphy (1997:4) among others. Koptak (2003:60) offers a comprehensive explanation:

Who are the wise ones? Coming after the simple, the term, "wise" may indicate those who are more experienced and accomplished in learning, those who would require skills of discernment that are more finely honed. Contrasted with the fools mentioned in 1:7, the wise are *any who choose to follow the path of learning* instead of passing it by. By placing the wise and discerning between the simple and the

fools, the writer highlights the inevitable decision that all must take. The simple must choose to become one of the wise or by default will become one of the fools (my emphasis).

Koptak's description of the wise as any who choose to pursue the path of learning is really the key to understanding the implication of this statement and clearly identifying the target audience of this material. With that in mind, we can now move on to the next synonym.

The seventh synonym, also in 1:5, is **twlbxt** "wise counsel" used positively in 11:14; 20:18; 24:6 and negatively in 12:5. In the positive notion it has the idea of good advice or guidance. Goldingay (1994a:586) reveals that the word comes from the word for ropes and as such suggests skill in steering your way through life. The description envisages a mature or experienced person as the one fulfilling the advisory role, from which we could read the father-son portraiture. The focus seems to be on the accuracy of the advice conveyed towards the right course of action. However, the receptivity of the one being advised stipulated by the word **!wbnw** "and the understanding" seems to be what the line is commending.

As the build up of the synonyms moves towards a climax, there is a foreshadowing of the magnification of one's capacity to handle what Hubbard (1989:47) calls the dazzling array of wisdom's genre in 1:6. The infinitival construct which had been suspended in 1:5 is reintroduced in 1:6 to underscore the intended build up. The connection of 1:6 with the previous section is also seen in the use of **!ybh1** "to consider" which we encountered in 1:2. In this case, the concept is better translated "to understand" since it implies the ability to handle what Goldsworthy (1993:43) calls

the “forms of wisdom”. Let us briefly turn our attention to the four forms of wisdom that are stated in 1:6.

Firstly, is the concept **lvm** “proverb” which we have already encountered in the plural form in 1:1 as a general description of the material in this account. Since the concept is being distinguished from other literary forms of wisdom, we need to define it once again in this context. The concept in its original setting has the idea of likeness or representation. Hubbard (1989:47) describes proverb as “powerful lessons conveyed in artful teaching”. Buzzel (1988:902) supports that idea, as he suggests that proverbs were employed to impart wisdom in a manner that made learning both an adventure and a challenge. However, Dell (1997:135) introduces an aspect on the biblical proverb that we ought to bear in mind, namely the idea of “reflection on the meaning of life and on the relationship of the creator God to human being in the context of retributive justice”. The divine perspective introduced in this description is important in that it leads us to the principle that we will discuss below in 1:7. Barrett (1999:13) says that the “terse statements define the precepts and practices of godly living”. That is a perspective we need to bear in mind as we consider biblical proverbs.

Secondly, is the concept **hcylm** “enigma” which suggests an allusive message deliberately packaged in that ambiguous manner. The concept also has the idea of a “mocking poem”. Some translate it “parable” although the root meaning of the concept does suggest the idea of scorn. The concept appears in Habakkuk 2:6 as a taunt song that people will sing in passing on judgment against the Babylonian aggression. In all these descriptions, an enigma projects a bit of sarcasm.

Thirdly, is the concept ~ymkx yrbd "sayings of the wise" which seems to indicate practical instruction, as seen in 22:17 where the phrase occurs as well as in the other places where the wise are referred to (3:35; 10:14; 12:18; 13:20; 14:3, 24; 15:2, 7, 12, 31; 18:15). What is particular to these sayings is that the speaker recites his lessons from personal experience and expects the listener to obey. Also in the section designated "Sayings of the Wise" in 22:17-24:34, the term "my son" re-emerges (23:15, 19, 26; 24:13, 21). Interestingly, the subject matter is similar in scope to what is addressed in 1-9. The parent-child motif takes us into the home setting once again.

Fourthly, is the concept ~tdyx "riddles", which is either a difficult question to answer or a complex parable to resolve. Hubbard (1989:47) describes riddles as "teasing questions clear enough to give clues to their solutions and cryptic enough to throw the careless off track". A good example is found in Judges 14:12-18 where application of the mind is really necessary to resolve the riddle.

There are perhaps two significant aspects we can point out about these wisdom genres. On the one hand there is the poetic nature common to all of them. In other words, the choice of pithy and emotive compositions was a deliberate and necessary ploy to present the various object lessons therein. Davis (2000:19) comments:

The demand for moral exactitude explains why the teaching of the sages comes to us in the form of poetry. For poetry is the kind of language best suited to probing the inexhaustible mystery of human situation in its entirety, and that is exactly what wisdom seeks to explore. Prose is the tool of analysis, of explanation of scientific and academic research. But

poetry looks at phenomena whole ... [and] is primarily designed to engage imagination.

Davis' explanation here prescribes poetry as the suitable and inexhaustible strategy for analysing a given human situation. As we will see later, the instructional units within Proverbs 1-9 put forward a hypothetical situation that the speaker will address as vividly as possible to maximise on effect. In so doing, creativity is engaged on the part of the instructor in making the situation as real as possible, and on the part of the learner to exercise discernment. As such, leaving a little bit of room for imagination was also part of the intended development while the repetitive and parallel patterns that are common to poetic language served to emphasise these lessons.

On the other hand, all these wisdom genres remind us about the "educational" processes that the teaching-parent engaged with his student-child. Estes (1997:14) reminds us about the predominance of this subject in the book of Proverbs as he writes:

To the contemporary reader, the term 'education' often suggests a highly organised system, frequently controlled and financed by various levels of government, that equips the younger generation with knowledge and skills necessary for useful service in the work-force. This study, however, uses the concept of education more in the sense of the French notion of formation, that is the development of the learner toward intellectual and ethical maturity.

To that we want to add Ross' (1991:905) concept of "skilful living" which is the ability to make choices and live successfully according to moral standards of covenant community. Bringing the covenant community into perspective, "education" speaks of the development and awareness of one's obligations towards the Lord since wisdom outside of God is inconceivable in this scheme.

To summarise then, wisdom's synonyms as presented in the preface assist us in delineating the Hebrew conception of wisdom as each term expands on the connotation whilst reinforcing and enriching the intended meaning. At the same time the synonyms reveal the purpose of the book. Buzzel (1988:901) sees a fivefold purpose:

- For attaining wisdom and discipline
- For understanding words of insight
- For acquiring a disciplined and prudent life
- For giving prudence to the simple
- For understanding proverbs, *enigma*, sayings of the wise and riddles (my italics)

Murphy (1990:16) sees 1:2-6 as primarily functioning by providing the hermeneutical key for chapters 1-9. However, all these zero in on the common agenda of the passing on of wisdom as a way to prepare one for life. From the preface, we are also able to determine the *implied reader*, whom we can safely say is a young person being prepared for what is to come, an orientation very significant for our purposes. With that in mind, we now turn our attention to what all this builds up to.

2.1.6 Principle of the book 1:7

The preface culminates into 1:7 which introduces the novel idea of the **hwhy tary** "the fear of the Lord", a key phrase in this account (see 2:5; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:27; 15:33; 19:23; 22:4; 31:30). The word "fear" has the idea of reverence or awe as is consistently employed in the book of Proverbs. Lenchard (2002:392) aptly describes the concept as "a proper religious attitude towards God". Hubbard (1989:48) qualifies it as "reverent obedience". And Farmer (1991:26) points out that "when the term 'fear

of the Lord' is used in other Old Testament texts, it refers to both the sense of awe human beings feel in the presence of the Lord and to the respect they show towards the Lord's intentions and teachings". Murphy (1990:16) describes "fear" as including a sense of awe before divinity, worship and observance of the law. All these descriptions focus on the specific attitude with which one is expected to approach or relate to the Lord at any given point in time.

The question we need to ask is why is such fear necessary for knowledge? To work our way towards an answer, we need to point out that the name of the Lord employed here **hwhy** is His covenantal name. It occurs about seventy times in the book of Proverbs. This is the divine name that has close ties to the law and as Gomez (1998:410) points out, is consistently employed in the account (see 2:5, 6; 3:5,7,9,11,12,19,26,32,33; 5:21; 6:16; 8:13,22; 9:10). What this tells us is that the covenantal requirements are in full view in mapping out the prescribed attitude here. Fee and Stuart (1993:201) depict that "it is a matter of orientation to God out of which the ability to *fear* Him" is expressed (my italics). Hubbard (1989:48) describes the orientation to God as follows:

[It] radiates out from adoration and devotion to our everyday conduct that sees each moment as the Lord's time, each relationship as the Lord's opportunity, each duty as the Lord's command, and each blessing as the Lord's gift. It is a new way of looking at life and seeing what it is meant to be when viewed from God's perspective.

To further assist us with the answer to question why "fear" is necessary, is the concept **tyvar** "beginning" which also appears in Proverbs 4:7; 8:22 and 17:14. The concept in its related constructions can also mean first, supreme or summit, to give a sense of

a culmination of a process.⁸⁰ Buzzel (1988:908) adds to this a novel idea of a “capstone”, again emphasising that sense of superiority. The main thought we begin to sense is that of something other than a commencement. The fear of the Lord thus expresses the essence, the principle or the summit of knowledge. The concept *t[đ]* “knowledge”, which we have already seen in 1:4 as a pivotal concept, implies in Lenchak’s words (2002:393) “[that] knowledge is neither based on anxiety nor divorced from religion, for the fear of the Lord is the proper basis for understanding life”. Any intellectual pursuit has to be entirely grounded on seeking a divine perspective.

Of interest is what the first line in 1:7 is antithetically paralleled to. It depicts *~ylywa* “fools” as those who hold in contempt *rswmw hmkx* “wisdom and discipline”, the inseparable pair we encountered in 1:2. The Old Testament uses different words for what is translated “fool(s)” in the English language.⁸¹ The concept employed here and is predominantly used in the book of Proverbs is associated with the verb *ZWb* which means to despise or to hold as insignificant or basically to belittle (see also Pr. 11:12 and 30:17). This is what condemns one to the class of the foolish because of sheer scorn.

80 The following constructs are worth looking at to see the variety of connotations this concept carries: **varo** I, head, top, summit, upperpart, chief, total, sum. **hvar** beginning time, early time (Ex. 36:11, only). **hvar** top, i.e. the topmost stone (Zec. 4:7, only). **!wvar** first, primary. **ynvar** first (Jer. 25:1). **tyvar** first, beginning, best. **twwarm** place at the head, head place (e.g. Gen. 28:11, 18; 1Sam. 19:13, 16) (Source: Bible Works CD 1998).

81 The concept **lbn** as in Psalm 14:1; 39:9 and Pr. 17:21 describes the fool as one who lacks spiritual perception. The best classic example of this type of person is found in that encounter between king David and Abigail which highlight Nabal’s action as we read in 1 Samuel 25. The concept **lsk** as in Ecclesiastes 2:14 describe a fool as one with a dull, closed mind.

While the subject of the “fool” or “foolish” is quite predominant in the book of Proverbs, there are two observations we ought to note. The first observation is the apparent absence of the subject in the first nine chapters of the account. Our explanation of that non-appearance is the assumption that the parent-teacher is playing an active role in the passing on of wisdom instruction to the student-child. We need to remind ourselves here of Fox (1997:155), who defines wisdom instruction as “the entire range of intellect and knowledge [which] is necessary and sufficient condition of ethical-religious behaviour”. If such an exchange is presumably taking place, the subject of a fool, as in one who despises knowledge, is not true about the realities of the first nine chapters. At the same time, this underscores our suggestion that these instructions are being passed on at various developmental stages of the student-child who by the end of the first nine chapters may have reached adolescence.

On the contrary, the second observation is the appearance of the foolish son/child motif in select places (10:1; 11:29; 12:15; 15:5, 20; 17:21, 25; 19:13). We need to point out at the onset that, in the section ascribed as the “Saying of the Wise” (22:17-24:34), which we said is similar to 1-9 in subject matter and scope, this theme does not occur. Nonetheless, the message that these references collectively project is a clear statement of regret over a child who is labelled “foolish”. In 10:1; 15:20; 17:21, 25 and 19:13 the concept *lysk* is employed while in 11:29; 12:15 and 15:5 we have the same concept as in 1:7, *lywa*. The point we are trying to drive home once again is the association of instruction as a parental responsibility, so that if a child turns out

to be foolish as these references decry, it seems that the parents will shoulder both the blame and the shame.

To recapture our thoughts here, "the fear of the Lord" concept introduced in 1:7 and reiterated elsewhere in the account as well as in other wisdom compositions, Job 28:28 and Psalm 111:16, establishes the principality of the notion. The antithetical parallelism of the first line in 1:7 to the second yields perhaps more than we can see from the initial reading of it particularly when we bring to the fore the parental/child motif. We, therefore, must agree with Fox (2000:67) and Harris (2000:207) who ascribe this verse the "motto", or with Hubbard (1989:48) to whom it is the "theme" and Gomez (1998:407) who labels it the "focal point". Whatever the description, 1:7 is critical hermeneutically and theologically for unlocking the message of the book of Proverbs. With that we now move on to the first instructional encounter.

3. Parental appeal against wicked company 1:8-19

The first encounter between the father and son in the book of Proverbs, on a *narrational* level, portrays only the parental voice giving specific instructions. The voice is projected as one of authority since it consistently employs the imperative construct in the instructional encounter. Customarily, the voice of the supposedly recipient child is neither recorded nor heard. The text assumes the recipient's audience through the reiterated address "my son". What is even more gripping in this opening address is the coupling of the father with the mother (1:8), through whom the appeal is corporately sounded. That parallelism between the mother and father demonstrates similar footing in authority over the child so that the voice of the father which we hear more

prominently is equally representative of the mother. However, the mother's voice, as Fox (2000:80) points out, hardly signifies that of a "schoolmarm".

The speaker's voice enables us to follow the *argumentative* pattern in the *opening* is 1:8-9 where the son is summoned to heed the voice of his father and mother equally. The *middle* 1:10-18, incorporates the prohibition against getting involved with the wrong company as well as supplying the justification for such. The matters raised in the *middle* find their resolution in 1:19 which comprises the *closing* aspect to this texture.

Since this is the first encounter of the exchanges, a number of questions come to mind for our consideration:

- What is the main concern of this encounter?
- Why is this encounter placed at the onset of these exchanges and collection?
- What does this tell us about the age of the son concerned?
- Does this encounter reveal anything about the social status of the concerned family?

These are significant questions that we need to bear in mind as we wrestle on with the various exegetical issues in this passage. At the same time, we need to retain at the focal point of this discussion, the main concern of this study which seeks to explore the role of family relationships, particularly that of the parent-child, as highly upheld in the book of Proverbs, for instructional purposes. In doing so, this relationship seems to project the home as the ideal place of instruction, vis-à-vis nurturing, that we propose as the missing dynamic in contemporary society. With that in mind we now turn our

attention to the text on hand beginning with an exegetical framework before proceeding with the close analysis of the contents.

3.1 The text and exegetical framework

The Address { $\text{`}^{\wedge}\text{M,ai tr;AT vJoTi-la;w> }^{\wedge}\text{ybia'}$
 $\text{rs;Wm ynIB. [m;v. 8}$
 $\text{`}^{\wedge}\text{yt,roG>r>g:l. }^{\sim}\text{yqin"[]w: }^{\wedge}\text{v,arol. }^{\sim}\text{he !xe ty:w>li yKi}$

The Imperative { $\text{`}^{\wedge}\text{abeTo-la; }^{\sim}\text{yaiJ'x; }^{\wedge}\text{WTp;y>--}^{\sim}\text{ai ynIB. 10}$
 $\text{hn"P.c.nI }^{\sim}\text{d'l. hb'r>a,n< WnT'ai hk'l. Wrm.ayO--}^{\sim}\text{ai 11}$
 $\text{`}^{\sim}\text{N"xi yqin"l.}$
 $\text{`}^{\wedge}\text{rAb yder>AyK. }^{\sim}\text{ymiymit.W}$
 $\text{~yYIx; lAav.Ki }^{\sim}\text{[el'b.nI 12}$
 $\text{`}^{\wedge}\text{ll'v' WnyTeb' aLem;n> ac'm.nI rq'y" !Ah-lK' 13}$
 $\text{hy<h.yI dx'a, syKi WnkeAtB. lyPiT; }^{\wedge}\text{l.r'AG 14}$
 $\text{`}^{\wedge}\text{WnL'kul.}$

{ $\text{`}^{\wedge}\text{l.g>r; [n:m. }^{\sim}\text{T'ai \%r,d,B. \%leTe-la; ynIB. 15}$
 $\text{`}^{\sim}\text{t'b'ytiN>mi}$

~D'-%P'v.li Wrh]m;ywI WcWry" [r;l' ~h,yleg>r; yKi 16
 The Motive/Rationale @n"K' l[;B;-lk' ynEy[eB. tv,r'h'
 hr'zOm. ~N"xi-yKi 17
 ~t'vop.n:l. WnP.c.yI Wbroa/y< ~m'd'l. ~hew> 18

The Consequence { wyl['B. vp,n<-ta, [c;B' [;ceBo-lK'
 tAxr>a' !Ke 19 @ `xQ'yI

3.1.1 Translation

- ⁸ Hear, my child, your father's instruction, and do not reject your mother's teaching;
⁹ for they are a fair garland for your head, and pendants for your neck.
¹⁰ My child, if sinners entice you, do not consent.
¹¹ If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us wantonly ambush the innocent;
¹² like Sheol let us swallow them alive and whole, like those who go down to the Pit.
¹³ We shall find all kinds of costly things; we shall fill our houses with booty.
¹⁴ Throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse"—
¹⁵ my child, do not walk in their way, keep your foot from their paths;
¹⁶ for their feet run to evil, and they hurry to shed blood.
¹⁷ For in vain is the net baited while the bird is looking on;
¹⁸ yet they lie in wait to kill themselves! and set an ambush-- for their own lives!
¹⁹ Such is the end of all who are greedy for gain; it takes away the life of its possessors.

3.1.2 The Address 1:8-9

In this first encounter, which is a call to the son to avoid gangsters, the **inner-texture** directs us to the opening verb [mV "listen"⁸² in the imperative construct (cf. 4:10; 8:34; 13:1, 8; 19:20; 23:19, 22; 25:10). Although not repeated in this unit, it is a significant command drawn from the same concept employed to draw the nation of Israel to attention prior to the issuing of significant instructions (see Deuteronomy 4:1; 5:1; 6:4 and 9:1). The concept effectively has the connotation of obedience more than

⁸² The word can be translated "hear" or "obey". In its variety of usages in the Old Testament, it is connected with communication either as a call to attention or as the actual issuance of instruction. Mostly it is linked to important messages and thus this unit is not an exception.

just listening or hearing. In 1:5, where we first encountered the verb, it was related to the wise whom we described as the receptive ones, unlike the fools who are “morally perverse as a result of deep seated attitude as opposed to lack of raw intelligence” to use Fox’s words (2000:68). In view of the impending danger, that strong sentiment is to be expected.

Connecting that opening verb to the noun **ynb** “my son”, repeated in 1:10 and 1:15, it compels attention by its frequent repetition in the rest of the account. While it is a term of endearment, it serves further purposes as can be detected from the *repetitive* pattern. It probably can be viewed as having a *double entendre* where on the one hand, it calls one to attention, but on the other is a reminder of the relationship and the expected obligations thereof.⁸³ These become particularized by the relationships spelt out here, **ba** father and **ma** mother, and specifically highlights their **rswm** “instruction”⁸⁴ and **trwt** “teaching”,⁸⁵ respectively. The father’s instruction is paralleled to the mother’s teaching, of which the son is equally asked not to **vjt** “forsake”, a call reiterated in 6:20. Even here we have a classical case of parallelism of “forsake not” to the opening verb “listen” as the same idea is evoked. In Cox’s (1982:103) estimation it is “an attitude of openness to what life can teach”. Another significant observation with regards to the book of Proverbs, is that instruction and teaching both speak of providing direction. As such, Goldingay (1994:587) says that

83 In this poem, it also marks the commencement of a new unit in terms of the progressive pattern (1:10 and 1:15).

84 The key concept that we saw in 1:2 and 1:7 coupled with the wisdom is employed here.

85 The concept **trwt** can be translated “law” although it is not the Mosaic law that is in mind here. Because of the parallel to the concept “instruction” that is clearly intended in this arrangement, we have to settle for “teaching” as the acceptable translation.

this “suggests that the style and content of the Wisdom books and those of the Torah are coming together” in this composition.

The admonition in 1:8 is given a brief rationale in 1:9 which is, in actuality, part of the address or the call to attention, but fully developed in 1:15-18 as far as the reason is concerned. It describes the father’s instructions and the mother’s teaching as the particle preposition, *y*k “for” provides that link. What we have in 1:9 is ornament imagery, the kind, according to Hubbard (1989:49), that makes a person delightfully outstanding to others and gives one something to cherish and value for oneself. The two concepts *tywl* “wreath” and *~yqn* “necklace”, which evoke the *sensory-aesthetic texture*, define the parameters of adornment. The head and the neck mentioned here in connection with the ornament imagery are usually reserved for the best adornment. The depiction occurs here as a natural reminder not only of the benefit but the attractiveness thereof, as Goldingay correctly observes (1994:587). Delitzsch (1978:60) similarly sees the description as portraying the fairest of ornaments and Farmer (1991:26) simply ascribes it as something of significance or a mark of honour. Perhaps Buzzel (1988:908) captures the intended perspective by looking at the adornment as honour gained from obeying parents. That perception is captured in Clifford’s (1999:35) subtitle for this unit which reads, “The deadly alternative to parental wisdom”. Equally compelling is McKane’s (1970:268) concise rubric, “Flee sin and violence”.

To shift to some aspects of **intertextuality** already hinted at, we observe that in 3:3; 4:9; 6:21 and 7:3, ornamental imagery is portrayed as learning rewards, perhaps a

case of an *echo*. As in Deuteronomy 6:6-9, it seems that the portraiture functions as a *mnemonic device* although Fox (2000:84) queries an *apotropaic* role.⁸⁶ Either way, we do have a case of a *cultural intertexture* where symbolic aspects are thus highlighted.

To move towards an all embracing meaning of all this we need to bring into perspective the **social and cultural texture**. Here, we may have a classical case of a *Gnostic-manipulationist* argument by the insistence on the part of the parents that the knowledge they intend to pass on is all that is necessary to avert worldly experiences represented here by the gangsters. The parents represent the *dominant* culture that stands in direct opposition to the *subculture*, the gangsters. We are therefore in agreement with Garrett (1993:69) who espouses that "Proverbs does not begin with its instruction with lofty or abstract analysis but with simple and straightforward appeal for the reader to reject association with criminals". The issue at stake here is well grounded in the lives of people even today. The *dominant* and *subculture* antagonism that we see here in the ancient world is very much alive in more than one way in the present day.

3.1.3 The prohibition 1:10-14

With that in mind, we can, therefore, move on to the next subunit the *imperative* in 1:10 is used to spell out the prohibition the father pronounces. There is a sense in which we can consider this verse the *opening* in terms of the **inner texture**. In that respect, it could be argued that the middle also has its own *opening* (1:10), *middle* (1:11-17) and *end* (1:18). The *middle*, in the larger scheme of things, commences

⁸⁶ The idea behind an apotropaic concept describes something believed to have the ability to ward off evil as in charms. This seems very unlikely in the context of 1:7 and the rest of the account which according to Bullock (1995:21) is a philosophic-theological approach to life that draws out the implication of worship and commitment to God.

with the *vocative* "my son". This term highlights the intended recipient of instructions that ensue. Koptak (2003:76) sees, in this term of endearment, an invitation to the readers to "identify with a boy coming of age and preparing to make his way in the world". His sentiment points the reader towards a tender aged recipient of these instructions. Although the age is not specified, we can make use of our own world perceptions and in view of the subject matter, one could imagine a teenager who is prone to gangsters. By the same token, Waltke (2004:188) regards this tender address as an indication of the special father-son relationship where the "father considers his son as his spiritual heir, not merely his biological offspring" (cf. 4:3). There is more to this term of endearment which seems to function as a *refrain* (see Koptak 2003:71) since it tends to precede an important lesson that commands attention.

The *vocative* is followed by a hypothetical scenario that the speaker creates using the particle adverb ~a "if". While the description that ensues is purely fictitious, its possibility must not be underestimated, nor is it far removed from reality. The speaker presents the scenario with vivid language to emphasise that the concern is that real. To reiterate, the dramatic language and line of argument employed here tells us that its likelihood is very high. At the focal point of the prohibition that is issued here are the *ajX* "sinners" (representing a *subculture*) whom Murphy (1998:8) includes alongside father, mother and son as the principal figures in this unit. We could argue in terms of the **intertexture** for the occurrence of a *social intertexture* because this group seems well known. Delitzsch (1978:60) observes that the noun is in the intensive form which serves to signify those to whom sin had become habitual. The

root of the word from which the concept “sinners” is derived means to miss the mark. Waltke (2004:190) suggests that the label implies a separation from the norm, thus by their actions, described below, they had disqualified themselves from society and rendered themselves un-teachable.

The sinners had a specific agenda as prescribed by the concept $\$wtpy$ ⁸⁷ which has the idea of enticing, deceiving or persuading. The introduction of the sinners and their wicked intentions present the prospect of competing voices, and in this case against that of the parents. Koptak (2003:71) alleges that the motif of competing voices runs throughout chapters 1-9.⁸⁸ If that is the case then, what we have is a lesson on how to discern the truth from falsehood, to follow Koptak’s thesis. He comments:

It is important to notice that the first lessons of parental instruction do not teach directly; they quote. The parents direct attention away from themselves, turning the young man’s attention to the voices he will hear when he leaves them to make his way in the world (2003:72).⁸⁹

A similar thought is espoused by Hubbard (1989:49) who says that this unit serves as a reminder that life was lived in groups, and as such, the parents’ voices were not the only one vying for attention. If that is true then, we can understand the prohibition that ensues **abt-la** “do not give in”, to be in line with the graphic portraiture of the sinners’ ill intent discussed below. The prohibition according to Garrett (1993:69) takes a *protasis* fashion “if” in 1:10a and the *apodosis* in 1:10b which are expanded in 1:11-14 and 1:15-18 respectively. Because of this scheme 1:11-18 forms an *inclusion*

87 There is an interesting etymological link between **htp** to “entice” and **ytp** “the simple” which we encountered in 1:4. A few parallels could be made from the implications of this observation.

88 The voice of the sinner here is comparable to that of the seductive woman of Proverbs 5, 7 and 9. Contrary to the seductive woman is the voice of wisdom equally portrayed as a woman whom we will encounter in our next exegetical unit (1:20-33) as well as 8 and 9.

89 The ability to discern is the main lesson of Proverbs 3:21-26.

demonstrated through the verbs **hbran** "let's lie in wait", and **hnpcn** "let's waylay".

The pair is repeated in 1:18 **wbray** "they lie in wait" and **wnpcy** "they waylay".

Through these concepts we begin to get a feel of how the father does not employ, as Koptak says (2003:72), "soft words" to describe the sinners. In the light of the sinners' grievous intentions we can, therefore, appreciate the father's prohibitive statement in 1:10b which literally commands the son not to go. It seems that only parents have the right to speak like that.

The sinners' intentions are further elucidated by the imaginary speech that the father composes in 1:11-14. The conditional clause is reiterated, ~a "if" to serve the dual purpose of introducing the fictitious discourse and, as Waltke (2004:190) observes, as the father's strategy to put words into sinners' mouth that equally "condemn them and expose their enticement". Fox (2000:86) equally affirms this putative quotation as a rhetorical device whose purpose is "to implant a moral evaluation of the act in the evil-doers' own words, thereby making them at once expose their perverted values and condemn their acts by their own mouths". To paint a better contextual picture, the **social and cultural texture**, the text presents a *conversionist* argumentation in view of the outside world here presented as corrupted by the sinners.

Firstly, we have, in 1:11-12, the self condemnation in the sinners' speech which is characterised by the intention to make their operative secretive – "let us lie in wait". Other observers correctly equate this to an "ambush" effectively making this a surprise attack (see Davis 2000:30; Murphy 1998:xxi). Waltke (2004:191) points out that the

verb is often used to describe animals lurking for their prey (see Ps 10:9; Lam 3:10-11). Ross (1995:177) also shows that the phrase is consistently used for hostile purposes as seen in Deuteronomy 19:11; Judges 21:21; Proverbs 23:28. We can clearly deduce from this observation that the intended attack should not generally occur among humans. It depicts, according to Delitzsch (1978:61), having gone beyond the point of self restraint.

Secondly, the self condemnation of the sinners is made obvious by their intention to spill someone's $\sim d$ "blood". Perhaps better than most commentators, Delitzsch (1978:61) captures the idea behind the reference to "blood" at this juncture. He alleges that "blood" is sometimes used "synecdochically for the person, but never with the reference to blood as an essential constituent part of corporeality, but always with reference to violent putting to death which separates the blood from the body". Thus, we can agree with McKane (1970:269) that the murderous intention to rob someone is particularised by the lack of a "sense of personal grievance" on the part of the perpetrators when in actuality it is such a wicked plan. Taking someone's life is not a matter to be taken lightly. We also agree with Murphy (1998:9) who says that the slaying of the innocent appears to be practically mindless despite the motivation. So strong is the word "blood" that its usage here presents the sinners' proposal as undesirable and in fact barbaric.

Thirdly, the self condemnation of the sinners is revealed by the description of their victim as yqn "innocent" in 1:11. The concept portrays the victim as free from guilt and thereby appropriately designating the sinners as wicked. We can tell the legal

language here from the advocating of the victim as having done nothing to implicate himself. Stated differently, there is nothing that the intended victim had done to provoke such actions. Nevertheless, these sinners do not need provocation. Waltke (2004:191) says that the description “underscores the monstrosity of their deed against all that is right” not as an isolated incident but a way of life. He continues that this set up “exposes their crime as a coldly calculated, high-handed, brutish plot against a hapless victim to give him no chance to flee or defend himself”. That analogy projects the sinners as utterly mindless of the implications of their actions.

Fourthly, the self condemnation of the sinners is seen in 1:12 where the designated metaphor for them is death itself. The concept **lwaV** “Sheol” is, generally speaking, an *allusion* to hell or death itself in the Old Testament. The usage here is not so much about its location as much as in what it represents. For that reason, in 1:12 it is synonymously paralleled to the concept **rwB** “pit” aptly used here to depict the end of life. Likewise, Sheol encapsulates the sinners as swallowing up the life of the innocent. The animation is further intensified by the word **[lb** “swallow up/down” (cf. **ydrwyk** going down or descending)⁹⁰ which describes the idea of gulping down the **~ymytw** “whole”. This evocative metaphor (Waltke 2004:192) ironically shows where these criminals really belong. Garrett (1993:70) comments:

The intended meaning is that the gang would be ‘like the grave’ and the victims would be like those who descend to it. ‘Like those who go down to the pit’, however, is in parallel to ‘like the grave’ and would normally be taken to have the same referent.

⁹⁰ The concept has interesting connotations. **dry** can refer to the idea of going down, to descend, decline, march down, or sink down. The negative connotations serve to emphasize the descent more as an effect as much as in Sheol as a power than as a place (see Clifford 1999:38).

This throws an ambiguity into the text as the reader senses that in fact the gang members have unwittingly put themselves in the position of 'those who go down to the pit'.

At the same time the metaphor serves to show the sinners' "insatiable" appetite just like death. McKane (1970:270) sees an *allusion* to Mot the mythological god of death, "with the gaping throat who swallows his victims whole". He continues by saying that "they encompass the destruction of their victims so swiftly and completely that it is just as if they had passed through the yawning jaws of Death. As this god never has a surfeit of 'life', so their appetite for spoil never sickens". Once again we can see the effect that such graphic portraiture would have in driving across the message as the father caringly advises his son. The father's prohibition to the son in 1:10 that commenced this speech should by now be loud and clear – you don't want to be a part of this scheme!

On the other hand, besides the self condemnation of the sinners, are their arguments for participating in the crime in 1:13-14. Firstly, is the assurance of "big money painlessly acquired", to use McKane's words (1970:268). The language suggests such an abundance of valuable things (*rqy* "precious")⁹¹ such that one can fill his house in 1:13. The use of *llv* "plunder" elsewhere for spoils of war suggests that crime had become a way of life or the norm (Ross 1991:908). What we need to see from this is the promise of, in Ross' words (1995:177), "swift success" and what Atkinson (1996:60) calls "hope for quick gain". To the contrary, the promise of wealth properly belongs to wisdom (1:13; 8:18; 24:3-4), as Leeuwen (1997:38) reveals. Already, the

⁹¹ The concept is mostly used for items of value. It has the idea of precious, value, esteem or costly. We get a sense that the sinners do know exactly what they are after and as such can hold out that prospect for the son. See also Proverbs 12:27; 20:15; 24:4; Jer. 15:19.

son has been exposed to the true gain through heeding the wise instructions of his parents in 1:9. Once again there are competing voices from which the son must learn how to discern the genuine from the imitation. In this case, the son ought to realise that the sinners have “malice on their minds, openly committed to create mayhem or murder in the name of greed” (Hubbard 1989:49). The argument that the sinners use to justify their intended course of action is therefore flawed.

Secondly, the implied companionship that the son will enjoy with the sinners in 1:14. The invitation to “throw in your lot with us”, according to McKane (1970:269), is a popular practice originated from the annual redistribution of communal land in a village which was done by lot. If this is true, then the sinners were effectively inviting the young man to join their community and thereby live in “village”. Murphy (1998:9) suggests that the “use of the word ‘lot’ is almost blasphemous in view of the function of the lot to determine the will of God”. He continues by saying that “it stands here for the common fate and sharing that will come from the evil adventure”. While Murphy does not refer to the figure of speech that the use of the lot here seems to imply, he, however, shares the sentiment of the intended companionship that the young man will have to stand by if he participates in this crime. By virtue of that association one has to abide by its violent way of life as the norm.⁹² As Koptak (2003:73) correctly surmises, “there is a tragic irony as this gang of thieves proclaims loyalty to one another through the promise of a common purse. It is a promise of community, but what community can you have with people who are enemies of community?” The kind of community that the sinners envisage will not last as it is based on ephemeral

⁹² The Shona have a saying which captures this kind of association “*Wadziya moto wembavha wavambavhawo*’ (lit; If you warm oneself in the company of a thief you become one also)”.

notions. The father is doing his best to paint a picture to assist the son towards that right decision. In a similar vein, we notice the use of the plural pronouns “we/us” intended to create a sense of comradeship (Koptak 2003:82). Hubbard’s comment (1989:50) is worthy of our attention at this point as he writes:

The fact that this alarm of the dangers of bad company is the first specific warning sounded in Proverbs suggests that folly is not just an individual matter but a social one as well. We travel in groups ... What we become is determined in some significant measure by the company we keep.

As indicated earlier on, this was not going to be a once off invitation but rather, was intended to be ongoing since, for the gang, this was a way of life.

3.1.4 The rationale 1:15-18

In 1:15-18 provides the father’s *rationale* as to why the son should not get involved with the sinners. In terms of the **inner texture** the subunit made up of two couplets 1:15-16 and 1:17-18 which begins with the *vocative* “my son”, a reprisal of 1:8 and 1:10, which in this case plays an emphatic role. This is followed by a double prohibition comparable to the one in 1:10. But in 1:15 the theme of $\$rd$ “way” or “path” which is implicit in 1:10 is brought to the fore. Davis (1999:38) points that the concept occurs over 70 times in the book.⁹³ The concept is a metaphor for the sinners’ course of life. Waltke 2004:194 explains this figure is representative of becoming so hardened by sin, that it becomes too familiar, too oft that one can no longer see the gravity of the transgression.⁹⁴ The double prohibition is fashioned in such a way that

93 Related to this metaphor are other concepts such as “path” which occurs some 20 times and “road” which occurs 6 times. The phrase that describes “to walk on the path” as in to conduct oneself also occurs some 6 times in this account (Davis 1999:38).

94 Waltke (2004:192) delineates a three pronged analysis of the metaphor ‘way’. The first one describes course of life, the second conduct of life and the third consequences of that conduct. All these three elements are realized in this unit leading to the consequence in 1:19.

the first line, “do not go along with them”, is paralleled to “do not set foot on their path”. In a sentence, the father is saying to the son, have nothing to do with these sinners.

The double prohibition is followed by a threefold rationale in 1:16-18 that appropriately begins with the conjunction *yk* “because” or “for” and possibly “surely”. The first of these reasons in 1:16 dwells on the compulsive actions as captured by the concepts *wcwry* “they rush” or “run” and *wrhmyw* “and they are swift” to highlight some aspects of *sensory aesthetic texture*. The former concept is related to how their feet rush into sin and the latter to swiftness in shedding blood (cf. 1:11). Again we have a classic case of parallelism that by now we realise is used rhetorically to reiterate the message. The occurrence of *\$lgr* “your foot” in 1:15b and *~hylgr* “their feet” is a case of chiasmic juxtapositioning (Waltke 2004:193). It is also an interesting switch, from the earlier focus on the adornment which focused on the head and neck (1:9), to the feet. The impulsive characteristic is highlighted in order to reveal the lack of calculation on the part of these sinners in terms of the consequences of their actions.

The second reason is stated in 1:17 where we have the first occurrence of a proverb in this account, a case of a *cultural intertexture*. While most scholars do identify the statement as a proverb, its meaning is however debatable, if not unknown. The error we must avoid in our attempt to find the meaning of this proverb is to ignore the context. Obviously, the proverb intends to embody the truth that is being developed and established through what comes afterwards. The proverb reads, “How useless to spread a net in full view of all the birds” (NIV). Bird trapping would be a typical *social*

intertexture as Clifford (1999:39) assists us with getting the original setting for this proverb. He writes that "hunters netted birds in Palestine by placing two vanes of netting on either side of a clearing or hole strewn with bait, while they hid behind a wall, holding onto a cord. When birds alighted the vanes quickly pulled toward each other".

Some scholars suggest that this depicts a "bird watching the preparations which are being made to trap it, it will easily take evasive action" (McKane 1970:270). Delitzsch (1978:65) adopts this perspective because of the emphasis on the words ~ןX "in vain" (cf. 1:11) and yny[b "before the eyes". If we agree with this explanation, the question is what point is the proverb making in the text? Garrett (1993:70) queries that "even if one is willing to admit that a bird is intelligent enough to recognise the purpose of a trap when it sees it (which is doubtful), the proverb has no point in the context".

Others would see birds' inability to control their appetites such that they are gullible or unable to restrain themselves (see Clifford 1999:38). This again does not satisfy the point the words "in vain" or "before the eyes" are making in this context. The critical question is to whom is the proverb referring? If the proverb is describing the gangsters, which seems to be the case, then we would have to make yet another decision as to whether the gangsters are the ones being trapped, or setting up the trap. The key to resolving this question lies in the point of the ensuing line (1:18) since it alludes to a trap as well. In 1:18, which constitutes a reversal of the words in 1:11, the gangsters are victims of their own trap.

Going back to the proverb, there could be a place for a double reading as Fox (2000:89) suggests. On the one hand the proverb can be read as a warning that the gangsters should have enough sense to avoid an obvious trap and on the other hand that they are unable to restrain themselves from the trap. Koptak (2003:74) brings out an interesting dynamic:

Yet this simple saying is difficult to understand, in part because it seems to intrude on its context. It does not seem to fit, and so it works like a riddle. Riddles use a cipher language that offers a clue and at the same time that conceals a trap. Therefore, we read this proverb about a trap, watching for ways that it may work as a trap itself ... birds are only trapped when they are unaware that there is a trap. A proverb (or riddle) about traps is used to demonstrate that the way of violent gain is a trap itself.

Koptak's analogy satisfies the point that poem has been making all along and that is the life of greed is a trap. Greed can become a desire so uncontrollable that in the end it only affects the perpetrators.

The third reason for the prohibition is stated in 1:18 which ironically shadows the sentiments of 1:11, as mentioned above, in that the true victim at the end is not the person the gang intended to waylay but only themselves. The son has been warned about getting involved with these gangsters as we paraphrase Goldingay's words (1994a:387) that stupidity is such that one cannot see disaster when it is staring them in the face.

3.1.5 The consequence 1:19

The *closure* is profound. The point of this poem is captured in this line that pronounces the outcome of all who go after "ill-gotten wealth". We also have the

interesting use of the concept *twxra* "path" or "way" (see 2:8, 13, 19; 17:23) the metaphor for a course of life. It calls the son to consider the outcome because, on the basis of this, he can make the right decision.

The consequence of the matter really could have been threefold. Firstly, we have to be concerned about the sinners themselves even though the futility of their way is already depicted. The question that arises is, what really went wrong in the lives of these young men to end up in the streets pursuing such a life? Perhaps they did not have the privilege of an exchange with their fathers to forewarn them about such dangers. Maybe if they had had that opportunity they did not heed to the warning but simply became victims of failure to exercise discerning voices and choices. Secondly, there is a concern on the fate of the innocent victim should the sinners have their way. Thirdly and more importantly, is the potentiality of the son yielding to, in our view and that of the father, the false prospect of money painlessly gained. Since the account is only a literary creation of the father as he prepares his son for adult life, we can breathe a sigh of relief that the grave events described therein are not yet realised hence the forewarning. He needs to make the choice about the course his own life should take.

3.1.6 Reflection on the parental appeal

At the onset of this exegetical analysis we raised four questions that in the course of our exercise we may have answered. We summarise our findings we would like to bring them into perspective. Firstly, pertaining to the main concern of this encounter we see a dual function. On the one hand there is a purely instructional function, a role the father continues to play. In this position the father is projected as the "expert

teacher [who] speaks with the authoritative voice ... because of his status as a knowledgeable and reliable transmitter of tradition" (Estes 1997:126)⁹⁵. He speaks from experience as one having walked this journey as well. On the other hand, the son is the focus of the instruction which makes him the reason, if you like, for the putting together of this material. He also makes use of quoted speech, and cites a proverb which are strategies used to validate one's argument.

Regarding the question as to why this material is placed at the onset of the exchanges is perhaps an indication of the age of the recipient who would have been susceptible to various temptations. As our discussion revealed, "there is nothing new about gangs of youth graduating into vice-rings and incorporated crime" (Lane 2000:18). The son was at a period in his growth where such issues would have been problematic or at least starting to emerge as a potential hazard. As a matter of both priority and urgency this subject had to feature at this time just like that of the adulteress in 2:16-19 is brought into the light so early in the collection.

By the same token, we have in fact answered the question about the possible age group of this listener. Adolescence is that time when there is an overwhelming quest for identity as Waltke (2004:182) points out. We now turn our attention to the question pertaining to what this encounter reveals about the social status of the concerned family. The reason why this question is significant is that it will assist us in dispelling the idea of a royal setting for this encounter since royal subjects would have been protected from such street exposures by virtue of their social status. What we

⁹⁵ This explains the use of the imperative or command which Estes (1997:127) says that it "comprises a highly directive strategy reflecting the authoritative stance of the teacher".

have is an ordinary parenting challenge true of the average home in ancient Israel. This challenge is not in any way confined to the ancient times as contemporary parents still have to deal with similar tasks. We close this section with Atkinson's (1996:72) sentiments when he writes:

Not only in parenting adolescence, but in all our contexts of human interrelationships, the wisdom of this paragraph helps us place the attractiveness of the moment in the context of the long term picture, and the likely outcomes of particular ways of behaving ... These parental warnings about avoiding the gangs are not only prudent cautions about the present. They are also part of the process by which characters are formed and the stories of our lives are written, which – from the perspective of the future – will be seen to have been life giving rather than the way of death.

The story our future lives will tell is dependent on whose voice we listen to and we discover that the same tension is found in the section that ensues.

4. Passion for God as the quest for wisdom 3:1-12

As most commentators observe, the poem found in 3:1-12 is more religious in content than any other unit in this account (Cox 1982:115; Garrett 1993:79; Goldingay 1994:589; Clifford 1999:49; Koptak 2003:117). That observation should not mislead us in seeing a shift in subject matter from wisdom to piety. Garrett (1993:79) correctly surmises that "devotion to God and devotion to Wisdom are inseparable",⁹⁶ as we will see in our exegetical analysis. This insight into the sages' perspective on wisdom as inseparable from one's relationship with God and others, is of particular interest to us. There is evidence in the Shona culture of a similar approach of avoiding dichotomizing religion from the everyday, or the sacred from the secular. In so doing, there are

96 Similar sentiments are shared by a number of scholars as reflected in the titles prescribed to this section; Delitzsch 1978 "Exhortation to love and faithfulness, and self sacrificing devotion to God, as the true Wisdom", Buzzel 1989 "The blessings of wisdom", Hubbard 1989 "Admonitions to piety and arguments for sagacity"; Ross 1991 "Admonition to follow the way of wisdom in relationships with God and People"; Waltke 2004 "The Lord's promises and the son's obligations".

concepts that are dwelt on in this poem that are equally prescribed to in the Shona traditional practices.

Among other things, the poem refers to values such as a quality life in 3:2, a good name in 3:4, health in 3:8, and first fruits in 3:9⁹⁷ that were equally upheld in the traditional Shona society. In his book *Karanga Mythology*, Herbert Aschwanden (1989:200-258) includes a section on "Mythology of an image of God" which analyses not only the ancient conceptions of the nature of God⁹⁸ but also the appropriated responses to them. As one reads this section it creates the indelible impression that all of life in the Shona conception cannot be pursued outside of an understanding of and a right relationship with God. Even natural phenomena are thus explicated and it, therefore, is reasonable to deduce that these are the ideals that were passed on from one generation to the next. Similar perspectives are reiterated in the work of Bourdillon *The Shona Peoples* (1976) and Gelfand's 1979 publication *Growing up in Shona Society*.

In his conception of the family in ancient Israel, Gerstenberger (2002:88) argues that the relationship to God within the family alliance is marked by its personal character. In this unit, which is highly pietistic, Gerstenberger's observation seems justified as we will see. We now turn our attention to the exegetical analysis.

4.1 Text and exegetical framework

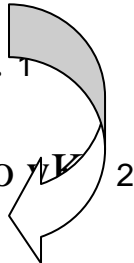
STANZA PATTERN GROUPS

TEXT

97 First fruits celebration known as "*matakopona*" – we are fortunate, is a thanksgiving feast in the traditional culture around February or March when crops start to ripen. Other names are also used for the same feast, "*masutso*" – to ripen or "*mataruma zvitsva*" – we have eaten the new (Aschwanden 1989:226).

98 The Shona names of God give an insight into the ancient perspective. "*Mutangakugara*" means he who came into being or simply the first of all being. "*Musikavanhu*" means creator of mankind, "*Mbedzi*" – giver of all life, "*Mwari*" – connotes God of fertility, "*Samatenga*" – the one who is above.

A Imperative
ytir'AT ynIB. 1
Incentive
~ymiy" %r,ao 2



˘^B,li rCoyI yt;wOc.miW xK'v.Ti-la;

˘%l' WpysiAy ~Alv'w> ~yYIx; tAnv.W

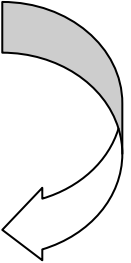
Incentive

^yt,ArG>r>G:-l[; ~rev.q' ^buz>[;y:-la;
tm,a/w< ds,x, 3

˘^B,li x;Wl-l[; ~bet.K'

@ ˘~d'a'w> ~yhil{a/ ynEy[eB. bAj-lk,few>
!xe-ac'm.W 4

C Imperative
Incentive



D Imperative

˘![eV'Ti-la; ^t.n"yBi-la,w> ^B,li-lk'B.

hw"hy>-la, xj;B. 5

Wh[ed' ^yk,r'D>-lk'B. 6

˘^yt,xor>ao rVey:y> aWhw>

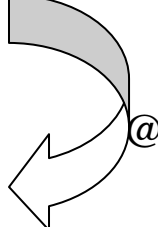
Incentive

˘[r'me rWsw> hw"hy>-ta, ar'y>

^yn<y[eB. ~k'x' yhiT.-la; 7

˘^yt,Amc.[;l. yWQviw> ^R,v'l. yhiT.
tWap.rl 8

E Imperative
Incentive



˘^t,a'WbT.-lK' tyviaremeW ^n<Ahme

hw"hy>-ta, dBeK; 9

@ ˘Wcrop.yI ^yb,q'y> vArytiw> [b'f' ^ym,s'a]

Wal.M'yIw> 10

F Imperative

˘ATx.k;AtB. #qoT'-la;w> sa'm.Ti-la; ynIB.

hw"hy> rs;Wm 11

Incentive

˘hc,r>yI !Be-ta, ba'k.W x;ykiAy hw"hy> bh;a/y<
rv,a] ta, yKi 12

4.1.1 Translation

Proverbs 3:1 My [son], do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments; 2 for length of days and years of life and abundant welfare they will

give you. 3 Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. 4 So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and of people. 5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. 7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. 8 It will be a healing for your flesh and a refreshment for your body. 9 Honor the LORD with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce; 10 then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine. 11 My [son], do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, 12 for the LORD reproves the one he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

4.1.2 Inner Texture in Proverbs 3:1-12

There are general observations among scholars concerning the highly poetical content as well as the pietistic character to this parental instruction. The approach here notably deviates from the protases-apodosis pattern of 2:1-22, and the hymnic approach of 3:13-26 (cf. Overland 2000:424). Potgieter's analysis (2002) represents a comprehensive attempt that takes into serious consideration, the poetic structure of this unit as well as the relevance of such poetic techniques towards interpretation.

Firstly, the structural composition of the poem consists of six stanzas clearly marked by a bi-cola, (except for a tri-colon in 3:3-4), of alternating imperatives and incentives as a pattern sustained throughout the unit. This pattern can be depicted diagrammatically as follows:

STANZA	A 3:1-2	B 3:3-4	C 3:5-6	D 3:7-8	E 3:9-10	F 3:11-12
Imperative	1 My [son], do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments	3 Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.	5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. 6a In all your ways acknowledge him,	7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.	9 Honor the LORD with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce;	11 My [son], do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof,
Incentive	2 for length of days and years of life and abundant welfare they will	4 So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and of	6b and he will make straight your paths.	8 It will be a healing for your flesh and a refreshment	10 then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will	12 for the LORD reproves the one he loves, as a father the son in whom he

	give you.	people.		for your body.	be bursting with wine.	delights.
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Table 11: Imperative/Incentive structure

Secondly, an observable feature in this pattern is that the imperatives take either a positive or negative form. Potgieter (2002:1359) explains that the negative commands in stanzas A and B suggest “distance”, while the positive commands suggest “closeness”. Similarly, Potgieter observes that stanzas C and D oppose self reliance and promote reliance on *hwhy*. In the last two stanzas E and F suggest both actional and attitudinal response to Yahweh to be the focus. That perspective is reflected in the statements “honour the Lord...” and correspondingly in the prohibitive statements “do not despise” or “do not resent” his discipline. This analysis assists us in realising how the stanzas are grouped into three as shown below:

GROUP	Imperatives	Incentives
A	3:1 My [son], <u>do not forget</u> my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments	3:2 for length of days and years of life and abundant welfare they will give you.
	3:3 <u>Do not</u> let loyalty and faithfulness <u>forsake</u> you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.	3:4 So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and of people
B	3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely <u>on your own insight</u> . 6a In all your ways acknowledge him,	3:6b and he will make straight your paths.
	3:7 Do not <u>be wise in your own eyes</u> ; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.	3:8 It will be a healing for your flesh and a refreshment for your body.
C	3:9 <u>Honor the LORD</u> with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce;	3:10 then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.
	3:11 My [son], <u>do not despise the LORD's</u> discipline or be <u>weary of his reproof</u> .	3:12 for the LORD reproves the one he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

Table 12: Stanza groupings

Thirdly, the occurrence of the vocative *ynb* "my son" in 3:1 and *repeated* in 3:11 is a possible *chiastic* relationship. That correspondence is underscored by the *repetition* of the preposition *y^lk* in the opening and closing stanzas as a framing device or *inclusio*. This address "my son", however, is consistent with the previous and succeeding encounters in Proverbs 1-9 in its distinctive literary function to both draw to attention and generally mark the beginning of a new section. All this serves to affirm that we are still dealing with parental instruction.

Fourthly, we notice the use of *parallelism* purposefully designed, as Potgieter (2002:1364) says, "to bind the cola together and enhance the theme of the relevant strophes. In 3:1a the synonymous parallel between *ytrwt* "my teaching" and *ytwcm* "my commands" is not simply a stylistic device but serves a greater purpose. Hubbard (1989:70) views this strategy as a reminder that "the words of the wise were more than mere opinion or suggestions. As such they had a binding quality to them because they were based on the teacher's God-fearing observations of how life under divine control really worked". Fox (2000:143) agrees with Hubbard when he describes *ytrwt* "my teaching" as referring to authoritative injunctions, and never to suggestions or recommendations that one is morally free to weigh and dismiss. By the same token, the parallel concept *ytwcm* "my commands" underscores binding requirements that needed no justification (Perdue 2000:96). These sentiments are reinforced by the prohibitive verb *xkvt-la* "do not forget" and the instruction *rcy*

“keep”. The verb **ICY** is antonymic to deliberate negligence of admonitions here. A similar pattern of the use of the verb occurs in 3:5 with **xjb** “trust” is contrasted with **!vt-la** “do not lean”. The *repetition* of the prohibitive adverb **la** “not” in 3:7 (a total of seven times in this unit) serves to reiterate the consistent pattern in this poem, which is common to these encounters (cf. 3:27-31).

The obligation to retain or guard these admonitions is reiterated in 3:3 through the parallel placement of the verbs **~rvq** “bind” and **~btk** “write”. In both cases of the metaphoric use of these expressions, the idea is that of permanent retention of **tmaw dsx**,⁹⁹ “love and faithfulness” or, as Koptak (2003:119) correctly points out, as a work of memory. We need to note that binding around the neck is emblematic of external realization, while writing upon the heart is internal (cf. Potgieter 2002:1366). These sentiments effectively enhance the message of the first two stanzas thus serving the rhetorical purpose of these carefully placed devices.

Fifthly, the direct reference to **~yhla** “God” 3:4 or related pronouns (**awh** 3:6), but more specifically **hwhy** (3:5, 7, 9, 11 and 12), in a *repetitive* pattern that dominates the rest of the poem, as we highlight diagrammatically as follows:

IMPERATIVES	INCENTIVES
	3:4 So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of GOD and of people
3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. 6a In all your ways acknowledge HIM ,	3:6b and HE will make straight your paths

⁹⁹ This phrase could be a typical case of hendiadys which Watson (1995:155) describes as the expression of one single but complex concept using two separate words, usually nouns.

3:7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.	.
3:9 Honor the LORD with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce;	
3:11 My [son], do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof,	3:12 for the LORD reproves the one he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

Table 13: Repetitive pattern of "Lord"

Without jumping into the sacred texture, the purpose of the frequent reference of the name of the Lord at this stage is used on the one hand to show the central focus of the poem, and on the other to show how it functions as a link for rest of the stanzas.

Lastly, there is the *sensory-aesthetic* texture through the reference to the various body parts and the senses they evoke. On the onset the **hbl** "heart" mentioned in 3:1 and *repeated* in 3:3 and 5 in all cases refers to the inner life. Hubbard (1989:68) explains that the reason for the focus on the heart initially as the place to retain the father's teaching is that "temptations that are exposed lie within the heart of the student [thus] inner life more than the outer is the focus". Again, the heart as the place for the retention of the most valuable is reiterated in 3:3 with figurative writing on the tablet of one's heart. Not only does this indicate permanence of the record, but also perennial access. For that reason, the call to trust in the Lord with all of your heart in 3:5 is then a rational invitation, since within one's heart lies all that is truly representative of one's makeup.

Of interest, the heart in 3:3 is *synonymously paralleled* to the neck, yet another body part of significance. According to Prinsloo (2002:1387), the neck is where breath and words originate. In this context it is used with specific reference to being decorated, a place reserved for jewelry or necklaces or highly prized ornaments that signify great authority or a high position. In our context, this place is suggested as the reserve of

valued virtues. The parallel of the heart to the neck then caters for both internal and external aspects as mentioned earlier on.

The reference to the eye/sight in 3:4 and 7 is also of interest as Prinsloo (2002:1387) suggests a perceived direct link between the heart and the eye. This is possible in view of the fact that the **!y[** eye is mentioned in 3:7 in the context of the advice given to guard against being wise in one's own eyes, a situation that Murphy 1998:21 aptly describes as "utterly hopeless". The sight here is that of the heart's perception to "bet your life on God", to use Hubbard's words (1989:70). To be in that position, according to Ross (1991:917) requires total commitment, and that is a matter of the heart, since it "carries the force of relying on someone for security".

The benefit of such a wholehearted trust brings into the picture the reference of the **\$rvl**¹⁰⁰ "to your flesh" synonymously paralleled to **\$ytwmc[1** "to your bones" in 3:7 as depicting health. Again we have here outward and inward dimensions of one's physiological state being highlighted (Prinsloo 2002:1387). Ross (1991:917) espouses that "compliance with this is therapeutic; it will be health to the body and nourishment for the frame". Waltke (2004:238) suggests healing and refreshment as part of the blessing here. What we appreciate from this perspective is, as Cox (1982:111) correctly points out, the "new dimension" where both moral and physical benefits are placed side by side. The idea of wholeness is surely emerging in this unit. To this dynamic will be added material benefits as well (3:10).

100 The term **rv** refers to the umbilical cord which suggests navel as some translators say. By the same token **ryrv** speaks of sinew or muscle. The idea of an outward and inward dimension here is appealing and for that reason we go along with the NRS translation.

4.1.3 Intertexture in Proverbs 3:1-12

The relationship of Proverbs 3:1-12 to the Shema is what dominates the **intertextual** issues among other things. A close comparison to Deuteronomy 6:4-9 reveals some correlation between the two accounts and raises the question of dependence of Proverbs 3:1-12 on the Shema (Overland 2000:430; Habtu 2006:752). That correlation is of particular interest to our study since the Shema, like Proverbs 3:1-12 as we see below, is presented as an instructional responsibility of the parents.

For our purposes, the first area of correlation is the whole idea of a long life and material benefits as a direct result of obedience of the teachings or commands that we see in Proverbs 3:2, 9 and 10, and is also spoken of in Deuteronomy 6:2-3, 10-12. Our attention is drawn to the all embracing concept ~w1v "peace" which, on its own, captures the essence of the intended blessings. Alden (1995:206) says that "peace" is only one dimension of Shalom since it "includes harmonious relationships with the family, payment of all debts, and the collection of all loans. It means rewards or wages, ultimately even a right relationship with God". In a similar vein, Murphy (1998:20) ascribes "the promises of a long life and prosperity [as] characteristics of the benefits of following wise teaching. Life is to be taken in a qualitative sense, as good life, indicated by 'peace' or 'shalom'. Isaiah 26:3 and 12¹⁰¹ conditionally promises "peace" to those who follow the requirements of the Lord. Van Leeuwen (1997:48) comments on the abundant welfare promised here as follows:

101 See also the priestly blessing in Numbers 6:22-25 for the use of shalom. In 1 Samuel 25:6 where shalom occurs three times and the NIV translates each occurrence differently as follows, "Say to him: 'Long life to you! Good health to you and your household! And good health to all that is yours!'" Also other interesting perspectives from 1 Chronicles 2:18; Psalm 37:11, 37; 72:7; 122:6-8; and Proverbs 3:17.

This extravagant promise of life assumes that the parental teaching faithfully mediates the teaching of Lady Wisdom and thus rewards (3:16-18; 8:35; 9:10-11 cf. 10:27). The authority of the parental speech defers Lady Wisdom and is accountable to her cosmic standards. This is not spelled out, but simply assumed in the logic of a promise that only God and Wisdom can fulfill. Behind the parents stands Wisdom, not as authoritarian cudgel, but as reality and reason (see 2:1-4).

In contrast to that a reversal of tranquility awaits those who disobey (Isaiah 48:22).

Prinsloo (2002:1387) depicts this as the development of a dyadic personality in which “the son exists, receives honour and enjoys blessing only in relation to figures of authority (his father and Yahweh). Therefore, great emphasis is placed upon the son’s obedience to his father and to Yahweh”. This is the message of the Shema and also of Proverbs 3:1-12, that peace and prosperity are ascribed not as “ends in themselves but as the result of effort in learning wisdom and living wisely. Therefore, each admonition charges the son to give up a self-centred fantasy and replace it with a God-centred reality [which effectively verbalizes that] you cannot be masters of your own destiny, you cannot be your own gods” Koptak (2003:118).

The second area of correlation is that of the rare pairing of the figurative “bind” in conjunction with “write”. These are connected to the virtues or teaching in 3:3 and Deuteronomy 6:8-9. Overland (2000:427) says that this ought to be understood as a mental or volitional process because of the sage’s concern with activities of the mind (see 3:3; 6:21; 7:3). This perspective has to be presented against the backdrop of an actual discovery of a pierced schoolboy tablet found in Egypt that the pupil literally tied around his neck on a string (Overland 2000:427). The matter seems resolute when we bring to attention Gerstenberger’s (2002:31) comment:

It seems to me that everything that we learn in Old Testament about interpersonal ‘loyalty’ to the community (*hesed*) and ‘trustworthiness’

(^e*mūnāh*) has its original setting in the family existence, oriented on mutuality. It is the sacred duty of the children, born out of the need to ensure common survival, to fit into the family and from early youth onwards to make the best possible contribution to the prosperity of the group. The adults for their part must fulfill the duty to care.

The roles that Gerstenberger highlights here are significant particularly from the point of view of locating these obligations within the family setting. In so doing, we can deduce a parenting perspective that carried many more responsibilities than perhaps are evident in our own situation. Once again in 3:22 and 4:9 we are reminded about the intellectual process implied in this appellation.

Fox (2000:144) agrees with this notion although he relates the volitional element often used to express consequence and promise and, thus love and faithfulness can only be of God toward the pupil not the pupil's toward others. He comments:

As a person's own virtues *hesed* and *'ēmet* would not be said to "abandon" him ... However, divine kindness might "abandon" a person, if he deserved it. More fundamentally, if *hesed* were a virtue of the listener, it could only be directed as fellow humans ... for *hesed* is always conferred by a superior upon an inferior (in status or power).

The question, then, that Fox's sentiments do not answer satisfactorily is that what precisely does it take on the part of the son not to "abandon" these virtues? It seems that while his perspective is worth considering, it does not issue precise action to ensure the necessary requirement. Cox (1982:115) argues that the terminology is that of a covenant context and as such depicts individual responsibility as he explains:

The terms "loyalty" and "faithfulness" designate the distinctive quality of the religious man in his relationship to God, and is central to the theology of Proverbs ... What is in question is an interior quality to society and the world. They therefore prepare the pupil for encounter with the divine (1982:116).

The result of this mental relational engagement between the pupil and God is captured by the reference to “your heart” in the same verse (3:3). Murphy (1998:20) affirms this perspective by endorsing that *tmaw dsx* “fidelity and kindness” are to be written on the tablet of the youth’s heart, thereby suggesting that he carries out the requirement. A similar figurative portraiture is espoused in Deuteronomy 6:8; 30:14; Jeremiah 17:1 and 31:33).

The third area of correlation is that of the significance given to the phrase *\$bl-lkb* “all your heart” in Proverbs 3:5 and Deuteronomy 6:5. In both cases *lk* “all” modifies the sentiments. The focal point, however, remains the “heart”. That primacy is impressively reiterated in Proverbs 4:23.¹⁰² The heart, as representative of one’s entire being, therefore corresponds with the various faculties mentioned in the Shema, “heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:5). Interestingly, Overland (2000:428) shows that in Psalm 119 where the centrality of the scriptures are the only subject of this acrostic composition, the phrase “all your heart” occurs five times.¹⁰³ In parallel passages where the phrase occurs, in a majority of the cases, a relationship with God or regard for His word is what is significantly at stake. This is clearly what is espoused in both Proverbs 3:5 and Deuteronomy 6:5.

The possible correlation between the Proverbs 3:1-12 and the Shema creates the impression of a *cultural intertexture* particularly when we also bring to attention the parallel perspectives from the Ancient Mediterranean world. Firstly, we know that in

102 “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life” (NIV).

103 The other passages of similar sentiments are Deut. 4:29; 10:12; 13:3; 26:16; 30:2, 6 and 10; Joshua 22:5; 23:14; I Samuel 12:20, 24; Proverbs 4:4; Jeremiah 29:13; Joel 2:12.

terms of orientation that this society was by and large authoritarian (Prinsloo 2002:1388).¹⁰⁴ This suggests that the concept “my son”, as much as in “your father”, could infer to that structure and particularly as a home based reality. Prinsloo (2002:1388) reveals that “parallels from Egypt from the New kingdom onwards sometimes name a specific father and a specific son by name. Proverbs 1-9 seem to have originated as private communication and reflect instruction actually carried on within the family”. In so doing then, we have as Robbins (1996:115) writes, “symbolic worlds that particular communities of discourse nurture with special nuances and emphases”. In this line of thinking, we can argue that the purpose of Proverbs 3:1-12, as much as the chapters 1-9, is written to prepare the young for life. Life in this conception is the pursuit of wisdom, and the pursuit of wisdom cannot be attained outside of a relationship with God.

Secondly, the aforementioned relationship with God evokes the whole concern about the blatantly religious bias of this unit again in relation to the Shema and other bodies of scripture. In the *oral-scribal intertexture*, there is a hint of *recontextualisation* where the words of the Shema, that the sage seems to be aware of although not acknowledged, are recounted (Robbins 1996:107). This standpoint therefore accounts for the piety or religious content that we find in this unit more than in any other. Nevertheless, Prinsloo (2002:1376) reveals that “Egyptologists have proven beyond doubt that the Egyptian instructions are built upon the concept of *ma’at*, and it is a thoroughly religious concept, *ma’at* being a goddess herself, the daughter of Ra, the

104 Gerstenberger (2002:20) contends that it is unclear as to how much authority the family head actually possessed in view of contrasting portraiture. On the one hand he seems to have the final say as far as the children are concerned where he could beat a disobedient child to death and yet on the other hand, he seems irresolute about a quarrelsome wife (Pr. 21:9) or the fact that she seemed more in control of household business and property (Pr. 31:16). In light of these revelations, we should therefore say that the family head did not exercise an absolutist rule in all matters, but in asserting his fatherly role he had some authority over his children.

principle of 'order', 'truth' and 'judgment'". Our understanding from this comparison is that wisdom is inextricably linked to religion. In our conception of this, the Proverbs 1:7 principle is thus upheld.

Outside of the Shema, the concept of being wise in your own eyes in 3:7 is closely associated with leaning on one's own understanding in 3:5. This *evokes* the thought of doing what is right in one's own eyes. Van Leeuwen (1997:48) reminds us that when people did what was right in their own eyes in the Israelite era it was in the absence of a king who understandably played more than a political role, but influenced people toward faithfulness to Yahweh (Judges 17:6; 21:25). What is of interest here is the alternative to being wise in one's own eyes which is to *hwhy-ta ary* "fear the Lord" and to *[rm rwsW* "and shun evil". These statements are indicative of the seriousness of self made wisdom. Here in 3:1-12 they reiterate what has been said in the preceding unit, as Waltke (2004:239) represents in the table below:

Spiritual Consequences Proverbs 2:1-11	Conditions of 3:1-12	Temporary Consequences
Understand what is right 2:9	Let love and faithfulness never leave you 3:2	Social favour
Know God 2:5b	Know the Lord 3:6a	Straight paths ¹⁰⁵
Fear the Lord 2:5a	Fear the Lord	Health

Table 14: Comparison of 2:1-11 to 3:1-12

In addition, the idea of offering first fruits to the Lord in 3:9 is a practice required in the OT. In the original conception of the practice, as recorded in Exodus 13:1-2, 11-13, the custom was instituted in honour of the Lord's delivering his people from Egypt, with firstfruits referring to every first born of man and animal. The significant aspect in

¹⁰⁵ Once again we have the ever popular metaphor of the path which represents all of life in this account (cf. 3:17, 23; 4:11-12, 14-15; 5:8).

this passage is that twice in Exodus 13:8 and 14 it refers to the whole practice being instituted also as an instructional opportunity and to *mnemonic* effect:

EX 13:14 "In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.'¹⁵ When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed every firstborn in Egypt, both man and animal. This is why I sacrifice to the LORD the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.'¹⁶ And it will be like a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that the LORD brought us out of Egypt with his mighty hand."(NIV)

Later on, the practice was instituted as a mandatory religious festival with particular reference to crops in Exodus 23:16 and 19; Leviticus 2:12; Numbers 18:12-13; Deuteronomy 18:4. At this stage in the further development of Israel's cultic practices, offering firstfruits was bringing to the Lord the first and the best, as a symbolic gesture of acknowledging his providence. This naturally followed the harvesting seasons which started with barley in early April into late May, then grapes around the end of September. Produce was stored variously in storehouses, or underground pits, silos and small rooms all especially constructed for this purpose (Waltke 2004:248). Van Leeuwen (1997:49) correctly surmises that "world and wealth reveals our true commitments", and that in principle is behind the institution of this act of worship. In a line, this offering of firstfruits was used to honour the Lord with one's wealth.

Hubbard (1989:72) describes the practice as a reminder that the practitioners of wisdom were also children of the covenant and at times took covenant stipulations and restated them in wisdom's parlance". This is an important observation that we ought to bear in mind as we think about the world of the sages. It is equally important to bring into perspective Cox's (1982:111) comment:

This morality is manifestly influenced by the cultic requirements of the covenant. It is clearly this interleaving of 'secular' and 'religious' in the makeup of a 'wise' person that marks the theology of the book bring a sense of human totality and wholeness. Moral good is fleshed out with material sufficiency.

To crown it all is the reference to the Lord's discipline in 3:11-12 which is compared to fatherly discipline. The subject of discipline features throughout the OT as a divine prerogative (Deut. 4:36; 11:2; Ps. 6:1; 38:1; 39:11; 94:12; Jer. 17:23; 30:11; 32:33; 46:26; Hos. 5:2), and in the book of Proverbs, as one of the pillars of parenting (Pr. 5:12, 23; 6:23; 10:17; 12:1; 13:18, 24; 15:5, 10, 32; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13,23; 29:17).

The serious nature of the subject is perhaps depicted in Deuteronomy 21:18-21:

DT 21:18 If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, ¹⁹ his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. ²⁰ They shall say to the elders, "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a profligate and a drunkard." ²¹ Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid.

The presentation of discipline in Proverbs 3:11 and 12 is such that it should not be regarded negatively. Particularly in view of the previous stanzas and their weighty promises we should be even more considerate of the intention of discipline as van Leeuwen (1997:49) writes:

Sometimes those who honour the Lord find their barns empty and their vats dry, so that joy and gladness flee away ... this alternative, godly, Job-like experience of life sometimes finds an explanation in the loving discipline and reproof of God/parent.

The blessing of accepting godly discipline is a wise move. In so doing one is blessed with even greater loving rewards from above.

4.1.4 Social and Cultural Texture in Proverbs 3:1-12

Proverbs 3:1-12 leans towards a *Gnostic manipulationist argumentation* by opening with the insistence on the compulsive nature of the father's instructions in 3:1-2 and reiterating similar sentiments in the stanza that ensues. Fox (2000:142) regards the father's demands for continued attention to the teachings, not as passive or rote memory, but deliberate retention of the instructions. Habtu (2006:752) says that the "terms used here remind us of the covenant loyalty that exists between the Lord and His people", and as such, reinforce their obligatory outlook. These requirements are further validated by the special favour they bestow spelt out in 3:4 "a good name in the sight of God and man". Since this stanza falls in the same group as the first, there is a sense in which the benefit here is linked to long life and "shalom" in 3:2 to form what Koptak (2003:119) regards as a trio of benefits.

The observations lead us to the *common social and cultural topics* (Robbins 1996:159) specifically honour and shame. Van Leeuwen (1997:48) writes that "Ancient Israel was a shame-and-honour culture in contrast to modern Western societies which often exercise social control through blame and guilt". In the ancient setting, one's status was communally determined hence the call for the son not to be self reliant. The son is here discouraged from self reliance in 3:5 and 7 for in so doing "shame" is attained. On the contrary, to be dedicated to Yahweh in 3:5, 6, 7, 9 and 11, invites various benefits and that is "honour" realized. In 3:6 is the making of his paths straight, a metaphor that, according to Koptak (2003:120), denotes travel made safe by clearing and leveling the road. Waltke (2004:244) suggests the idea of the path being "smooth". Prinsloo (2002:1388) describes "honour" as being attained by seeking Yahweh while shame is attained by rejecting him. Citing Malinda's perspective Prinsloo

presents the perspective in the table below that we supplement with a Shona traditional perspective:

ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN SOCIETY	(POST) MODERN WESTERN SOCIETY	SHONA TRADITIONAL SOCIETY
Being and/or becoming are important	Doing (activity) is important	Being (<i>unhu</i>) ¹⁰⁶ is important
Collateral (groups) and lineal (hierarchical) relationships	Individualism	Communal
Present and past time orientation	Future time orientation	Past and present orientation
Uncontrollable factor of nature (subordination)	Manipulation or mastery of nature	Respect and 'fear' of nature
Human nature is a mixture of good and bad	Human nature is neutral and correctable	Human nature can be shaped into good

Table 15: Ancient traditional values

4.1.5 Sacred Texture in Proverbs 3:1-12

This composition seems to be a lesson in piety because of the honorifics “trust”, “fear” “acknowledge”, “honour” and “do not despise/resent”. In reading these requirements together we are, in the first place, impressed with the notion that, “devotion to God and devotion to wisdom are inseparable” (Garrett 1993:79). Fox (2000:254) alleges that “if we were to encounter [this unit] in isolation, we could classify it as pietistic

¹⁰⁶ The concept “*unhu*” is a much celebrated ideal in the Shona traditional practice which has retained considerable support and admiration in the contemporary setting.

homily rather than a Wisdom instruction". It only serves then to underscore the importance of piety in the pursuit of wisdom. With this in mind, we can appreciate the seven times or more where direct references to God in this exchange depict His centrality in wisdom and all of life. Davis (2000:40) offers an insightful comment into the perceived outworking to wisdom when he writes:

Wisdom does not come simply from study (although this is valued) nor from even the keenest nature of intelligence. Its foundation is not finally within ourselves at all but rather in the relationship we have with God. That relationship is one of practical trust - that is, trust so complete that it is evidenced in all we do.

Delitzsch (1978:85) restates Davis' perspective by treating the entire poem as pointing out the relationship between God and man as the sole source of true happiness.

In the second place, we are struck by the perspective that in order to realize the inseparable notions of wisdom and piety that are so fused together in this unit, one has to accept one's limitations. Fox (2000:254) points out that "personal piety grew out of and expressed a sense of individual frailty, isolation, and sometimes even angst. Its characteristics were a conviction of complete dependence in God and a surrender to his will". At the core of this parental instruction is the concern to shape the right attitude hence the exposition of self made attempts to live a life which only leads to regret. This effectively endorses Overland's (2000:440) finding that Proverbs 3:1-12 is not a random collection of instructions, but an echo of the Shema and a reflection of its own arrangement. Central to the Shema is the obligation to love the Lord with one's entire being, a message that parents were obligated to instruct their children.

4.1.6 Reflecting on Proverbs 3:1-12

To the question, "What is life?" Proverbs 3:1-12 responds in a remarkable way by insisting that this is not a self-made discovery. The poem projects the chief role of parental instruction as the platform for gaining such insights. We have two thoughts that we would like to highlight from this exchange.

Firstly, we are captivated by the fact that "long life", as in quality and quantity, elsewhere in the OT and NT passages is similarly associated with obedience to one's parents (3:2). In Exodus 20:12 (cf. Deut. 5:16) we read these remarkable words, "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you". Likewise, in Ephesians 6:1-3 that sentiment is given a slight emendation as we read, ¹ "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² "Honor your father and mother" which is the first commandment with a promise ³ "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth". To speak of family life, in the biblical conception of it, to speak was about life itself. Gerstenberger (2002:25) is correct when he says that the "Israelite family was a community which shared life, dwelling place and belief to an extent and with an intensity that we in our atomized little remnant can no longer imagine". We can, therefore, say that obedience to parents was not just a casual or convenient part of life but obligatory, for in so doing was to gain insight on life itself (Deut. 27:16).

Secondly and similarly, is our attraction to the reference to divine discipline in the same breath as that of the father (3:11-12). The passage indicates that discipline is an act motivated by divine love as much as in fatherly delight. The true motive of parenting then should remain love. In saying this, we realize the magnitude given to parenting and/or family life in ancient Israelite society. In this case, God's disciplinary acts of

love model that of the father in the son in whom he delights. That thought deserves much attention particularly in view of the presentations of God in that paternal role in scripture. Our attention is drawn to passages like Deuteronomy 1:30-31; 32:6-7; Psalm 103:13; Matthew 7:11; 12:50; 18:14; where anthropomorphic portraitures appear for our reflection and emulation.

5. Instructions on being neighbourly 3:27-35

Interpersonal relationships form another avenue through which the practical nature of wisdom is traceable. This is the subject matter of Proverbs 3:27-35 set in the same chapter as 3:1-12 which, as we saw, had the relationship to Yahweh at heart. Koptak (2003:125) sees a connection between the two units in that the list of five prohibitions against the poor treatment of neighbours stands in structural symmetry with five admonitions to honour Yahweh in 3:1-12. The structure seems to suggest that right relationship with God should effectively lead one to right dealings with one's neighbour. The emphasis here is that "the behaviour and discourse of the individual affects either positively or negatively the well-being of a community" (Perdue 2000:111). Waltke (2004:266) affirms this by saying that "the logical connection between the commands on being a good neighbour and the argument shows that social behaviour and theology are intertwined with each other".

A similar relational emphasis is true of the Shona traditional setting where even individual wellbeing is communally determined. The standard Shona greeting goes "*Ndiripo kana muripowo*" – "I am well if you are well", to underscore orientation towards the other. That orientation is projected in most matters of life so that it is inconceivable to be egocentric because of the relational dynamism found in

communities. The proverb which captures the importance of these relationships within the Shona society goes, "*Ukama urimbo, kudambura hahubvi*" – "Relationship is like bird lime, even after breaking it does not vanish". Hamutyinei and Plangger (1974:219) explain that irrespective of how many times relatives may fall out with one another, they do not cease to be relatives. This proverb inculcates a spirit of togetherness of kith and kin. That is a much celebrated ideal even among "unrelated" people. With that in mind let us consider this unit.

5.1 Text and exegetical framework

	<p> $\`tAf[[]l; \hat{I}^d > y" \text{D} \zeta^{\wedge} yd, y" \hat{A} lael. tAyh. Bi wyl' ['B. mi bAj-$ $[n:m. Ti-la; :27$ </p>
Prohibitions	<p> $\`%T'ai vyEw > !Tea, rx'm'W bWvw" \%le \hat{I}^{\wedge} [rel. \text{D} \zeta^{\wedge} y [, rel. \hat{A}$ $rm;aTo-la; 28$ </p>
	<p> $\`%T'ai xj;b,l' bveAy-aWhw > h[r' ^{\wedge} [re-l[;$ $vrox]T;-la; 29$ </p>
	<p> $\`h[r' ^{\wedge} l.m'g > al\{-\sim ai \sim N" xi \sim d'a' -\sim [i \hat{I} byrIT' \text{D} \zeta bArT' \hat{A}-la; 30$ </p>
	<p> $\`wyk'r'D > -lk'B. rx;b. Ti-la; w > sm'x' vyaiB. aNEq; T.-la; 31$ </p>
Rationale	<p> $\`AdAs \sim yrIv'y > -ta, w > zAln" hw"hy > tb; [At yKi 32$ $\`%reb'y > \sim yqiyDlc; hwEn > W [v'r' tybeB.$ $hw"hy > tr;aem. 33$ </p>
	<p> $\`!xe-!T, yI \hat{I} \sim ywIn" [l; w > \text{D} \zeta \sim yYInI [l; w > \hat{A} \#yliy" -aWh$ $\sim yciLel; -\sim ai 34$ </p>
	<p> $\`!Alq' \sim yrIme \sim yliysik. W Wlx'n > yI \sim ymik'x] dAbK' 35$ </p>

5.1.1 Translation

Proverbs 3:27 Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. 28 Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it" when you have it with you. 29 Do not plan harm against your neighbor who lives

trustingly beside you. 30 Do not quarrel with anyone without cause, when no harm has been done to you. 31 Do not envy the violent and do not choose any of their ways; 32 for the perverse are an abomination to the LORD, but the upright are in his confidence. 33 The LORD's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the abode of the righteous. 34 Toward the scorers he is scornful, but to the humble he shows favor. 35 The wise will inherit honor, but stubborn fools, disgrace.

5.1.2 Inner Texture of Proverbs 3:27-35

The **inner texture** is marked by the five prohibitions against unjust treatment of others in 3:27-31 followed by the rationale specified by *y^k* in 3:32-35. The prohibitions are indicated by a *repetitive pattern* of the adverb of negation *la* "not" which effectively elects what a person cannot do to others. By virtue of the placement of the adverb at the beginning of each of these lines it effects a repetition by *anaphora* which functions also as a structural indicator. The statements take a formulaic fashion *do not do X* (3:27-31) followed by an issuance of the reasons in 3:32-35 (Waltke 2004:265).

Some commentators (Koptak 2003:125; Waltke 2004:265) envisage a pairing of these prohibitions to form groups of three that are determined by the subject matter:

3:27-28	27 Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. 28 Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it" when you have it with you	Action
3:29-30	29 Do not plan harm against your neighbor who lives trustingly beside you. 30 Do not quarrel with anyone without cause, when no harm has been done to you.	Speaking
3:31-32	31 Do not envy the violent and do not choose any of their ways; 32 for the perverse are an abomination to the LORD, but the upright are in his confidence.	Attitude

Table 16: Groupings of prohibitions

Our reservation rests with the coupling of 3:31 as a prohibition with 3:32 a rationale unlike the first two which are both comprised of prohibitions.

The focus on the $\$y[r$ "neighbour" (3:28 and 29) is not only established by the *repetitive* pattern here, but also the occurrence of an *ephiphora* in 3:28 and 29 of $\$ta$ "with them". We agree, then, with Perdue (2000:110) that "the conservative nature of Proverbs 1-9 is obvious for maintaining the well-being of the community in a stable and continuing fashion was uppermost in the mind of the teacher who composed these poems". The making of the "neighbour" is key to this unit together with five maxims that offer specific guidance to that relationship. The rationale behind such maxims serves to establish, in our minds, the significance given to this ideal. The antithetical pattern adopted for the rationale serves to make the immediate impression of what is wrong as opposed to what is right.

5.1.3 Intertexture in Proverbs 3:27-35

The **intertexture** should firstly consider who then qualifies to be a "neighbour". Waltke (2004:267) ranges the concept from a friend (Pr. 17:17; 22:11; 27:9-10) to company that one retains (6:1,3,29; 11:9, 12; 14:20-21; 16:29; 17:18) then also just about anyone (19:4, 6; 21:10; 25:8-10; 26:18-19; 27:17; 29:5). This question was also raised in the time of Christ. Interestingly, in that context, the person who raised the question was able to qualify the importance of loving the Lord with one's being together with loving one's neighbour as one's self as the correct reading of the Law (Lk. 10:27 cf. Mt. 22:37-40). To the question "who is my neighbour", Jesus responded

with what is commonly known as the parable of the "Good Samaritan" when perhaps it should be about the man who was robbed who is central to the account and also because he is the neighbour in need (Lk. 10:29-37). In that context the teaching ends with the injunction to go and do as the Samaritan did in meeting the needs of those we come across. In so doing, we truly become neighbourly. Fox (2000:165) cites the rather extreme example in Exodus 23:5 of assisting your enemy with their donkey that has collapsed under a burden. In this case the owner of that donkey, irrespective of the strained relationship, has a claim upon that much needed assistance.

In yet another attempt to define one's neighbour, Perdue (2000:108) assists us with painting the *historical intertexture* when he describes the scenario as follows:

In the social context of villages and clans, as well as that of larger cities, neighbours consisted of those who resided within this defined and narrow social setting. Indeed a neighbour may have been a relative or a marginal member (e.g. Slave, debt servant, or concubine) of a clan or tribal household. Village households often consisted of people related by blood who lived in dwelling that were in close proximity to each other ... Eventually the term 'neighbour' was extended to include even the larger context of citizens of Israel and Judah even resident alien or foreigners who were noncitizens, residing usually within native households.

Perdue's comprehensive description gives us the idea that on the one hand, a neighbour could have been a blood relative in the ancient setting where settlements were by clan (Jos. 14:1-19:51). The close relationship made the neighbourly obligations even more compelling. On the other hand, the concept is described with specific reference to town and cities as equally binding. Irrespective of where one found him/herself, this was a standing order. Hence the prohibitions of Proverbs 3:27-31 are equally compelling.

5.1.4 The social and cultural texture in Proverbs 3:27-35

The *Reformist argumentation* in this unit is unmistakable in that there is a call for change in the social institution to function toward good ends set by the prohibitions and the rationale thereafter. As far as the prohibitions are concerned, we have, firstly, the exhortation not to withhold good from those who need it when one is in a position to be benevolent (3:27). The phrase [nmt-la "do not withhold" seems to suggest that assisting a neighbour in need was the norm. According to Waltke (2004:267) the phrase implies that the neighbours are in need of reliable kindness. These acts of kindness are encapsulated through the concept bwj "good". In fact the idea behind wyl[bm in Habtu's (2006:753 cf. Hubbard 1989:77) conception literally imputes the idea of being owners of the good on the part of those deserving the assistance.¹⁰⁷ The obligatory nature of this call is made more courteous by the sentiment of being in a position to do something about it because this is precisely all that it takes – having the ability to assist.

Secondly, is the exhortation against delaying assistance when one is in a position to do so right away (3:28). Hubbard (1989:77) calls it "the ploy of infinite postponement" when a person asks his/her neighbour to come back ṚXṢ "tomorrow". Murphy (1998:23) alleges that "delaying tactics are equivalent to a refusal". Koptak (2003:126) uses a stronger word by calling it the "sin" of withholding good as he writes:

¹⁰⁷ See Fox's example cited above for the compulsory nature of the idea being advocated here. It is more than what the average experience would consider as the norm.

Saying 'tomorrow' is a way of putting off both neighbours and the opportunity to do a good deed. Employers in Israel were warned against taking advantage of the poor by withholding daily wages ... Timely follow-through of one's promises and commitments is also a good principle.

Thirdly, the admonition decries evil intent against a trusting neighbour (3:29). The concept **h[r** "plot" contains the idea of plowing which Buzzel (1988:913) says comes from the scenario of plans being thought through or devised as furrows in a field. In one word, this sounds like treachery (Lane 2000:33) which McKane (1970:300) expands as the spiteful and malicious intrigue which takes advantage of a relationship of trust in order to destroy a neighbour. Hubbard (1989:77) reveals that "trust is a central ingredient of community. Where it is betrayed by devising (or plotting) evil (harm) against a neighbour, no community is possible". The idea of peace in the neighbourhood is what is behind this concern. Fox (2000:166) correctly surmises that "It is especially nefarious and underhanded to scheme to injure someone who trusts you". The word **xjb** "trust" encapsulates the ideas of safety, security and confidence.

Fourthly, is the prohibition against groundless accusation of a neighbour (3:30). The verb **byr** "accuse" has the idea of strife, contention or quarrelling which Hubbard (1989:77) says is as upsetting as plotting because of its pettiness. That attitude resembles selfishness at its peak. In the book of Proverbs, a number of sayings speak against this behaviour in no uncertain terms.¹⁰⁸ Hubbard (1989:78) aptly describes the situation in view here when he writes:

¹⁰⁸ See Pr. 15:8; 17:14; 20:3; 26:17, 21; 30:33 just to highlight a few examples of this concern.

The picky, petulant person knows no compromise and refuses to grant the neighbour the benefit of the doubt. Every misgiving or misunderstanding becomes a reason for criticism or conflict. Part of being neighbourly is the willingness to be wrong and the ability to bite one's tongue when we think we are right. Few issues in life are worth breaking relationships to prove our correctness.

Lastly, is the prohibition against the temptation to envy a violent man (3:31). The envy resonates from the fact that this character seems to enjoy easy money gained unjustly. The concept S^MX "violent" suggests the use of force towards self gain which includes oppressing others and corrupt activities among many possibilities. McKane (1970:300) describes the problem as that of a person who will use violence to gain his selfish ends, reckless of the consequences to others, and the temptation to be envious of the one who can do such things with apparent impunity. In dealing with this problem, the statement is immediately followed by a description of their destiny in 3:32 as Garrett (1993:184) describes:

The violent man is one of the two archetypal tempters (see 2:12-19). He represents the allure of early prosperity by violence and crime. His destruction is assured, however, because God himself opposes him (vv.32-34).

As far as the rationale is concerned we have four considerations towards *reformist argumentation* being advocated here. Firstly, we have already hinted above, is the immediate repudiation of the violent man with divine abhorrence in 3:32. The concept tb[wt "abominable" describes something utterly detestable, usually a word reserved for foreign cultic practices. In contrast to that, is the taking of the righteous into His confidence.

Secondly, there is the contrast between the curse on the house of the wicked against the blessing on the home of the righteous in 3:33. Fox (2000:166) points out that the “curse” here “is not just the pronouncement of a malediction but the unhappy situation itself” (Pr. 28:27) that God ‘sends’ (Deut. 28:20; Mal. 2:2) as punishment. As such there are strong implications that emanate from this pronouncement.

Thirdly, we see the fate of the scornful who refuse to take divine rebuke seriously and suffer the consequences of their making (3:34). These stand directly in contrast to the humble to whom God gives grace. Divine favour resting on the humble is a theme that needs no introduction in the biblical scheme. Humility, in effect, suggests a yielded heart and life – the kind that God can work with and in our study a son that is educable.

Lastly, the summation of the fate of the wise is contrasted to that of the foolish in 3:35, where the positive notion comes first. Once again we have the theme of contrasting lives and fates employed here to make apparent the obvious choice the son ought to make in this context. Hubbard (1989:79) summarises the rationale as follows:

HUMANLY CHOSEN CONDUCT	DIVINELY ASSIGNED RESULT
3:33 Wicked/Just	Curse/Blessing
3:34 Scornful/Humble	Scorns/Gives Grace
3:35 Wise/Fools	Glory/Shame

Table 17: Summation of Rationale

5.1.5 Sacred Texture in Proverbs 3:27-35

The introduction of **hw**hy in 3:32 and 33 and by way of pronoun in 3:34 ushers us into the **sacred texture** in what commenced as purely ethical advice. In these occurrences, as Koptak (2003:127) correctly observes, Yahweh is situated at the center of these contrasts. In fact He makes all the difference. The fate of the righteous as opposed to the unrighteous has to do with the divine factor. In other words human relationships or this idea of neighbourliness cannot be pursued outside of a greater relationship with God.

The three statements made with direct reference to Yahweh are interesting in that having established the irreversible fate of the offenders, the closing statement assumes divine retribution. The writing is on the wall as it were, in that the conclusion "equates the moral condition of the just and the wicked with the category of the wise and foolish. This is another expression of just = wise; fool = wicked" (Murphy 1998:23).

Habtu (2006:753) captures the essence of this unit when he writes:

Where there is plotting rather than trust, accusations rather than friendship, violence rather than peace making, there is no community. No wonder why Lord detests a perverse man but honours a righteous one, whom he takes ... into his confidence.

Outside of God it is impossible to conceive this community.

5.1.6 Reflecting on Proverbs 3:27-35

The idea of community is an important theme in the book of Proverbs. Bland (1998:236) espouses that the book of Proverbs is about youth who journey beyond the protected walls of home into mainstream society to fulfill their roles responsibly so that righteousness exalts the nation (14:34). The use of the prohibitive here should not be seen as a simplistic approach to parental instruction. Embedded in this exercise is every intention to reason with the son to see the bigger picture.

On the one hand the bigger picture has to do with one's relationship to the neighbour. The kind of behaviour into which the son is guided demands consideration of the other before self interest. It is this kind of communal outlook that makes for a better society. The individual contribution to better communal relationships is important here. In view of the fact that in biblical times the communities were made up of families belonging to the same clan who chose to group together (Gerstenberger 2002:62) for mutual solidarity and identification, one's neighbour was invariably one's kinsman.

On the other hand, is the presentation of the subject on being neighbourly from a divine perspective. The relational values that are presented here are not simply speaking, a way in which parents find their own way of achieving right relations with the neighbour. These are divinely determined injunctions and Yahweh takes a serious interest in these. Divine displeasure is taken up a little later on in 6:16-19 when some antisocial behaviour is discussed.

6. Release from unnecessary indebtedness 6:1-5

The subject of money which we encountered in the opening parental appeal re-emerges in this poem from a different angle altogether. Van Leeuwen (1997:74) calls

it a prime mover in human affairs (1:13-14; 4:17). In this instance the subject is couched in the context of an attempt to assist a "neighbour" but the poorly calculated motion leads the short-sighted son to potential trouble. We also appreciate hearing the advice being given here having heard the injunctions of 3:27-35 on being neighbourly so that the application of wisdom as a discerning mechanism is brought to the fore here. In the previous instance, being neighbourly was presented as an unconditional obligation to those in need to whom one can render assistance. In this case the warning is against a rash decision to assist in a potentially back-firing situation where caution ought to be exercised.

We are also encouraged to see that this subject of finances is being addressed within the confines of the home. The transaction has wider societal implications and as such the father takes a keen interest in assisting with advice to avert what could turn out to cost the son much more than his good intentions which are unfortunately not well thought through. We have the interesting tension in this context of the need to assist the neighbour on the one hand and the necessity of exercising discernment on the other. In both instances, the application of wisdom is important in very practical day to day situations that the son will frequently encounter. In our current situation, the scenario is such that the unfortunate action has already been taken and the advice is how to reverse this.

6.1. Text and exegetical analysis

The address { ynIB.â 1
 ^yP,(K; rZ"ål; T'[.q:βT' ^[<+rel. T'b.r;ä['-~ai

The protasis

T'd>K;¹l.nI÷ ^ypi_-yrem.aiB. T'v.q:ïAn 2
`^ypi(-yrem.aiB.

The apodosis

yKi« lce^aN"hiw{>) ynI³B. ÝaApáae tazOð hfe'[] 3
bh;îr>W sPe^ar;t.hi÷ %lEï ^[<+re-@k;b.
t'ab'Û
hm^aWnt.W÷ ^yn<+y[el. hn"åve !TEåTi-la; 4 `^y[(re
`^yP,([:p.[:l.

Summation

dY{imi rAP^acik.W÷ dY"+mi ybiäc.Ki
lceN"hiâ 5
@ `vWq)y"

6.1.1 Translation

Proverbs 6:1 My child, if you have given your pledge to your neighbor, if you have bound yourself to another, 2 you are snared by the utterance of your lips, caught by the words of your mouth. 3 So do this, my child, and save yourself, for you have come into your neighbor's power: go, hurry, and plead with your neighbor. 4 Give your eyes no sleep and your eyelids no slumber; 5 save yourself like a gazelle from the hunter, like a bird from the hand of the fowler.

6.1.2 Inner texture in Proverbs 6:1-5

On the onset, our attention to the **inner texture** is drawn to the vocative **ynb** "my son" in 6:1 which not only marks the beginning of a new section, but is also a foremost reminder of the father-son exchanges. The intimation of that exchange is underscored by the *repetition* of the vocative in 6:3 in which the father commands the son on what to do in yet another acute demonstration of parental authority in registering an awareness of the danger of impulsive surety. As in the previous occasions, the father creates a hypothetical scenario indicated by the conditional clause ~a "if" which not only tells us that there is a high potentiality of occurrence, but also forms the protasis

in this argument. The conditional clause, which is sustained into the second verse, spells out the twofold circumstances of indebtedness. The indebtedness on the one hand is derived from the verb **br**[which means to “to take or give in pledge” paralleled to the verb **[qt** translated “bound”,¹⁰⁹ as in the NRS to speak of self meted burden in both cases. On the other hand the indebtedness is presented as vocal undertakings that have also imprisoned the son. The verb **vqy** “to lay a bait” or to be ensnared, is paralleled to **dkl** “to capture” or “seize” which speak of the entrapment through a vocal promise made to provide surety for another. The concept **tvqwn** brings into perspective the conceptual sphere of hunting which remains in view up to verse 5 (see Waltke 2004:332).

There is a possible tripartite arrangement here as scholars would register varying perspectives. The other party concerned here, **[r** the neighbour, comes into full view by virtue of the *repetitive* pattern in 6:1 and twice in 6:3. The language used here according to Hubbard (1989:97) suggests a friend or close person who in this context is the money lender. The third party here is in 6:1 introduced as **rZ** “stranger”, who seems to be a resident alien. The estrangement here suggests one who lives outside of the moral and ethical boundaries that the son belongs, which has negative implications on taking a pledge on behalf of such a character. As some scholars would

109 The NRS translates the imagery used here to speak of binding one’s hands to another which has its validity in this context. However, the NIV translates the line “if you have struck hands in pledge for another” which seems to suggest some form of tradition associated with agreements. Ross (1991:931) thinks that there is some significance associated with this graphic imagery in comparison with other texts such as 11:15; 17:18 and 22:26 although the aspect of significance is not explicated. Waltke (2004:331) equates the practice to our own hand shaking when sealing an agreement (see 2 Ks. 10:15).

admit, this tripartite arrangement is disputable (Waltke 2004:331; Hubbard 1989:97; Longman III 2006:170).

What is however incontestable is the idea of entrapment of the neighbour spoken of in 6:3 which becomes the basis for the imagery portrayed in 6:5 where the father uses pictures from nature to evoke the *sensory-aesthetic* texture and also draws us to the conclusion of the case. The danger underscored by the parallel portraiture of the “hunter” and “fowler” from whose *dy* “hand”, *repeated* twice in this verse, he ought to escape from. There is need to escape danger at any cost as suggested by the concept *lcn* used in 6:3 and *repeated* here in 6:5.

We have in this poem, in terms of the progressive pattern then the *beginning* marked by the protasis in 6:1-2 where the issues are raised. This is followed by the *middle* which is the apodosis in 6:3-4 and the summation in verse 5.

6.1.3 The intertexture in 6:1-5

Perhaps Ross (1991:931) is incorrect when he says that it was fairly common for someone to put up security for another to underwrite debt. The closest reference we have of that sort of scenario is in Genesis 44:32 when Judah pledges himself to Joseph as surety for Benjamin, as Clifford (1999:75) points out. In this case we must admit that the situation on hand did not involve a financial transaction. However, in the book of Proverbs itself there is a consistent directive that to put up security on behalf of another is regarded as being unwise (Pr. 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:26 and 27:13). In other biblical passages the trend that seems evident is that a person would pledge on

his/her own behalf not for "another" (see Ex. 22:26; Deut. 24:10-13; Ez. 18:7-16; 33:14-15). Even in these instances, the indebted is encouraged not to withhold overnight an item given in pledge. The father's advice is therefore consistent with the overall scriptural injunction.

There is something to be said about the neighbour *ʾĪZ* since the same root concept is used of the wayward woman in 2:16 and in 5:10 and 5:17 to suggest her unfaithfulness to a marital covenant. The impression achieved about this kind of debtor is one who does not share the same convictions or lifestyle as the son. At most, we can say that he has no proven track record of reliability that would justify the son's risk taking. This is the issue at stake – the unknown stature of the debtor on whose behalf the son pledges surety. Waltke (2004:331) points out that "the surety assumed the responsibility for the payment of the debt and became liable to seizure should the debtor default on his payment".

There is also something to be said about the gazelle and the bird as victims of entrapment. These images project vividly the scenario of the son that the father paints. In the few OT passages in which the gazelle is depicted, it is presented as a hunted animal (Is. 13:14; 1 Chr. 12:8). Waltke (2004:335) describes the principal hunting method where large stone corrals in the shape of triangles open at one end into which gazelles were driven and would be trapped. He also points out that although these corrals were far too low to serve as barriers, gazelles would not jump them but would be trapped in the confusion and often get injured in the process whereby they were slaughtered *en masse*.

A similar picture comes to mind with the mention of a bird and the snare. One is reminded of the encounter in 1:17 where the futility of setting a trap in a bird's full view is described. In both cases of the gazelle and the bird, the idea of escape from entrapment is suggested here and so must the son find an escape from trouble. Waltke (2004:335) says that both the gazelle and the bird, once aware that they are caught in a trap, give all their attention to escaping from the hunter's hand.

6.1.4 Social and Cultural Texture in 6:1-5

In the social and cultural texture our focus of attention returns to the neighbour to whom the son has bound himself. As we have said before, generosity was the norm of ancient Near Eastern culture. Looking after "strangers" or aliens/foreigners mostly described in the OT as people who did not have access to the land or resources that would make them economically independent (Ex. 22:21; 23:9; Lev. 19:10, 33-34; Deut. 10:18; 24:17-18; Ps. 146:9; Jer. 7:6) was equally important. The question then, is to what precisely does the concept *ʾIz* refer which seems unfavourable to the father in the advice he gives to his son here?

Ross (1991:931) hints at an answer when he suggests that the concept neighbour could also mean a misfit or stranger which reveals the impulsive nature of the decision on the part of the son hence the entrapment. There is no compulsion or obligation in this case. Van Leeuwen (1997:74) says that "more is at stake than the financial advice. The 'son' has put himself at financial and personal risk by making a rash

commitment to another. Wisdom requires that the mistake be corrected". He continues to comment more significantly about the situation here when he writes:

But at this point it is difficult even to recognise that mistake has occurred, for negative consequences have not yet occurred. The damage is only potential, though the parent portrays the son as already caught in another's power. Wisdom requires insight into the whole situation: the nature of the investment, the character and reliability of the neighbour ... the possible future outcomes, and the son's ability to sustain the loss (1997:74).

The remedy to all this is a demanding yet necessary enterprise, to free oneself from the neighbour's power by humbly pressing the plea to regain control and release. The verb **lcn** has the idea of tearing oneself away - which is a forceful way of depicting the necessity of release from this type of bondage. Similarly, the verb **spr** has the idea of allowing oneself to be trampled upon, stated here in the imperative construct as in almost all the other verbs used here.

The concern for release is presented with a sense of urgency in 6:4 when the son is commanded to allow no sleep nor slumber until this matter is resolved. As if that is not enough, the closing remark in 6:5 underscores the need to **lcn** (cf. 6:3) "free" oneself from the bondage, a concept, which as we have said above, has an idea of tearing oneself off, a close shave if you like. Hubbard (1989:98) comments as follows:

In a society where pride and self-esteem governed public conduct and made apology rare and grovelling before a creditor even more rare, this lesson would have cut to the quick. It called for admitting a faux pas, reneging on a promise, and badgering a powerful neighbour for relief from it. Distasteful but necessary.

In a real sense what the father was asking would have been understood as going against the flow. But the urgency with which the father speaks is such that at any cost the move had to be made.

6.1.6 Reflecting on Proverbs 6:1-5

Firstly, in a demonstration of a great instructional methodology, the father creates a vivid scenario. Clifford (1999:70) points out that the "father imagines his son has already made the legally binding gesture of surety and is liable for the debt of another". In the poem the father teaches the son the important lesson that some things cannot wait. McKane (1970:322) sums it up well when he says that "to give an undertaking to a money-lender in respect of credit which he has made available to a foreigner is to walk into a self-constructed trap".

Secondly, we have the necessity for the application of wisdom in all situations. Wisdom is implied as issuing the *de rigueur* insight that would caution one into such a rash decision. Hubbard (1989:98) describes this move as a "reminder that prudence [wisdom's synonym] would have avoided the predicament in the first place. It was not to a brother or uncle that he rashly pledged collateral and consigned an agreement. It was someone to whom he had no primary obligation and who, in turn, was not at all accountable to him". In saying this, we recognise that wisdom is indeed all about skilful living. However, when one finds oneself in a less than ideal situation, the greatest lesson here is how to negotiate your way out of that type of situation at any cost. Ross (1991:931) says that a "gullible man might lack judgment and be easily swept in, only to realise too late that he was trapped ... and enslaved ... Such a rash act of generosity might take a lifetime to pay". What we take away from this passage

is the calculating foresight of wisdom that the father displays in the advice he gives to his son.

The quest for wisdom continues to be the focus in the passages that ensue in our exegetical exercise. Mark Hinds (1998:215) links the concern here to the human ability to make decisions thus, becoming wise is by "learning to exercise discernment and judgment, through careful observation and thinking, and lots of practice and mistakes". We get the impression that the book of Proverbs does not endorse an ethic based on rash decisions where the necessary time for discernment has not been properly undertaken. Wisdom eventually presents herself in person to underscore that message.

CHAPTER FOUR

WISDOM AND THE PRIMACY OF HOME BASED NURTURING

1. Instructions on the quest for wisdom

In this chapter we consider the passages that display a slackening formal structure of the Instruction. This is not to say that they do not belong to this genre but rather that they are presented differently. For example, in most of these cases, the imperative which dominated the previous passages is omitted. There is more of an idea of a strategic presentation of ideas in order to appeal to the reader. The son is left to make up his own mind with less of a prescriptive style and more of a descriptive one. In all cases, what he needs to choose at the end of the day is fairly obvious – at least to us, and we trust to him as well. Only a fool would choose otherwise.

We will commence by looking at 2:1-22 in which wisdom is equated to fatherly admonition. At the same time, the son is exposed to the benefits that wisdom accords if one abides by the instructions that are issued. This will be followed by the three poems in chapter six beginning with the wise advice against the sluggard in 6:6-11 where the vocative “my son” is omitted, perhaps as a reflection of the utter disgust against the personality here. This is followed by yet another disapproved character – the malevolent, in 6:1-15, who is a menace to society. The malevolent character prepares the ground for the numerical saying in 6:16-19 which similarly condemns the use of bodily faculties for evil.

We will close the exegetical exercise by an analysis of the personification of Wisdom in 1:20-33 and 9:1-18. These poems depart completely from the scheme we have encountered so far in this genre. We will however, seek to argue for a home based

motif in these poems as well. Placing these poems one after the other is a deliberate intention to deal with personification as a focused theme.

1.1 Protection realised through wisdom 2:1-22

Parenting was a seriously undertaken responsibility in the traditional Shona society. Because of that, there was a close connection between attaining wisdom for life and upbringing. Due to the taxing involvements, parenting or better still one's upbringing became a communal responsibility (see Kabweza 1979:27-30).¹¹⁰ That communal responsibility is captured in the Shona proverb "*Mwana ijira rinofukwa navanhu vose*" (lit.: A child is a blanket to be shared by all) cited by Hamutyinei and Plangger (1987:236).¹¹¹ For that reason, one's behaviour was indicative of the family or community that one came out of. Michael Bourdillon (1976:23) describes this observation from the point of view of the closely knit communities among the Shona people in which he asserts that individual behaviour could not be spoken of in isolation. However, the behavioural quality of a child was directly proportional to the quality of the parents or parenting. No one could therefore afford the reproach "whose child is this?" since it had negative connotations. Even when it came to marriage, family reputation was critical.

The exegetical analysis of Proverbs 2:1-22 seems to reflect a similar seriousness to parenting by making parental advice the equivalent of wisdom itself, as Fox (1994:233)

110 Kabweza (1979:30) expands on the communal responsibility of bring up a child by pointing out that all males to that child were either fathers (*baba*) or grandfather (*sekuru*) and correspondingly all older women were mother (*amai*) or grandmother (*mbuya*). By the same token if a child made a mistake all these older members of the community could discipline that child.

111 Hamutyinei and Plangger (1987:236) explain the proverb by saying that "A baby has no bias and is loved by everyone. It is also freely given to anyone to hold and to look after and people are most careful in handling it. The proverb is quoted freely in clarifying the position of a child in a community".

writes that “the father’s words are not only a way to wisdom; they are wisdom itself”. This statement has significance on our overall motive for taking parenting seriously as reflected in 2:1-22 and elsewhere. Longman III (2003:80) rightly describes the book of Proverbs as an account that “presents observations, advice warnings and guidance on how to live life”. He then goes on to locate this within the Israelite home setting by arguing for an understanding of a biological relationship in chapters 1-9 and concluding that the “book of Proverbs insists on the importance of a strong cohesive family and denigrates anyone or anything that erodes the family bond” (2003:81). The impression one gets from a close reading of this poem is that parenting is a patient and demanding enterprise. This statement also brings to mind the Shona proverb “*Kuudza mwana hupedzisira*” (lit.: To tell a child is to give precise and complete instructions).¹¹² And in Proverbs 2:1-22 we see an example of that as well as in the units that ensue.

We notice, as Lane does (2000:22), that in this passage the parent speaks with greater authority and, as Perdue (2000:86) rightly observes, in a highly persuasive manner. Beyond the notion of just passing on information, the parent is concerned about imparting character formation. The parental intentions are captured by Fox’s (1994:235) summation of the passage when he writes:

The lecture advances in a single line of thought: If you do what I say, you will learn wisdom, which will bring you to the fear of God and righteousness, which will protect you and keep you away from wicked men and women, and thereby ensure you a long life.

More significantly, perhaps, is that the sentiments in the prologue 1:2-7 as well as the warnings of 1:8-19 and 1:20-33 are consolidated in this carefully constructed poem in

112 Cited by Gelfand (1979:124) he explains the proverb in view of everyday situations that “Do not send a child on an errand without full information, otherwise he will make a mistake”. However, the same principle is applicable to all matters of life where careful as opposed to casual instructions are important. Hence the proverb, “*Abereka atochena mwoyo*” (lit. : One who has borne children ought to be patient) see Hamutiyinei and Plangger (1987:236).

2:1-22. Habtu (2006:750) regards this as the most organised unit in the whole of the book of Proverbs with 22 lines that correspond to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet¹¹³ all majestically set as a single sentence in the original language. The design is perhaps as a *mnemonic* device to assist the learner to internalize the rather intense and invaluable instructions therein.

In terms of the content, the poem divides itself into two equal halves with 2:1-11 zeroing in on the development of character through wisdom and 2:12-22 the dangers wisdom preserves one from (cf. Murphy 1998:13; Waltke 2004:214). At the same time the two blocks are subdivided into two stanzas of four verses each and a climatic stanza of three verses (Waltke 2004:215). That scheme can be represented diagrammatically as follows:

TEXT	2:1-11	CONTENT	2:12-22	CONTENT
Stanza 1	2:1-4	Accept parents' teaching	2:12-15	Deliverance from the wicked men
Stanza 2	2:5-8	Know and fear God	2:16-19	Deliverance from the wicked woman
Stanza 3	2:9-11	Practice righteousness	2:20-22	Realise life and not death

Table 18: Stanzas in 2:1-22

Another key observation is that each stanza is clearly marked by beginning with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet א, for the stanzas in 2:1-11, and ל, for the stanzas in 2:12-22 (see van Leeuwen 1997:42; Koptak 2003:96).¹¹⁴

¹¹³ It must be pointed out that this poem although having this observable correspondence is not an acrostic such as one found in Proverbs 31:10-31 or Psalm 119. However, the correspondence perhaps assisted with memorization of the contents.

¹¹⁴ The א stanzas are 2:1, 5 and 9 while the ל stanzas are 2:12, 16 and 20. While this is an observable pattern being utilized to achieve a specific purpose in this account, no one really comments on what that purpose really is. In our estimation, this is once again a literary plot by the parent teacher to assist with a *mnemonic* effect as is common in these collections.

1.1.1 The text and exegetical framework

The Address 2:1	{	ynIB. Proverbs
The Protasis byviq.h;l. 2	{	<p> $\`%T'ai !Poc.Ti yt;wOc.miW yr'm'a] xQ;Ti\sim ai$ $\`hn"WbT.l; ^B.li hJ,T; ^n<z>a' hm'k.x'l;$ $\`^l,Aq !TeTi hn"WbT.l; ar'q.ti hn"yBil; \sim ai yKi 3$ $\`hN"f,P.x.T; \sim ynIAMj.M;k;w> @s,K'k; hN"v,q.b;T.\sim ai 4$ </p>
The Apodosis	{	<p> $\sim yhil\{a/ t[;d;w> hw"hy> ta;r>yI !ybiT' za' 5$ $t[;D; wyPimi hm'k.x' !TeyI hw"hy>-yKi 6 \`ac'm.Ti$ $!gEm' hY"viWT \sim yrIv'y>l; \hat{I}!Poc.yID \grave{;};!p;c'w>\grave{A}$ $7 \`hn"Wbt.W$ $\%r,d,w> jP'v.mi tAxr>a' rcon>li 8 \`~to ykel.hol.$ $qd,c, !ybiT' za' 9 \`rmov.yI \hat{I}wyd'ysix]D \grave{;};Adysix]\grave{A}$ $\`bAj-lG:[.m;-lK' \sim yrIv'ymeW jP'v.miW$ $\sim [r>yI ^v.p.n:l. t[;d;w> ^B,lib. hm'k.x' aAbt'-yKi 10$ $\`hK'r,c.n>ti hn"WbT. ^yl,[' rmov.Ti hM'zIm. 11$ $rBed;m. vyaime [r' \%r,D,mi ^l.yCih;l. 12$ $tk,l,l' rv,yO tAxr>a' \sim ybiz>[oh; 13 \`tAkPuh.T;$ $Wlygly" [r' tAf[ll; \sim yximeF.h; 14 \`%v,xo-yker>d;B.$ $\sim yviQ.[i \sim h,ytexor>a' rv,a] 15 \`[r' tAkPuh.t;B.$ $\`~t'AlG>[.m;B. \sim yzIAln>W$ $\`hq'ylix/h, h'yr,m'a] hY"rIk.N"mi hr'z" hV'aime ^l.yCih;l. 16$ $\`hx'kev' h'yh,l\{a/ tyrIB.-ta,w> h'yr,W[n> @WLa; tb,z<[oh; 17$ $\`h'yt,l\{G>[.m; \sim yaip'r>-la,w> Ht'yBe tw<m'-la, hx'v' yKi 18$ $tAxr>a' WgyFiy:-al\{w> !WbWvy> al\{ h'ya,B'-lK' 19$ $\`~yYIx;$ </p>
	{	<p> $tAxr>a'w> \sim ybiAj \%r,d,B. \%leTe ![;m;l. 20$ </p>

#r,a'-WnK.v.yI ~yrIv'y>-yKi
 21 `rmov.Ti ~yqiyDIc;
 WtreK'yI #r,a,me ~y[iv'r>W 22 `Hb' Wrt.W"yI ~ymiymit.W
 @ `hN"M,mi WxS.yI ~ydIg>AbW

1.1.2 Translation

¹ My [son], if you accept my words and treasure up my commandments within you,
² making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding;
³ if you indeed cry out for insight, and raise your voice for understanding;
⁴ if you seek it like silver, and search for it as for hidden treasures
⁵ then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.
⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;
⁷ he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk
 blamelessly,
⁸ guarding the paths of justice and preserving the way of his faithful ones.
⁹ Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path;
¹⁰ for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
¹¹ prudence will watch over you; and understanding will guard you.
¹² It will save you from the way of evil, from those who speak perversely,
¹³ who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness,
¹⁴ who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil;
¹⁵ those whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways.
¹⁶ You will be saved from the loose woman, from the adulteress with her smooth
 words,
¹⁷ who forsakes the partner of her youth and forgets her sacred covenant;
¹⁸ for her way leads down to death, and her paths to the shades;
¹⁹ those who go to her never come back, nor do they regain the paths of life.
²⁰ Therefore walk in the way of the good, and keep to the paths of the just.
²¹ For the upright will abide in the land, and the innocent will remain in it;
²² but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be rooted out
 of it.

1.1.3 The Address 2:1a

As in the previous encounters, (1:8-19; 3:1-12; 3:21-26; 6:1-5), the addressee is identified by the vocative “my son” *ynb*. In poem that vocative is not repeated again as it is in 1:8-19 where it occurs thrice. Perhaps this is due to the fact that this poem

is constructed as a single continuous sentence in which the addressee is mentioned only at the beginning and effectively sustained in the remainder of the didactic speech. The speaker, presumably the father, is neither named nor provided with a title (Perdue 2000:86), which is also consistent with the previous exchange (1:8), and subsequent ones (3:1; 4:1). At this stage of our study, we are beginning to identify the address as a rhetorical technique that is employed to bring to attention what the *narratee* intends to accomplish with each text (see Robbins 1996:54).

1.1.4 The protasis 2:1b-4

The **inner texture** draws our attention to the conditional clause marked by the particle adverb ~a "if" in 2:1, 3 and 4 which forms a series of protases. Logically this is followed by the apodosis, a series of them as well, in 2:5-19 marked by the particle adverb Za "then" in 2:5 and 9 which state the known results. The *repetition* of ~a is possibly for emphasis as would generally be the case. Alternatively, this could also function to single out specific aspects of the appeal being made here. Buzzel (1988:908) along with Atkinson (1996:33) views on the verbs that are used in these verses as of special significance.¹¹⁵ In similar vein, Habtu (2006:751) regards the use of a chain of verbs to emphasize the intensity required in the search for wisdom.

In a similar way, there are wisdom's synonyms that Waltke (2004:214) suggests as co-referential terms. Although these verbs and synonyms occur within a conditional clause, there is no doubt concerning the strenuous effort that the addressee must

115 There are 8 verbs used in 2:1-4 alongside various objects for the speaker's words or synonyms of wisdom that are used in this stanza. The verbs are of particular interest as they represent the intended response on the part of the son to the call being made here.

employ in order to realize the intended results. Thus the protasis and apodosis clearly function to demarcate the *opening-middle-closing texture*. The *opening* could be the protasis itself, 2:1-4, where the issues of concern are raised but not necessarily resolved. Logically, the *middle*, 2:5-19, is the rather lengthy apodosis, comparatively speaking, where our attention is directed toward the benefits of the diligence to which the addressee is invited. Naturally, the *closing* then is 2:20-22 which van Leeuwen (1997:45) calls the purpose and warning statement which effectively captures the essence of all that the father is saying to the son.

VERB	MEANING	ASSOCIATED SYNONYM
Xql 2:1	accept, take (get, fetch), lay hold of (seize), receive, acquire (buy), bring, marry (take a wife), snatch (take away). ¹¹⁶	yrma my words
!pc 2:1	hide, treasure, store up	ytwcmw " my commandments"
bvq 2:2	hear, be attentive, heed.	hmkxl "to wisdom"
hjn 2:2	extend, stretch out, spread out, pitch, turn, pervert, incline, bend, bow.	hnwbtl "to understanding"
wrq 2:3	call, call out, recite (read).	Hnybl "to discernment"
!tn 2:3	Give	hnwbtl "to understanding"
vqb 2:4	to seek, require, desire	
Fpx 2:4	search, search for, disguise oneself.	

Table 19: Verb/Synonym association

At the same time, the adoption of the protasis and apodosis here assists the depiction of the *argumentative texture* (Robbins 1996:59). We can appreciate the *logical*

116 Meanings given here are as in the Bible Works electronic resource. Eric Lane (2000:22) offers some interesting meanings of each of these verbs by stating what each one implies. To accept – believe it, consent to it; to store it – to retain it in your mind, memorise it; turn your ear – attend to it, don't just hear it but continually turn your ear to it; understand – what it requires of you; look for it – as in hard earned treasure.

reasoning because our text, by intention, is highly persuasive as the father appeals to his son. What is also peculiar to the adopted *argumentative* texture is the omission of the imperative (cf. 1:8) even though the speaker is sure about his compulsive statement. This could be a classic example of what rhetoricians call *enthymeme* (Robbins 1996:59) which follows this kind of reasoning. Perdue (2000:88-9) calls it casuistic or case argument as he explains:

This type of argumentation is reminiscent of case law in Israelite and Jewish legal codes and has suggested to some scholars that among the sages were lawyers and judges engaged in the formulation of judicial law.

We are not sure about this suggestion other than to point out that this is common way of argumentation as clearly seen in many biblical passages (Joshua 23:12; Judges 9:29; I Samuel 6:3; 1 Kings 8:48-48; 9:6-7; 2 Chronicles 7:14). McKane (1970:278), who prescribes to the same label, affirms our reservations here when he points out that the style of the so called casuistic legal formulation "is not as tightly organized here as it is in the omen and legal contexts".

All the conditional statements also evoke the *sensory-aesthetic texture* by citing various physical faculties. These are particularly highlighted by the *synonymous parallelism* of the lines, a feature which is recognizably sustained in the greater part of the composition. In 2:1 the text presumes the intellect through which the son can accept the father's words and store his commands. There is the juxtaposition of the ear and the heart in 2:2, with respect to listening to wisdom and applying understanding. The heart (**b1**) is particularly significant by virtue of the *repetition* in the next stanza (2:10).

Van Leeuwen (1997:60) validly comments on the significance of the heart as follows:

[The heart is metaphorically used for] the internal well spring of the acting self ... the inner person, the 'I' that is the locus of a person's will, thought (Pr. 16:1, 9; 19:21) and feeling (Pr. 14:10, 13; 17:22). Thus, all of a person's actions (Pr. 15:13; 2 Sam 7:3) especially speech (Pr. 16:23) flow from the heart, expressing its content whether good or bad.

The human receptors continue with the reference to the mouth through the admonition to call out for insight and crying out for understanding in 2:3. The *sensory-aesthetic* texture in 2:4 evokes the sense of sight in asking the son to look for wisdom as for silver or treasure.

The point of referring to these human faculties is that wisdom is intended to permeate all dimensions of human capacity. This receptivity is highlighted through the *repetition* of !yb "understand", thrice in the protasis (2:2, 3) and a further four times in the remainder of the poem (2:5, 6, 9 and 11). Such internalization of wisdom is the only safeguard against the dangers mentioned later in this admonition. For that reason, the precise design of this poem, the type of argumentation as well as the evoking of the *sensory-aesthetic* texture play a complimentary role of creating *mnemonic* devices that will assist the son.

The literary significance of the series of protases in 2:1-4 is enhanced further by the **intertextual** aspects. Of particular significance is the re-visitation of wisdom's synonyms which we encountered in 1:2-7. The father's words yrma and his commands ytwcmw usher us into the educational exercise. Here the son is asked to receive and treasure these instructions, respectively speaking. This opening line

espouses an intensity that is necessary on the part of the learner, since the exercise here is not purely academic. The mention of **hmkx** “wisdom” alongside the most prominent synonym of this unit, **hnwbt** “understanding”, brings to mind an association we have previously encountered in 1:2 and 5 in terms of the inseparability of the two. Koptak (2003:96) reveals that the argumentation employed here is comparable to that of the *Instructions of Amenemope*, the Egyptian wisdom account. What we ought to read out of this similarity opens all sorts of possibilities.

Of greater significance, conceivably, is McKane’s (1970:279-80) thesis on the notable dependence of Proverbs 2 on Deuteronomy. The *cultural* intertexture espoused in Deuteronomy 6:1-3 is brought to the fore here. In this context the particular words that the parents ought to use to instruct their children, and which are seen in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 are later on highlighted by Christ in his teachings as the greatest commandment (Mt. 22:37-38; Mk. 12:29-30; Lk. 10:27). The intended internalization of the parental instructions on the part of the children is also given special attention in Deuteronomy 6:7-9 as a *mnemonic* aid. This is especially significant in view of what Waltke (2004:215) sees as an escalation from “listen” in 1:8 to “accept” in 2:1 which emphasizes the necessity to internalize parental instructions. He points out that the housing of these instructions in one’s inner sanctuary lays the foundation for all subsequent conditions and promises such as, “store up” (2004:220). Similarly, Murphy (1998:13) points out that the **tWCM** “command” in Deuteronomy that recurs in 2:1 has the same intensity. He adds that the aspects of listening, hearing and

attentiveness employed in this stanza are characteristic of both Israelite and Egyptian wisdom accounts (1998:13).

Related to that is the personal effort that the son must take on in this educational process in 2:3, which appears in words reminiscent of personified Wisdom's effort in 1:20. Just as Wisdom raised her voice in her public appeal, so must the young man raise his in the quest for discernment and understanding. That effort on his part is also advocated in 2:4 as Koptak (2003:98) comments:

The stress is on the active role the young man must play in his education, calling out as if his life depends on it, searching as if the wealth of the world will be his, turning his ear and leaning his heart.

Similarly, the request to "treasure" the parental instructions in 2:4 serves to *echo* the motive given in 1:9 which is the adornment that the necessary attention will realize. In both cases we have, to use Habtu's words (2006:749), a reminder of the "beauty and delightfulness of a life lived in obedience to parents". However, in 2:4 is yet another case of an escalation of the psyche to a higher degree, as Waltke (2004:220) points out. He observes the *references* to "silver" and "hidden treasure" to imply a great deal of work and sacrifice respectively. Silver, although highly valued and desirable in the ancient times¹¹⁷ (Genesis 13:2; Job 22:25-26; Psalm 12:6; Proverbs 3:14; 8:10; 10:20), was mined and smeltered, whilst hidden treasure equally requires some effort to be found (Isaiah 45:3; Jeremiah 41:8; Matthew 13:44). Lane (2000:22) correctly describes the greater enlargement of the lesson here to value parental instructions as a hard earned treasure. The son could not miss the point of the reward here that would

¹¹⁷ Except around the time of Solomon when notably the biblical text specifies that then silver was not regarded as valuable perhaps due to the abundance of gold associated with this period. See 1 Kings 10:21-22.

come with a desire to apply himself to this cause, which is what the rest of the speech dwells on in 2:5 onwards.

The **social and cultural** intertexture leans heavily on the *Gnostic manipulationist* argumentation by insisting on the father's speech as the gateway to distinctive knowledge. This is particularized by the use of ~a in 2:1, 3 and 4 as conditional indicators of this knowledge. Garrett (1993:74) links the three protases to three specific undertakings, "listen attentively", "yearn for wisdom" and "seek as for hidden treasure". However, all eight verbs employed in this stanza collectively insist on the speaker's words as key towards the realization of the intended outcome. Waltke (2004:220) sees the verb "accept" as foundational for laying down the subsequent conditions and promises. He suggests that these verbs function in the same way as proverbial statements do in exerting illocution which is the distinction between a statement's content and its force.¹¹⁸ The statements that appear here in the conditional clause function as commands which the son is expected to obey. With particular reference to this unit, Schwarb (1995:11) makes a statement on the power of words that we should bring to the fore, when he says that "the book of Proverbs does not consist of mere platitudes; its words have more power to save souls from the realm of death into the realm of life (2:10-12)".

1.1.5 The apodosis 2:5-19

The first stanza is sustained by the series of protases (2:1, 3 and 4) as well as the eight verbs which describe the means through which wisdom will be attained, and in

¹¹⁸ For a comprehensive study on illocutionary force see Yanga's (1977) study entitled "Inside the Proverb : A Socio-Linguistic Approach".

2:5-11 we have correspondingly a series of apodoses. The **inner texture** reveals the apodoses clearly marked by *Za* “then” in 2:5 and 9 in a typical *repetition* pattern that not only state the benefits of accepting parental instructions but is also emphatic of that concession. The first occurrence of *Za* “then”, dwells largely on the theological conception of the benefits derived from the particular focus on **hwhy** “the Lord” mentioned twice in 2:5 and 6, and implied in 2:7-8 as well. The mention of yet another name of God in 2:5 *~yhla*,¹¹⁹ draws our attention to the key phrase of the book of Proverbs, **hwhy tary** “fear of the Lord”, *synonymously paralleled* to *~yhla t[dw* “and knowledge of God”. We also see that *t[d* “knowledge” is *repeated* in 2:6 and 10 to give the concept emphatic prominence in this stanza.

The second occurrence of *Za* in 2:9 offers the moral or practical application of the benefits of heeding to parental instructions of 2:1-4. We observe a *repetitive* pattern in the opening two words used in 2:5, **!ybt za** “then you will understand” also present in 2:9 perhaps to bring to attention the inseparability of the matters raised in 2:9-11 and those of 2:5-8. That key phrase also brings into play the significance of moral insight both to this unit and the rest of the account as will be particularized by

119 **~yhla** is name of God associated with His acts of creation which occurs some 680 times in the OT. By comparison, **hwhy** occurs some 6007 times because it is the covenantal name thus reflecting His dealings with His people.

the *repeated* metaphor¹²⁰ of *šlh* “walk” (2:7, 20) closely associated with those of the *xra* “path/way” (2:8, 13, 15, 19), *lg[m* “path” (2:9, 18) *šrd* “way” (2:8, 20). Ross (1991:913) rightly describes this metaphor as representative of a lifestyle that regularly leads in the direction of what is morally good. In similar vein van Leeuwen (1997:44) comments on the metaphor for path that is developed in this speech as follows:

Path here is not simply the course of events in a life, but the religio-ethical manner in which people negotiate the events that come their way. Yet by just or unjust conduct, we humans also manufacture the events that come to us.

Van Leeuwen’s comment is important to bear in mind particularly with the occurrence of the key phrase of this account, *hwhy tary* “fear of the Lord”, in 2:5 which evokes some equally important aspects of **intertextuality**. The introduction of this key phrase, which we encountered in 1:7 and recurs in this account and elsewhere in the wisdom genre (Job 28:28)¹²¹, could be a case of an *oral-scribal intertexture*. The words are also alluded to in the carefully constructed poem about the virtuous wife in 31:30. However, in this context the phrase achieves a new level of meaning by configuring the search for wisdom on the part of the son, which the text clearly reveals in 2:1-4 as being imbedded in accepting parental instruction, with the fear of the Lord in 2:5-8 as the climatic result. In so doing, we have a novel idea, perhaps in our minds only, of the biblical conception of educational as Fox (1994:242) explains:

Education has two processes. It commences with the father’s teaching and its rote incorporation by the child, but this must be complemented by the learner’s own thought and inquiry.

120 See Waltke (2004:218) who compares a similar repetition of the metaphor and its synonyms in 4:10-19 and 4:20-27.

121 A number of texts in the OT also refer to this phrase maybe not in necessarily in the same vein but at least allude to its significance (2 Chr. 17:10; 19:7,9; Ps. 19:9; 34:11; 111:10; Is. 11:2-3; 33:6). Of these only Psalm 34:11 has a parent-child motif. In the book of Proverbs a close connection to that is found in 9:10 which the majority of the texts offer a generic conception (10:27; 14:27; 15:16, 33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17).

Then God steps into the picture and grants wisdom ...
Education is thus a cooperative effort of a child, parents and
God.

That joint effort then enables us to agree with van Leeuwen (1997:43) who declares that "the quest for wisdom is necessarily a quest for God, for wisdom comes from God". By the same token, Farmer (1991:31) reiterates that "there are undeniable connections between the search for 'wisdom' and the 'fear of Lord'" in the language and protases-apodoses structuring of these stanzas.

As pointed above, the second apodosis in 2:9 which begins with the same wording as the first one (2:5) suggests more than a complimentary role, but gives equal weight to the moral application. Our attention is drawn to the triad of virtues, "justice, righteousness and equity" which we encountered in 1:3. In this particular instance the virtues are representative of *bwj-lg[m-lk* "every good path", a metaphor we have highlighted above.

In terms of the **social and cultural texture**, we have here yet another occurrence of the *Gnostic manipulationist argumentation* particularized by the insistence on distinctive knowledge and understanding. What is particular about this knowledge is that it is not purely intellectual but a reward of diligently seeking the Lord. Koptak (2003:99) regards this knowledge as a "way of knowing that permeates one's entire being, touching the emotions and will – it requires the commitment of the whole person". Van Leeuwen (1997:43) offers a comprehensive explanation of this knowledge when he writes:

"Knowledge of God" here is not due simply to individual activity
or to immediate divine revelation. Humans get to know God

somewhat as they get to know a language, through interaction with parents and others who speak and act in the ordinary activities of life. As parents related to God, world and others, they communicate a certain understanding of God and reality. The child's business is gradually to take responsibility for his or her life in response to parents, persons, the world and God.

The comment above suggests that the lessons one has to learn in life cannot be attained outside of the interaction of the family and others (cf. Gerstenberger 2002:29). We need to qualify that interaction on its own, without deliberate instruction, will not assist towards the knowledge and understanding implied here. That is why the parental authority is of primal importance. Waltke (2004:220) clarifies that "the father bases his authority not on his patriarchal position or on tradition, but on the Lord Himself ... in other words the father's will and the command will carry authority only as they conform to the Lord's will". By implication, the wisdom to be attained from this ongoing exercise cannot be defined narrowly. Farmer (1991:32) espouses, that we cannot see its relationship to faithful worship of the Lord as implied in 2:7-8. For that reason, the covenantal name of the Lord, as in His relational appeal, makes sense in this context.

Closely related to all this is the **sacred texture** noticeable in the appearance of the names of God in association with the summons to accept parental instruction. In his understanding of the divine perspective, Goldsworthy (1993:23) views the fear of the Lord motif as the "acceptance of God's word that interprets critical events in Israel's history as God's acts to redeem Israel. It means a reverent response of faith to the God who thus presents himself to be the Redeemer". Goldsworthy's sentiments ties in well with the covenantal/relational theme implied in this stanza, although taking a broader perspective. To that we add McKane's (1970:281) observation that "the

vocabulary of wisdom is set unmistakably in the frame of religious commitment and its derivative morality. This is best seen in the apodosis of v. 5 and the associated motive clause of v. 6 ... This indicates that the teacher's authority and content of his wisdom are derived from Yahweh". Habtu (2006:570) offers a definitive conception of the fear of the Lord when he writes:

It is sometimes difficult to articulate what is meant by 'fear' in the encounter between God and human beings. The phrase "fear of the Lord" or "of God" does not refer to the dread of the unknown or the mysterious. Nor does it refer to the terror induced by the wrath of God. In the context of the covenant people, of whom the Wisdom writers were a part, this fear is the reverent and humble submission of the whole of life to the revealed will of Yahweh. It manifests itself in the worshipful adoration of the creator of heaven and earth and the sovereign Lord of history.

Habtu's comment rightly contextualizes the fear of the Lord within the covenant, which is important for the son to note. The father's instructions are not an attempt to forward his own views but to speak on behalf of the Lord. Atkinson (1996:33) is correct in stating that the "summons to hear wisdom is really a summons to hear God. The hearers are called to discern God's presence in the world, and give attention to it, not only in the special times, or when God is, so to speak, 'public', but at all times, even when God is hidden". He continues by showing the inseparability between right living from right relationship with God by commenting:

God's justice merges into his righteousness and goodness on the one hand, and his mercy and steadfast love on the other. When Wisdom 'guards the path of justice', we can include in that path the social justice which demands equity of opportunity and resources for all people within God's world, but we must also broaden the path to lead us to the will of God for righteous living, based on his goodness and his mercy (1999:34).

Besides the twofold benefit of the right relationship with God and right relationship with others, highlighted in 2:5-8 and 2:9-11 respectively, there is the protection from

the wicked men (2:12-15) and the wayward woman (2:16-19) that wisdom also offers and to which we now turn our attention.

1.1.6 Protection from the wicked men 2:12-15

The **inner texture** draws our attention to the first word in this stanza **šlychl** “will save you” in 2:12 which is *repeated* in 2:16 to earmark the protection that wisdom will realize for the son. In this first instance, the danger lies in the group prescribed by the phrase **vyam** [r “evil men”, particularly their **šrd** “way”, a metaphor of great significance in this stanza by virtue of its *repetition* through its attendant synonyms which occur some nine times in the remainder of the speech. The frequency of this metaphor underscores the emphasis on the lifestyle that is represented therein. The same concern raised about these wicked men is in view of their **rbd** “words”. One cannot fail to see the effect of these words which is shown by the negative label **twkpht** “crooked”, a noun which describes speaking perversely. Similar concerns in the use of dangerous words are reiterated in the ensuing stanza, with reference to the wayward woman (2:16). The danger, according to Koptak (2003:101), lies in the invitation to join their way as this is followed by six descriptions of their way as departing from the straight. Habtu (2006:751) captures the vivid description of the departure as with following statements:

- ❖ Men whose words are perverse
- ❖ who leave the straight paths to walk in dark ways,
- ❖ who delight in doing wrong
- ❖ and rejoice in perverseness of evil,

- ❖ whose paths are crooked
- ❖ and who are devious in their ways.

What is peculiar to these lines is the parallel structures that are employed. In the first instance we note the "straight path" *antithetically paralleled* to the "dark ways" in 2:13. The point of concern is captured in the phrase **bz[** "leave" or "forsake" the way which is described as **rvy** level, straight, right, just or lawful. Second, is the *synonymous parallelism* of their **xmf** "delight" in wrong doing to their **lyn** "rejoicing" in perverseness of evil in 2:14. Such absurdity, according to Ross (1991:913) is due to their seared conscience. Thirdly, in 2:15 we have the yet another case of *synonymous parallelism* in the evasiveness of the phrases **~yvq[~hytxra** "who are crooked in their ways" and **~twlg[mb ~yzwlnw** "who are devious in their tracks". Although no specific crime is mentioned up to this juncture, the dominant theme to their crookedness in all respects is unambiguous (see Fox 2000:117). The impression we get from these descriptions, as the son should have, is the concern on the part of the father in seeing anyone go along with the wicked men. We agree with Schwarb (1995:11) that the father is motivated by love to speak so vividly of the danger the wicked men pose, as he says such "love defines the authenticated direction of life and death". Perdue (2000:91) comments on the greater scope of the way of the wicked when he writes:

Indeed, deceitful speech, left unchecked, perverts the moral order of the cosmos and damages the structures of life for all creation. Those who are evil are not forced to be so by Yahweh. Rather, the teacher stresses, turning toward the lifestyle of the evil ones is a matter of choosing to turn from the "paths of righteousness" to follow the "ways of darkness".

Unlike the recipient of wisdom, who delights in knowledge, the wicked take their pleasure in doing evil”

The son in receiving these warnings, stands in an advantaged position to make the right choice by virtue of the exposure to the pathway of the wicked. That is why we highlighted the importance of protection that wisdom will bring about.

The **intertexture** is similarly brought to the fore by the verb **lcn** (2:12 and 16) which interestingly occurs in Deuteronomy 23:14, Esther 4:14¹²² and Jeremiah 1:19. In all cases the concept brings into play what would be desperate situations to contend with. In this instance we have both the words and the ways of the wicked men that the son needs to be protected or delivered from. Interestingly, the perverseness of words and the related debauchery remain a recurrent theme in the book of Proverbs (see 6:14; 8:13; 10:31, 32; 16:28, 30; 23:33). The same can be said about the metaphor of the path and the related synonyms (see 2:8; 3:23; 4:11, 14, 15 & 19; 5:6; 6:23; 8:20; 9:6, 15; 10:17, 29; 11:5; 12:15, 26, 28; 13:15 etc).

We also recall the first parental discourse 1:10-19 where the son is warned against yielding to the invitation of such wicked men. That call is reiterated in 4:14-19, a recurrence indicative of the ongoing danger associated with these men. Ross (1991:913) states that the adjectival notions here are what represent unpleasant experiences, or what bring pain and misery due to the dullness of the wicked men’s consciences.

122 The passage Esther 4:12 reads, “When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, 13 he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" (NIV). The concept of interest shows the intensity which is brought upon to bear in this context as well as the book of Proverbs.

The **social and cultural texture** dwells on the vivid descriptions that the wicked men follow. As each statement reveals the perversion of the wicked men, we effectively have a *reformist* argumentation at play in this stanza. The wicked men represent a *counterculture* because of their rejection of explicit and central values of the dominant culture (Robbins 1996:169). The reference to Yahweh, as mentioned earlier on, in His covenantal name accentuates “personal intimacy with [God] through obedience to his word; the notions of cognitive response to his revelation and existential intimacy and obedience are inseparable” Waltke (2004:223). Atkinson (1996:34) describes this as a “winsome personality”, perhaps as a model of the kind of people that the young man needs to associate with, or subsequently become. Graham-Taylor (2001:27) offers a helpful summation of this stanza when he says that:

Wisdom will save us from being perverse, devious and crooked and getting into the company of the kind of people. Scripture tells us that bad company corrupts morals. Part of the new deal is that God will give us the good sense to instantly recognize bad company and thus avoid it.

There is yet another deadly companion that the son ought to be protected from.

1.1.7 Protection from the wayward woman 2:16-19

As in the previous stanza, the infinitival verb **\$lychl** “to deliver you from”, evokes the **inner texture** by introducing the parallel match to the “wicked men” of 2:12 **hrz hvam** “the strange woman”¹²³ in 2:16. Her strangeness is further elucidated by the

123 The NRS and NIV translate the noun “adulteress” since a married woman is in mind in this stanza. The noun can mean wife and in this case she is married to someone else. Waltke (2004:231) calls her the “unchaste wife” for the same reason.

adjective, **hyrknm** “from the outsider or foreigner”, which is a description of the threat that she epitomizes. We are also drawn to her **hyrma** “speech” qualified as **hqylxh** “smooth” as her chief arsenal just like the wicked men in 2:12.

Similarly, just like the wicked men forsake the straight paths for the dark ways (2:13), the wayward woman correspondingly **tbz[h** forsakes **hyrw[n @wla** “the companion of her youth” which suggests her husband. The gravity of “forsaking” her husband is *synthetically paralleled* to the verb **hxkv** “she forgets” which in this case refers to **hyhla tyrb-taw** “the signed covenant of her God”. Her fatal flaw becomes the focus of the rest of the stanza. In 2:18 we are introduced to *parallel* metaphors, **htyb** “her house” and **hytlg[m** “her path” (cf. 2:8 and 15) which lead to **twm** “death” and **~yapr** “the dead” respectively speaking. These metaphors, Waltke (2004:232) correctly points out, are unpacked in 2:19 by emphasizing the unprotected state of **lk** “all” who go to her. The *repetition* of the negative particle **al** clearly indicates finality in yielding to her ways as that will instigate a point of no return.

The portraiture of the woman, against whom the son is being warned, inaugurates the **intertexture**. Her description as **hrz** “a stranger” (2:16) is a word that occurs some

eleven times in the OT.¹²⁴ She is the subject of 5:1-23; 6:20-35; 7:1-27. Her interests are also represented through the personified “Woman Folly” in 9:13-18. Yee (1989:53) assumes a single woman throughout these contexts by what is described as a poetic cluster. What makes her acquire the label of being a stranger is not that she is ethnically foreign to the Israelite culture. Rather, her actions of forsaking her husband cause her to live contrary to the upheld values. The reference to God as the one before whom the covenant with her husband was made, clearly indicates her conscious estrangement to the binding principles of Israel. Fox (1996b:42) offers a comprehensive explanation of this when he writes:

In chapters 5, 6 and 7, the Strange Woman is first of all a human seductress. The erotic character of her appeal is not muted. The literal reading is the only one conveyed by chapters 6 and 7, though symbolic readings encouraged elsewhere reflect back on these chapters. In 9:13-18 – apart from the addition – the woman figure is simply a ‘foolish woman’, without any necessary symbolic reverberations.

In all these cases the strange woman deliberately distances herself from the norm. By the same token, the action of distancing of herself is further emphasised by the use of *yrkn*¹²⁵ (2:16), which equally suggests waywardness as opposed to being a foreigner (cf. McKane 1970:285, Camp 1996:92 and Koptak 2003:102). Perdue (2000:87) suggests a broader perspective, particularly in regards to the synonym, *yrkn*, here which occurs in other OT references in speaking of other ethnic backgrounds, as in a foreign group (Deut. 17:15; 1 Ks. 11:1, 8), a prostitute (Pr. 23:27) or one unknown (Ecc. 6:2). He goes on to state that “the proposed interpretation of the strange

¹²⁴ See Exodus 30:9; Leviticus 10:1; Numbers 3:4; 17:2; 26:61; Ruth 3:2; Job 10:17; Proverbs 5:3; 7:5; Isaiah 30:24 where the concept suggests a scenario contrary to the norm.

¹²⁵ Although in many other OT usages the concept speaks of a foreigner, (see Exodus 21:8; Deuteronomy 17:5; Judges 19:12; 2 Samuel 15:19; Job 5:10; Zephaniah 1:8), in the book of Proverbs, a wayward wife is clearly what is in mind (see Proverbs 5:20; 6:24; 23:27).

woman and her activity in Proverbs includes adultery, common prostitution, cultic prostitution, devotion to fertility pagan deity, foreign culture and religion and folly, the opposite of Wisdom 9:1-18" (2000:87). This broader perspective is perhaps applicable to the greater scheme of things in the book of Proverbs, as Perdue rightly points out. However, the language in the context of our passage seems emphatically that of a wayward wife in sexual promiscuity.

In Malachi 2:10-16 a similar concern is raised although it clearly has a foreigner in mind. Similarly, 1 Kings 11:1 refers to king Solomon's foreign wives who led to his eventual downfall. In Ezra 10:2, 11, 14, 17, 18 and 44 in the post-exilic period, marriage to strange women became a real concern because of the potentially hazardous influence towards spiritual infidelity. At this time, Israel was not at her strongest point, religiously speaking, hence the weightiness with which the matter is handled.

The influence of the wayward woman was also a matter to be reckoned with. Waltke (2004:231) brings to our attention to her arsenal - her smooth words or seductive speech (2:16). The verb **qlx** he says comes from "a root whose nominal derivative is used of David's five 'smooth' stones", from an account that really needs no introduction. He continues to point out that the verb is also used in the action of making metal smooth (Is. 41:7) and metaphorically in reference to the heart, as deceitful (Hos. 10:2). Of particular interest are the seven occurrences where the verb refers to deceptive speech (Ps.5:9; 36:3; 55:21; Pr. 2:16; 7:5; 28:23; 29:5). In all cases is the danger of the entrapment is realized by paying attention to such talk. The

wayward woman's speech is her most damaging weapon. Garrett (1991:74) says that the verb, to make smooth, employed here means to flatter, which suggests that seduction was achieved by the appeal to the ego and not sexuality alone. That is why Yee (1989:53) regards the Strange Woman as the ultimate antithesis of the Lady Wisdom as "the author characterizes the two women as competitors for the same man, the son instructed by the father". Sadly she does not employ that powerful ability in a positive way to embrace her own husband whom she egoistically forsakes.

The subject of her husband, particularly the description "of her youth" (2:17) is *echoed* elsewhere in the OT (Mal. 2:14; Pr. 5:18; - wife of your youth; Joel 1:8). In all references, the partner of one's youth seems to carry the sense of a passionate relationship associated with that young love or first love (see Pr. 30:19). The weight brought to bear on this matter is added by the *allusion* to the covenant **hyhla tyrb** a concern similarly presented in Hosea 2:20 and Malachi 2:10. Once again we are reminded that the estrangement of the woman here is not ethnic, but her forgetting the binding covenantal terms that she made with her husband and in this case, before God. As Ross (1991:914) points, out the reference to the covenant is an indication that she is an Israelite. The deadly consequences of her actions here are presented from the world of her victims, which once again evokes the popular metaphor of "path/s" and related synonyms but in this case connected to "her house".

The reference to "her house" *echoed* in Proverbs 5:8; 7:8, 27; is described in telling language, as going down to the pit of death in 2:18. The same is true of "her paths" which lead to the spirit of the dead. As if that is not enough, the hazardous ways are

reiterated in 2:19 to spell out the finality of the self inflicted judgment of going to her, as seen in the references above. However, there is more at stake here than the life of the young man as we will see through the **social and cultural** texture.

Firstly, the **social and cultural** texture, for the most part, presents a *conversionist argumentation* by focusing on the corruption that the wayward woman truly embodies. In this stanza 2:16-19 there is nothing positive said about her, as the moral implications of her actions are what dominates the proceedings. While she is responsible and will suffer the consequences of her actions, that is not the speaker's primal concern. The son who is the potential victim of this woman is warned of paying with his very life if he heeds her seductive invitations.

Secondly, in terms of the *common social and cultural topics*, we have social and cultural systems and institutions that the text presupposes or evokes. On the one hand is marriage and on the other is community. In terms of marriage, we have the introduction of the woman concerned here as **hrz hvam** which Fox (1996b:31) says is a conventional designation which consists only in her belonging to another man. Marriage in the Israelite culture was upheld in the sense that the implied condemnation of the wayward woman damages that intention. Longman III (2003:84) says that "the book of proverbs insists on the importance of a strong cohesive family and denigrates anyone and anything that erodes the family bond". The forsaking of her husband and potentially seducing the son is obviously seen negatively. Thus adultery is seen as wrong and the son is warned to avoid immoral women (2:16-19; 3:13-18; 4:4-9; 5:1-23; 6:20-35; 7:1-27). The phrase "go to her" in 2:19 is loaded with sexual

connotations against which the son is warned. Perdue (2000:92) warns that “adultery diminished the solidarity of the family which was the core value among the understandings of the family in ancient Israel and early Judaism. Adultery also threatened the viability of the extended household, both in economic terms and in regard to the family’s future existence”. That is why the penalty for that offence in the OT was death (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22-24). Ironically, the same fate is implied in the poetic language of the speech (2:18-19). In contrast, the book of Proverbs celebrates a good wife (18:22; 19:14; 31:10-31) and at the same time registers the agony associated with a bad choice (11:22; 12:4; 19:13; 21:9, 19; 23:27; 25:24; 27:15-16).

In terms of the community, Israel’s system was divinely determined, hence the allusion to the covenant. In this context it is a marriage covenant that is the focus, but is presented as a direct interest of *hyma* “God”. The comments we made earlier on about her “strangeness” within her own culture makes us realize that she is no longer in line with the normal societal determinatives. Koptak (2003:102) says that “she is ‘strange’ or ‘other’ in the sense that her actions place her outside the norms of the Israelite community, even though she comes from within it”. In this context we cannot fully explore the issues related to communal systems without reference to marriage. Perdue’s (2000:92) comments are helpful at this juncture:

Although affection are occasionally mentioned between a husband and wife (Gen. 34:3-4; 1 Sam. 18:20), marriages in Israel and Judah were essentially an economic arrangement between two family households and had as their primary purpose survival through reproduction, the security of the husband’s household and property rights, and laws of inheritance.

The reason for referring to this statement is to show that there was more at stake here in giving in to the seductive motions of the wayward woman. The father undoubtedly had all these implications in mind, particularly when he concludes with sentiments in 2:20-22 that suggest land inheritance, which was the general desire for all Israel.

The **ideological texture** here raises the question pertaining to the implications of the "strangeness" in view of the wide range of connotations. Camp (2000:40) registers four possibilities: firstly, a person of foreign nationality; secondly, a person outside one's own family household; thirdly, a person who is not a member of the priestly caste; and fourthly, deities or practices that fall outside the covenant relationship with Yahweh. The strangeness here resonates from sexual and or marital conduct. In 2:17 she is described as having forsaken the husband of her youth. In 7:10 she is presented as a prostitute and in 7:19 as taking advantage of her husband's absence to allure her potential victim. The thought has crossed some minds concerning the power of women that these texts seem to suggest, as Pezhumkalttil (1994:86) writes:

The study of the texts helps us to grasp to a certain extent the power of woman in society, especially in the home, and more especially in the life of a man ... it would be useful to use one of the interpretation from the Rabbinic literature on this topic: "Rabbi Aha said: If a man marries a godly wife, it is as though he had fulfilled the whole Torah from beginning to end. To him applies; 'Thy wife is like a fruitful vine (Ps. 128:3). Therefore the verses of the chapter of the virtuous wife in Proverbs (31) are arranged in complete alphabetical sequence (and no letter is missing as in other alphabets in the Bible) from the Alef to Tau.

To glean from these portraits any form of positive aspects, is obviously not the intention of the text. To do so as some feminist scholars attempt, is ignoring the overwhelming negative outlook dominant in these texts. Even though some scholars have argued for the existence of "sacred prostitution" in Ancient Israel (see Camp

2000:45), we find that this text and others that ensue in the book of Proverbs do not offer explicit tangents for such perspectives. In addition, the mention of God as the passage does means that there is little scope for other views.

In view of the **sacred texture**, McKane (1970:286) takes issue with the use of **hyrma** a reference to the witness of the solemn marriage covenant (cf. Farmer 1991:33). Up to this point the book of Proverbs consistently employed the name **hwhy** in reference to God. We are not sure if this variation should be used to suggest a foreign god. This is particularly difficult with the use of **~yhla** in 2:5 in synonymously with **hwhy**. The bottom line is that the wayward woman is in direct conflict with a divinely instituted obligation. Koptak (2003:102) correctly espouses that "she is estranged and a stranger to the way of Yahweh, but it is seen in her wayward behaviour, not in idolatry". This is not to deny the threat that foreign women posed as Camp (1996:94) writes:

Closer analysis reveals that her ethnic status is not the first consideration. Rather, her strangeness of a sexual sort come large, though this is metonymically paired with religious 'infidelity' of some sort ... Foreign women were dangerous not only as potential conduits of foreign worship into Israelite families, but as representatives and mediators of the claims that non-Jews or 'wrong kind' of Jews - might make on the land'.

We have already alluded to the threat that foreign women posed through the various scriptures that prohibited such marriages, purely on religious and not racial grounds. Loyalty to Yahweh could not be seen in isolation since it affected all areas of life as Atkinson (1996:34) comprehensively comments:

In the Old Testament, family loyalties were intended to reflect the loyalty of the covenant to God and his people, and theirs to him. The marriage covenant and the covenant of Yahweh were analogies of each other. This makes even more significant the use of the word covenant in 2:17 by forsaking the partner of her youth, the loose woman forgets the covenant of her God. By betraying her covenant of marriage, this woman looses herself from the covenant community and turns her back on the covenant of God.

In that reciprocity, we ought to see the effect of her actions and their implications on the addressee.

While the passage presents the seduction of the strange woman with a sense of compulsion, the kind that would entrap the unlearned (Pr. 5:3; 26:28), she does not have the final say. Van Leeuwen's comment (1997:44) is important to bring into perspective here when he says that "the allurements of the strange woman are powerful, but they can be avoided through the deeper and nobler love of wisdom. Greater passions displace lesser ones". That development of a passion for wisdom is the pivotal issue of this speech (2:1-22) that the father directs to his son. That climatic deduction is captured in the final stanza.

1.1.8 The outcome 2:20-22

The **inner texture** commences with the opening word **!m** "thus" or "on account of" in 2:20, which effectively calls to mind the preceding issues as determinants of the outcome. The verb that follows **!t** in the second person masculine singular construct obviously refers to the addressee as the one being specified here in terms of the intended result. Our attention is also drawn to the commendation of **~ybwj \$rdb**

“ways of good men”, *synonymously paralleled* to the ~yqydc twxraw “the paths of the righteous”. Their affirmative destiny in 2:21 is introduced by the adverb yk “surely”. Those who participate in such good company find their true heritage in #ra “the land”, the only word repeated in this stanza 2:21 and 22. The benefactors of the land in 2:21 are referred to as the righteous and blameless who stand in sharp contrast to the wicked in 2:22. Thus the reference to land is used to *antithetically parallel* the removal of the ~y[vrw wicked from it in 2:22. The wicked correspondingly find their counterpart in ~ydgAbw “the unfaithful or treacherous”, who are wtrky “dismissed” or “cut off” and WXSy “torn off” the land in verbs that Waltke (2004:236) describes as a case of synonymous, metaphorical parallel.

Matters pertaining to **intertextuality** are, firstly, related to the catchwords \$rd “way” (2:12 and 20) and twXra “paths” (2:8, 13 and 20). As mentioned before, these are key concepts used in this account as representative of the sum total of a person’s character. In this context, as before, the metaphor singles out an individual’s given choice as van Leeuwen (1997:44) espouses:

Although each person must walk in his or her own path, we humans travel in companies gathered and directed by the ultimate loves for either wisdom or folly. Life is not neutral and static, but a movement towards good or ill, however hidden and subtle that may be.

Frequent in the book of Proverbs are the contrasting behaviours and fates of the righteous and the wicked as prescribed by their chosen pathway (Perdue 2000:93). This is particularly highlighted in chapters 10-15.

Secondly, is the reference to the land which can allude to a number of things. In this case, however, it refers to the covenantal heritage promised in Genesis 12:1 and reiterated in patriarchal narratives until the fulfillment. As the passage implies, land represented a gift for religious fidelity which could be taken away for failure to abide by such divine regulations (see Ex. 20:12; Deut. 4:1; 5:16; 8:1, 19-20; 25:15; 30:11-20; Ps. 25:13; 37:3, 9, 22, 29, 34; 69:35-36). Ross (1991:914) is correct in saying that the land question brings in the Deuteronomic motif, where it is a critical issue on the brink of the conquest and settlement. However, the land question remained a conditional benefit in the life of Israel as implied in 2:21-22 and the passages cited above. Land is also featured in wisdom writings as a significant heritage (Job 15:18-19; Pr. 10:30; 23:8) which effectively connects Israel's historical traditions with this genre (see van Leeuwen 1997:45).

Thirdly, is the reference to the wicked as representatives of unacceptable behaviour.

Waltke (2004:235) describes them as follows:

In this book the [wicked] refers to the impious people who are greedy (10:3; 21:10), violent (10:6), threaten innocent life (12:6; 24:15); practice deceit (12:5) and cruelty (12:10), and speak perversely (10:32; 11:11; 15:28; 19:28).

In our immediate context the wicked men of 2:12-15 as well as the wayward woman of 2:16-19 belong to those who are being dismissed from the heritage.

In terms of **social and cultural texture**, the concluding stanza gravitates towards the *Gnostic manipulationist argumentation*. The inference to walking in the ways of the Lord and, equally so, keeping to the paths of the righteous in 2:20 are presented as distinctive knowledge necessary for inheriting the land in 2:21. Habtu (2006:752) equates this to the attainment of wisdom when he says that, "by gaining wisdom and avoiding the snare of evil men and evil women, the young man preserves his life". These sentiments, therefore, serve as a clear portraiture of the ultimate intentions of the father's speech which boils down to these summative statements. The ethos of this climatic ending is well presented by Koptak (2003:103) who writes:

This conclusion helps us appreciate the persuasive purpose of this whole chapter. In its original context, this instruction would be heard as an invitation to seek wisdom as a way of life – way emphasizing that wisdom is more than intellectual pursuit, life emphasizing its reward of deliverance from removal from the land and death. It is God who accomplishes that deliverance and protection, and the means by which he accomplishes it is the gift of wisdom.

The crux of this fatherly instruction, therefore, extends beyond the borders of the home and shows the interconnectedness of home and community, subjects that are not seen in isolation in the Israelite religious life. This has close connections with the **sacred texture** that we now turn to.

The **sacred texture** is of interest here in view of the perceived theological perception already referred to, of patrimonial land as a divine gift (Perdue 2000:93). Although Yahweh is not mentioned by name, he is implied within the statements of this conclusion in that the major teaching of this speech is that wisdom remains a gift from him. We agree with Davis (2000:14) who says that "wisdom does not require any special intellectual gifts. The fruit of wisdom, a well-ordered life and a peaceful mind,

result not from a high IQ, but from a disposition of the heart that the sages (wisdom teachers) of Israel most often call the 'fear of the Lord'". The father correspondingly cites the same source (2:5), a theme conceivably implied in the rest of his speech. Atkinson (1996:73) captures the essence of this connection when he writes about inheriting the land in association with covenant obligations:

To get involved with a woman who has loosed herself from the covenant obligations of the people of God is to jeopardize one's own place within the covenant, and risks being cut off from all that sustains life in the land which belongs to God's people. Such a man is cut off from his family, and thereby from the life of the family of God.

Although Atkinson says this with particular reference to the wayward woman being cut off from God's people, this is also true about associating with the wicked men. In both cases, removal from the Land physically through exile or death is in view. These social issues are not spoken of as isolation to divine requirements.

1.1.9 Reflecting on the protection realized through wisdom

To summarise our findings, firstly, we see in 2:1-22 as situating these instructions within the domain of the home. This is not to deny the possibility of a different setting, however, the emotive fatherly appeal to the son which summons him to hear Wisdom as a calling to hear God, seems to actualize the parental responsibility of Deuteronomy 6:1-9. The mnemonic devices employed in the poem also seem to reflect the recommendations of Deuteronomy 6:7-9 for parents as they impress these instructions on the children for assistance with retention strategies. Koptak (2003:110) is correct in saying that "the teaching of this chapter urges parents to take seriously the task of wisdom education in the home. In saying so, parents, are prescribed, as part of their primary task, to be wisdom teachers.

Secondly, there is a sense of urgency in the parental call to the son to seek wisdom which suggests that education in wisdom emanates from the inherent desire to have it (Koptak 2003:108). The opening verbs in the conditional clause create an impression that the quest for wisdom ought to be coveted and pursued like valued treasure and in so doing one is well on the way towards its realization. Perdue (2000:89) correctly cautions us that this process does not suggest “wisdom is not available to rational inquiry and human observation. While these indigenous talents are necessary for obtaining wisdom and sharpening the understanding of the comprehensive variety of topics the sages examine and enfold in their teaching tradition, they are not enough”. This is where the “fear of the Lord” motif comes into play.

Thirdly, we notice that in this perspectival outlook, there is no dichotomy between the secular and the sacred. As the warning to avoid the wicked men and the wayward woman is issued, in the same breath divinely instituted requirements are implied. Graham-Taylor (2001:128) is correct in showing the interconnectedness of all life dynamics when he writes:

Adultery goes right to the root of our relationship with God and, by extension, with one another. We cannot have satisfactory social relations if we are not trustworthy, faithful and committed. This is why we are, in this portion of scripture, reminded that if we become inmates in the household of adultery we are on the slippery slope to hell and destruction – and, most alarming of all, we are warned there is no way back.

Similar sentiments could be said about the company of the wicked whose pathway leads to destruction. When the father speaks as emotionally charged, he knows there is no room for experimentation. After all, it is his son that he speaks to. Koptak (2003:109) sees some good in adopting such an all embracing perspective as a valuable and effective strategy when he comments:

Someone might observe that in our day a teacher cannot make the assumption because the ancients did not divide life into sacred and secular realms the way we do. However, I believe that the parental teacher's attempt to shape the young man's desires is more likely to be successful in our day for that very reason, because it also does not make the mistake of separating the good life from the virtuous life (and its theological foundations).

Lastly, is the significant benefit of parental wisdom linked to land heritage. The land question may not be such a prominent issue in most contemporary settings as it was not only a portion of a family's ancestral heritage or the covenantal promise to Israel as a nation (Fox 2000:123). Proverbs situates the land issue as a benefit for walking the path of wisdom and removal from land as punishment for failing to heed parental instructions in the long run. In more ways than we realize today, is parental instruction crucial.

1.2 Wise advice for the sluggard 6:6-11

We now come to this poem in which the important feature of communal survival is idealised. The context is summer or harvest time when hard work was directed towards the acquiring of food (cf. Gerstenberger 2002:20). The family could not afford to have a member who was lazy, and in being that way, contributed nothing to the communal productive efforts. In fact, a lazy person could not afford his lifestyle since it would not be the riches he missed out on, as Waltke (2004:339) points out, but rather "it is food, the necessity of life". Clifford (1999:76) picks up on this theme when he observes that the tone of this address is "sharper than usual, perhaps because the context is harvest, which is so crucial for the community's welfare". Having a lazy person is detrimental to the survival of all. Simply put, "laziness is another way to

become poor” (Harlow 1984:26). Clearly, this is a subject of extreme importance to bring up among many other lessons that are featured in these exchanges.

Our interest in this poem is threefold. Firstly, this is the only time within the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs that the subject is brought up. Here, it is featured within the scope of parental instructions, although that claim is not directly made. This brings to the fore Gerstenberger’s (2002:25) sociological orientation on the Israelite family circle and in particular the productive role expected of each member for the sake of the welfare of all.

Secondly, for the first time in our text, we have the use of observation as an instructional mode. Unlike the previous cases where hypothetical scenarios are imagined, and typical events recreated, in this instance the learner is commanded to go and learn by observing natural phenomenon. Longman III (2006:171) says that “with the call to go and observe the activity of the industrious ant, we see here an explicit example of the importance of observation in the development and support of wisdom principles”. Longman III’s views are echoed by Gittay (2001:46) who suggests that the observation of a set of fixed cosmological rules projecting order and stability is a highly persuasive and beneficial wisdom principle. The importance of observation is uniformly recalled in Proverbs 24:32¹²⁶ as a fruitful exercise.

Thirdly, in the Shona traditional culture we have similar admonitions towards hard work (see Hamutyinei 1992:48). At the same time, it reflects strong parental authority

126 Pr. 24:32 “I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw”

emblematic of Shona father whose tone of address changes when he brings up unpleasant matters. As in all the previous cases, the son cannot talk back, as a sign of respect. Thus, the way the subject is handled in biblical and Shona contexts reflects an individual focus which has some affinity with a domestic setting. With these preliminary thoughts in mind we will now consider the text more closely.

1.2.1 Text and exegetical framework 6:6-11

The framework reflected here follows the natural division of the poem where the first half, 6:6-8, describes the industry of the ant as an object lesson. The second half, 6:9-11 focuses on the sluggard to whom the object lesson applies. Verse 11 provides some form of closure.

Instruction	}	~k'(x]w: h'yk,är'd> haePr> lce_[' hl'îm'n>- la,-%lE) 6 `Ive(moW rjEivo !yci ^a q' Hl'î-!yae(rv<βa] 7 `Hl'(k'a]m; ryci ^a Q'b;÷ hr'îg>a' Hm'_x.l; #yIQ:âB; !ykiät' 8
Admonition	}	`^t<)n"V.mi ~WqiT' yt; ^a m'÷ bK'_v.Ti Ylceî[' yt;Pm'-d[; 9 `bK'(v.li ~yId:ây" qBuPxi Yj[; m. tAm+WnT. j[;äm. tAnveâ j[;äm. 10

Consequence	}	@ `!gE)m' vyaiäK. ^a_r>so*x.m;W÷ ^v<+are %LEih;m.ki-ab'(W 11
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1.2.2 Translation

Proverbs 6:6 Go to the ant, you lazybones; consider its ways, and be wise.
 7 Without having any chief or officer or ruler,
 8 it prepares its food in summer, and gathers its sustenance in harvest.

9 How long will you lie there, O lazybones? When will you rise from your sleep?
10 A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest,
11 and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want, like an armed warrior.

1.2.3 Inner texture in Proverbs 6:6-11

The **inner texture**, firstly, draws our attention to the opening verb, $\$1$ “go”, which is in the imperative construct creatively set at the beginning of the unit to introduce the lesson on diligence. The command seems to have a rousing effect on the part of the $lc[$ “sluggard” or “lazybones” (see Waltke 2004:336), whom, as we will see, is preoccupied with sleep (6:9-10). The command also puts into perspective the *opening-middle-closing texture* where the *beginning* is raised in 6:6-8 as the lowly ant, van Leeuwen (1997:74) says, serves as a moral example. The *middle* in 6:9-10, presents the condemnation of the sluggard by raising rhetorical question, $ytm-d[$, literally “after how long?” with the interrogative *repeated* in the same verse ytm designed to apply the apparent lesson from the ant by rousing the sleeper. The passage then *closes* in 6:11 typically with a consequence clause that reveals that too much sleep or lack of industry will lead to yet another self induced trap, (cf. 6:1-5), in this case poverty.

Secondly, we note that in typical Instruction fashion we have a predominant use of the imperative in the opening statement, some four times in total. However, the addressee usually indicated by the vocative “my son” is replaced with the double vocative, $lc[$ “sluggard”, in 6:6 and 9, perhaps because of the repulsiveness of the subject. There is

some sarcasm in the request for the "sluggard" to learn from the **hlmn** "ant" a feminine singular noun in this case. Hubbard (1989:99) picks up on the sarcasm by projecting a 5ft plus and some 130 pound in weight sluggard being told to let an ant, less than a quarter of an inch long and weighing a slight fraction of an ounce, be the teacher. He continues that "a person with gifts of speech, with a brain the size of a whole anthill is told to bend over and peer down, and learn from the lowly ant. The irony is powerful" (1989:99 cf. Ross 1991:932).

Thirdly, and closely related to that, is the significance of the feminine construct in the concept **hlmn** "ant", which most commentators do not highlight. Van Leeuwen (1997:75) regards this as yet another occasion for female symbolism exposed in the text, after the personification of Wisdom as we will consider later in this chapter. The singular construct is also significant in that it delineates individual responsibility and ignores the collaborative behaviour of ants, noteworthy as that might be.

Fourthly, as predictable of Hebrew poetry, we have the use of *parallelism*. In 6:8 the industrious nature of the ant is depicted on the one hand as storing its provision in summer which is *synonymously paralleled* to her gathering food at harvest on the other hand. The particularization of summer and the harvest is unmistakable, a peak period of work. Similarly, the rhetorical question raised in 6:9, "how long will you lie there" is synonymously paralleled to "when will you rise from your sleep". Even here, the focus on the sluggard's slumber is highlighted twice and taken up further in 6:10. In the consequential clause we have the use of two similes, "like a robber" and "like an armed warrior", to describe the effect of a lazy lifestyle which is **Var** "poverty", and **RSXM**

“want”. Longman III (2006:172) alleges that the imagery here suggests that poverty will sneak up on the person and arrive suddenly, which serves as a warning with the hope that the “people who have a propensity to be lazy will stir themselves into activity”.

1.2.4 Intertexture in Proverbs 6:6-11

Firstly, we need to point out that the “sluggard” is a prominent subject in the book of Proverbs (10:26; 13:4; 15:19; 19:24; 20:4; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30-34; 26:13-16). What is particular to a majority of these texts is they emphasise the individual. As much as the Israelites enjoyed a communal ideal, they could not escape from the fact that individuals made up the solidarity they took pleasure in. Therefore, the stance taken here of singling out the offender was crucial in a communal setting.

Secondly, the examples from nature in terms of industriousness and other aspects also feature quite a lot in the OT (Job 12:7; Is. 1:3; Jer. 8:7). More specifically, is the reiteration of the “ant” as an example (Pr. 30:25-26) and the comparison to locusts and lizards (Pr. 30:27-28). The main idea here is that lessons from nature are available to all and as such, are indisputable. In our instance the lesson is threefold; that of foresight, industry and preparedness. Perdue (2000:125) comments that “unstated but assumed is that the ant recognises that the preparation will enable it to survive sustained periods of drought and bitter cold. This illustration from nature becomes for the wise person a compelling example of the necessity of hard work and the requisite preparation for future survival”.

Thirdly, there is the general association of the harvest with hard work as a divine institution (Gen. 8:22). As a result a number of scriptures reflect that common notion of summer time and hard work, (Ex. 23:10,16; Pr. 10:5; 14:4; 18:20; 20:4; Is. 62:9; Joel 3:13; Mt. 9:37-38). The point to be made from this, is that the ant demonstrates being in tune with cosmic reality as Clifford (1999:76) says that she “instinctively springs into action at any opportunity of gathering food”.¹²⁷ Hubbard (1989:99) endorses the same idea by stating that the fact that the ant plans ahead demonstrates her understanding of the seasons and invariably the cycles of life, unlike the sluggard who would rather sleep a little. Such is the disdain of the sluggard’s laziness and love of sleep that the sentiments of 6:10-11 are repeated verbatim in Proverbs 24:33-34.

1.2.5 Social and Cultural texture in Proverbs 6:6-11

The subject in 6:6-11 assumes a *Gnostic manipulationist argumentation* by virtue of the command to “go to the ant ... consider its ways and be wise”. The distinctive knowledge to be gained from this observation, we note, is what would make one “wise”, an imperative attainment in this account. There are some aspects of *common social and cultural topics* implied in the fact that the subject of observation, the ant, has no chief, officer or ruler in 6:7. This presupposes some form of governance or administrative institutions that existed within the cultural setting through which labour was organised. Hubbard (1989:99) suggests that the particularisation of these officials implies the Solomonic bureaucracy of which the ant is not a part. Even hierarchical

¹²⁷ At this time while I am writing this portion in the month of January, my wife insists on doing the dishes right after dinner otherwise ants will invade her kitchen. She says that it only takes them a few moments for ants to detect a potential source of food and then they spring into action. A lot of our crops start ripening around this time of the year. I have also observed while working in my garden recently under some of our pot plants that ants had established their colonies and with that were tiny pieces of grain they had collected.

structures within an ant colony are not in view here as Longman III (2006:172)

comments:

The fact that modern scientific study has uncovered hierarchy in an ant colony is beside the point. This information was not available to the ancient Near Eastern observer, to the sage is speaking from the point of view of naïve observation. And without obvious social structure, these creatures cope quite well.

Even if this information was available, it does not take away from the point being made in this poem. Waltke (2004:336) concurs with this explanation when he adds that even though there is a perfect social organisation among ants, as entomologists have discovered, this does not imply a hierarchy of command. The concept *!ycq* “chief” describes one who holds others accountable in upholding the law.¹²⁸ The *rjv* “officer” was someone who exercised military, judicial or civil administrative duties. The *lvm* “ruler” describes someone who governed or had dominion. None of these leaders are in view when it comes to the ant’s work ethic put forward here. On the contrary, the sluggard would have such structures to his aid, and yet astonishingly fails to deliver.

Related to the above is the fact that the ant’s foresight, is line with seasonal cycles. Van Leeuwen (1997:75) tells us that Palestine has two main seasons, the cool, rainy season which runs from October to May and the warm, dry season which runs from June to September, with three to four months of no rain at all. April is when most of the harvesting took place, where the early period of that month would be barley and the latter wheat (see Waltke 2004:338). However, the gathering of the food by the ant

¹²⁸ See Jos. 19:13; Job 29:35; Pr. 25:13; Is. 3:6-7; Dan. 11:18 for the use of the same concept and perhaps its implication in these contexts. The idea of a chieftainship was not formally instituted in Israel. The closest to that ideal is probably the period of the judges, otherwise “chiefs” were known among Israel’s neighbours (Num. 25:15).

was not limited to the two main crops but many other potential sources.¹²⁹ There are over a 100 known species of ants to whom this scenario could apply. But as Waltke (2004:336) advocates it probably was the harvester ant (*Messor semirufus*), found everywhere in Palestine, that the speaker had in mind.

To add to the above, we draw our attention to the rhetorical questions raised in 6:9. The questions presume that the harvest is actually happening, hence the implicit admonishment to reverse the futile laziness. According to van Leeuwen (1997:75) these questions throw responsibility where it belongs, but gives the sluggard the freedom to make up his own mind. In other words there is still room to redeem the situation. This is followed by the mimicking of the sluggard's own excuse for wanting to take a "little sleep" which is the use of effective irony to rebuke the sluggard (Ross 1991:932). Here is an attempt to belittle the quantity of sleep. Waltke (2004:339) points out that "sleep is the defining characteristic of the sluggard the love of sleep is pure escapism – a refusal to face the world".

The poem closes with by pinpointing rather regrettably that "hunger" will be the outcome of a lazy lifestyle. The use here of the similes here of a "robber" and "armed man" is interesting. The former represents someone who takes another's possessions by force and the latter one who is intended to protect but turns out to be the offender. In either scenario the victim is defenceless. The state of poverty is here epitomised by the use of a concept not normally used, of the poor and the oppressed, as Waltke (2004:339) observes, who are a special concern for the Lord. These poor and

¹²⁹ See 1 Chr. 12:40 for a variety of food sources consumed in Israel which would have been accessible to the ant in her gathering her much needed supplies.

defenceless usually become destitute through circumstances beyond their control, such as widows and orphans who lose their access to income when the breadwinner passes on. By contrast the sluggard, described in 6:10 as wanting to rest his hands, is here reflecting his reluctance to work and that is the cause of his poverty. Koptak (2003:188) makes the following comment:

The teaching also shows that laziness, at its root, is a failure of love. While others work to provide for self and family, caring for others, the loafer wants to be carried. In sum, the theme common to the first and second teachings may well be that of laziness, a wilful negligence that looks to bear the burdens that should be one's own. Just as it is wrong to take what is not one's own, so it is wrong to shirk responsibility for what is.

At the heart of this concern, therefore, is the future of not just the individual concerned, but society as a whole. By the same token, Garrett (1993:97) defines the sluggard as "someone who works to undermine social and personal relationships for his own benefit ... someone who openly rejects the rules of society and thus undermines normal social relations". That represents a serious concern, hence the attention given to this subject at this juncture of the book of Proverbs.

1.2.6 Reflecting on Proverbs 6:6-11

Firstly, the ant is amazingly described in Proverbs 30:25 as a creature with little strength and yet it has the ability to store up food in summer. That, if you like, is the crux of the matter which this lesson from nature brings out. If an ant in her limited state has the foresight to provide for her needs, what excuse can a sluggard, one who is reluctant to work, forward to justify his position? This picture serves as an apt warning to a sluggard who, by his actions, invariably subordinates himself to such a lowly creature. For that reason we have the command to "go" and learn from her, to

depict the degradation implicit in this scenario. Productivity was important for the sustenance of the community which could not afford the idleness of even one of its members. The point is driven home beyond question through the approach taken in the treatise found in Proverbs 6:6-11. Habtu (2006:756) adds that “where the student has previously been addressed repeatedly as “my son” (6:1, 3), in this passage he is repeatedly addressed as “you sluggard” (6:6, 9). This is not only humiliation that the teacher uses to make his point about diligence and indolence. The sluggard is sarcastically advised to go and learn from ants”.

Secondly, we have the evoking of Gerstenberger’s (2002:20) concept of a family as a close community focused on acquiring food together and as a group that indubitably shared all that it found and acquired. As a result, we have a clearly developed theological position that governed that co-existence and understandably communicated within the family setting.

1.3 Against a malevolent character 6:12-15

The Instructions we find in Proverbs 6:12-15 describe a person who is a menace to society and as such his destiny leads to self destruction. A similar theme of a person who sows discord is reiterated in the passage that ensues. Our interest in this passage lies in the fact that personal character, which the father insists on in the preceding exchanges, has a lot of bearing on society. Hinds (1998:223) suggests that the “teacher strives to help learners think about the community’s beliefs, values, and way of life. The teacher does not promote mere memorisation of facts, although memorisation can be helpful; rather, the learner is encouraged to play with the community’s beliefs and practices”.

To Hinds' thesis we subscribe Gerstenberger's (2002:25) conception of the Israelite social strata which does not treat an individual in splendid isolation from the rest of society. Even though our passage addresses an individual (the malevolent character), it only does so to reveal how the particularized aspects have an impact on the rest of society. The community's way of life may not be explicitly obvious in this passage because of the individual focus. However, we cannot miss the hint we are given in 6:14, which Waltke (2004:342) argues to be the heart of the poem as he comments:

These lively descriptions of the insurrectionist aim to form Israel's youth (see 1:4, 5) into constructive members of the community by vividly detailing a troublemaker's abhorrent features and by warning his inevitable judgment. These deadly marks are the end product of dabbling with evil, so stay far away from them. One begins the road to becoming a troublemaker and under God's wrath by trying to make easy money such as going surety or by avoiding work.

A similar effect of individual's character on the rest of society is also a subject of concern with the Shona traditional culture in view of the emphasis on communal life.

1.3.1 Text and exegetical framework

The passage opens with three verses that describe the characteristics of the insurrectionist 6:12-14 followed by a portraiture of their destiny 6:15. The description is brief and to the point. It builds up a form of suspense which does not last very long as suddenly the end is pronounced. It is as if the author did not want to take much of his/her time with what seemed rather obvious – there is no future for a personality of this kind.

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	`hP,(tWviQ.[i %le ^a Ah÷ !w<a"+ vyaiä l[;Y:liB.â ~d'aa' 12
Description	`wyt'([oB.c.a,B. hr, ^a mo÷ wl'_g>r;B. lleämo wyn"y[eB.â #reäqo 13 Î~ynIiy"d>miÐ ĭ~ynId'm.À t[e_-lk'B. [r'ä vreäxo AB ^a liB. ÿtAk'Puh.T;(14 `x;Le(v;y>
Destiny	@ `aPe(r>m; !yaeäw> rbe ^a V'yI÷ [t;P,î Ad+yae aAbåy" ~aot.Piâ !Ke ^a -l[; 15

1.3.2 Translation

Proverbs 6:12 A scoundrel and a villain goes around with crooked speech,
13 winking the eyes, shuffling the feet, pointing the fingers,
14 with perverted mind devising evil, continually sowing discord;
15 on such a one calamity will descend suddenly; in a moment, damage beyond repair.

1.3.3 Inner Texture in Proverbs 6:12-15

The **inner texture** opens by employing the generic concept ~da "a man", immediately qualified as l[y]b "a scoundrel", to indicate that the speaker has a specific character in mind. The noun describes worthlessness as derived from the concepts y]b "without" and l[y] "worth, use or profit". The opening concepts are duplicated by use of parallel equivalents, !wa vya "a wicked man" which serve to emphasise the undesirable nature of the character. The noun !wa is *repeated* in 6:18 to show the connectedness of the two units. This is followed by a detailed description of the various traits that comprise this personality. The description itself engages the *opening-middle-closing texture*, firstly by introducing us to the character with a specific label, and secondly, by prescribing the various negative aspects that comprise such a

personality, and thirdly closing with the fateful destiny of such a personality. Clifford (1999:76) advocates that the description here opens in 12a with a focus on the essence of the personality, followed by his demeanor in 12b-13, and then his inner life in 14a, his effect on society in 14b and destiny in 15. Longman III (2006:173) supports Clifford's structure.

1.3.4 Intertexture in Proverbs 6:12-15

The subject of the "scoundrel" and "villain" occur frequently in the book of Proverbs and elsewhere in the OT (2 Sam. 20:1; 1 Ks. 21:10, 13; Pr. 10:29; 12:21; 16:27; 17:4; 19:28; 21:15; 22:8). This mostly applies to people, as van Leeuwen (1997:76) says, who disrupt the social and moral order. Citing 1 Samuel 10:27; 25:17 and 30:22; Ross (1991:933) describes them as those who violate the law by acting in a contemptuous and foolish manner against cultic observance or social institutions.

Several traits are highlighted to depict their wickedness. Leading the lot is the aspect of **hp twvq[** "crooked speech" (which recurs in Proverbs 6:19; 13:5; 14:5, 25; 25:18) as an undesirable element. In fact other abusive uses of the mouth or speech are equally depicted in the book of Proverbs, such as rumours in 18:8, slander in 10:18; 20:19; and gossip in 11:13; 17:4. Van Leeuwen (1997:76) reminds us that "in human affairs, there is nothing more powerful than an open mouth, whether for good or for ill". The crooked mouth is the scoundrel's most potent weapon.

The crooked mouth is coupled with other body parts, which supposedly are utilised for equally damaging causes, "winking the eyes, shuffling the feet and pointing the

fingers” 6:13. The precise meaning of these gestures seems to be an enigma. Longman III (2006:174) explains that “their significance is embedded in ancient culture, and we may not understand their full significance”. Taking a cue from McKane’s study (1970), Hubbard (1989:101) suggests some connection to pagan practice or collectively as a bag of tricks and harmful omens. However, his initial proposal that the “body language probably implores more than shiftiness or subterfuge, though both are involved” seems more reasonable (cf. Longman III 2006:174). This proposal gives the impression of the worthlessness or untrustworthiness of an insurrectionist. Ross (1991:933) also regards the sinister language as representing gestures that depict a form of deception if not a way of making insinuations. Waltke (2004:344) takes a whole different perspective saying that the “gestures imply that he [the insurrectionist] has followers who agree and conspire with him, and understand his nonverbal speech”. In saying so he denies magical connotations.

And yet there is one more body part that represents the driving force behind his actions, and that is **wblb** “in his heart/mind” (see also Gen. 17:17; I Ks. 10:24; Ps. 14:1; Pr. 26:25; 28:26; Oba. 1:3). The decisive nature of the heart as the core of a person is expressed explicitly in Jeremiah 17:9-10:

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?
I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve (NIV).

Longman III (2006:174) emphasises how the heart takes a more profound level from which all actions, motives and speech emanate. From the status of the insurrectionist’s heart we gain the impression that all else, in terms of the undesirable personality traits,

proceeds from it. The description of these traits which, according to Clifford (1999:76), prescribe his demeanour and inner life, adds up to depict a highly deceptive personality in view of the concept **!dm** "discord". This concept occurs some 10 times in the book of Proverbs underscoring each time, the difficulties associated with living with such a character (see 6:19; 10:12; 15:18; 16:28; 29:22) The graphic portraiture of the undesirability of discord is ultimately spoken of with particular reference to a wife (19:12; 21:9, 19; 25:24; 27:15). This has striking implications for family life.

1.3.5 Social and Cultural Texture in Proverbs 6:12-15

The mention of the concept **!dm** "discord(s)" (6:14b) in the plural construct suggests a variety of ways in which the personality concerned is unbearable in society. The passage also indicates that this is a continuous practice through the phrase **t[-lkb** "all the time". The description, therefore, assumes a *conversionist argumentation* which considers the world to be corrupt because of the insurrectionist. Without prescribing a resolution as such, the description is intended to serve as a warning and in so doing to send a signal that this is undesirable from what we already know to be a closely knit society (cf. Gerstenberger 2002:20).

The above citing also allows us to perceive that the community is in total view here since "discord" can only happen through (bad) contact with others. Needless to say, this brings to the fore the various societal units that are potentially affected by the chosen actions, attitudes and speeches of this character. In speaking about the adopted choices of the perverted heart, Hubbard (1989:101) comments:

All choices (“heart”) are malicious, because discord among family unity, are their aim. Such discord may even carry them into court to try to give legal expression to their contentiousness.

From the preceding portraiture of the malevolent character in 6:12-14, the pronouncement of their destiny is predictable in 6:15. Waltke (2004:345) describes it as a retributive outcome since the calamity that the insurrectionist caused, will recoil upon him. Van Leeuwen (1997:76) regards the fate as sudden demise, while Ross (1991:933) views it as utter ruin. We are left without a doubt in our minds, that the actions of a person who causes discord are self condemning. The concept ~aotp “sudden”, brings into view an element of surprise, while the phrase aprm !yaw, implies irreversible consequences. In attempting to bring to light possible cultural realities leading to this outcome, Hubbard (1989:101) writes:

What ultimately crushes (“be broken”) such a wretch is not described (v. 15). It may be a righteous uprising of the community, it may be a negative decision by the town’s elders in the litigation that takes place in the city gate. In any case, the defeat is so devastating that all temptation to copy the perverse person is quelled.

What we appreciate about Hubbard’s comment is the fact that it brings into view the community in its entirety in the execution of justice. In so doing, it accentuates the warning against deviousness.

1.3.6 Reflecting on Proverbs 6:12-15

As in the previous scenario (Pr. 6:6-11), a different way of communication is adopted here. There is a strong reliance on imaginative power by the vivid portrayal of a wicked person which serves as a warning. Hubbard (1989:101) is correct in his assessment that the presentation of the insurrectionist’s defeat is so injurious that it

dispels any intentions to copy such perversity. The unit which ensues, also assists in restating the lesson taught here in a different literary format. We now turn our attention to that.

1.4 Abominable conduct 6:16-19

There is scope to regard 6:12-19 as belonging to a single unit because of the common subject matter. If that is the case, what is said in the first strophe 6:12-15 is, perhaps to a greater efficacy, restated in 6:16-19. Hubbard (1989:101) views the material in the latter, possibly, as a commentary of the former. He bases his argument on what he regards as the climatic line that is reiterated in both accounts 6:14 and 19. Habtu (2006:756) treats both poems under a single heading "Beware of mischief makers" as he comments:

This warning against mischief makers who cause dissension in the community is given in two forms. In 6:12-15 a mischievous person is described and in 6:16-19 similar information is repeated in a numerical saying.

Our interest in this unit is twofold. Firstly, it is the only time within the first nine chapters in the book of Proverbs where a numerical pattern is employed as a teaching aid. We understand that a numerical pattern of this nature, among other aspects, tends to emphasise the last aspect on the list that is presented (cf. Hubbard 1989:102; Longman III 2006:175). If that is the case in 6:16-19, the last item is of particular interest to this study. Secondly, we have the use of the concept $\sim yXa$ "brothers" which the NRS understandably translates "family". In view of this familial orientation, Longman III (2006:178) argues that "this proverb reminds us that it is wrongminded to think of the book as a collection of individual ethics. The community is very much in

mind throughout". This being the last item in the list, as mentioned before, makes it climatic or the most emphasised. With that in mind we will now take a closer look at the saying.

1.4.1 Text and exegetical framework

Our text is fairly straightforward since its structural layout is guided by the numerical saying introduced in 6:16 and elaborated on in the remainder of the unit. Waltke (2004:345) subdivides the catalogue further by looking at the misused body parts mentioned in 6:17-18 and in 6:19 as a separate category for two antisocial actions.

Introduction `Av*p.n: Îtb;î[]ATÐ ;tAb[]ATÀ [b;v,^aw>÷
hw"+hy> anEâf' hN"heâ-vv, 16

`yqI)n"--~D' tAkip.vo ~yId;^ay"w>÷ rq,v'_ !Avål. tAmr'â
~yIn:ây[e 17

Delineation `h['r'l'(#Wrîl' tAr^ah]m;m.÷ ~yIl:ïg>r; !w<a"+
tAbåv.x.m; vrexoâ ble^a 18

@ `~yxi(a; !yBeä ~ynI©d'm.÷ x;Leîv;m.W rq,v'_ d[eä
~ybiz"K.â x;ypiäy" 19

1.4.2 Translation

Proverbs 6:16 There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him:

17 haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood,

18 a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that hurry to run to evil,

19 a lying witness who testifies falsely, and one who sows discord in a family.

1.4.3 Inner texture in Proverbs 6:16-19

The **inner texture** opens with the apparent numerical pattern with the number VV

“six” initiating the things that Yahweh hates followed by [bv “seven” that are an

abomination to him. Murphy (1998:38) delineates the pattern as x and x plus 1 where

the list begins in 6:17 -19a with the first six items followed by the seventh and final one in 6:19b. Noticeably, the first six items come one after another without a conjunction linking them until 6:19b when the conjunction W “and” appears. This follows the pattern seen in the introductory statement in 6:16a the six things that Yahweh hates are then linked through the W¹³⁰ conjunction, “and seven that are an abomination to Him” in 6:19b. In that fashion, the second line heightens the magnitude expressed in the first, which as Longman III (2006:174) says “it is hard to imagine a more definitive way to express God’s displeasure than these two sayings”. This then prepares us for the *argumentative texture* employed in this saying where the introductory statement in 6:16 is followed by a delineation of the various items presumed therein.

We also notice in 6:17-18, the delineation of various body parts as a top-down movement which begins with body parts that are in the head and ending with the feet. Each body part is related to a specific sin. This is clearly a *mnemonic* function which, as Hubbard (1989:102) shares, is a primary purpose of a numerical saying besides numbering the items. The various body parts also evoke the *sensory-aesthetic* texture in their presentation here, particularly when bodily members are, to use van Leeuwen’s (1997:77) words, turned from their good use to the service of wrongdoing.

The aspects that are highlighted as the wrong use of good body members also enable the poet to deal with wide ranging issues under a single rubric (see Longman III 2006:174). Each of the items selected in this saying, deserve much more discussion

130 The W conjunction also occurs in 6:17b as if to mark the completion of the first three items.

space. Indeed, elsewhere in the book of Proverbs and the OT we do have such space accorded to them as we will see in the subsequent texture. However, in reading these aspects together, each item cannot be viewed in isolation. The way each item relates to others comes to the fore, by virtue of the number parallelism employed here. Waltke (2004:345) says that “the seven together present another concise and vivid description of the troublemaker; no other type of person satisfies the description”.

1.4.4 Intertexture in Proverbs 6:16-19

The numerical pattern occurs elsewhere in the book of Proverbs 30:15-16, 18-19, 21-23, 24-28 and 29-31. Outside of the book of Proverbs the most extensive is found in the first two chapters of the book of Amos and brief ones in Job 5:19; Ecclesiastes 11:2 and Micah 5:5. Of these, different lists are used and only in 6:16-19 do we have a visual rendering of the members of a human body. That rendering assists in the realisation of an intended cross-pollination of subject matter between 6:12-15 and 6:16-19. We attempt to show that association diagrammatically as follows:

6:16-19	6:12-15
17a eyes	13a eyes
17a tongue (speech organ)	12b mouth
17b hands	13b finger
18a heart (devising evil)	14a heart (devising evil)
18b feet	13a feet
19a lying	14a deceit
19b sowing discord	14b sowing discord

Table 20: A comparison of Pr. 6:16-19 and 6:12-15, information adapted from van Leeuwen (1997:75).

We also notice that the catalogued characteristics that the Lord abhors are, as McKane (1970:326) aptly designates, “all disruptive in their tendency, that they break the bond of confidence and loyalty between man and man”. McKane’s observation is particularly

important when compared to other passages where these characteristics are addressed (see table overleaf). What is particular to these passages is the way in which others are victims of the exercise of such negative characteristics. There is a sense in which these victims are unable to avert the injurious acts exerted against them. The point driven home is that such conduct is utterly undesirable.

This outlook is embedded in Gerstenberger's (2002:62) thesis when he declares that "mutual solidarity alone holds the social organism together; identification with it is completely in the interest of the individuals and individual". Although these words are spoken of at a familial level, their application at a wider societal level is implied in Gerstenberger's perspective. However, the family which he describes as the community necessary for life, is in 6:19b the core of concern in these instructions.

All this concurs with Bland's (1998:221) notion of the formation of character as the primal agenda of the book of Proverbs. He argues that from the very inception of Israel's history, she was summoned to pass on her faith to the next generation. The instruction of youth was a religious responsibility largely informal and related to the family unit. Gittay's treatise (2001:45) regards the same concept, "following the right way", as the instructive goal of the book of Proverbs towards proper behaviour. Here in denouncing the catalogue of the seven characteristics that are effectively the sum total of improper behaviour, the speaker leaves an ineradicable imprint. This could be said of the other passages where these subjects occur. Ross (1991:934) correctly deduces that the "point of such a poetic arrangement is that the present enumeration does not exhaust the list". A comparative study is therefore important to glean some perspective elsewhere. The table below therefore serves to present some corresponding passages where the enumerated aspects occur.

SUBJECT	RELATED PASSAGE
Haughty eyes	Ps. 101:5; 131:1; Pro. 21:4; 30:13;
A lying tongue	Ex. 20:16; Pro. 12:19; 21:6; 26:28;
Hands that shed innocent blood	Deut. 19:13; Ps. 106:38; Is. 59:7; Jer. 7:6; 22:3, 17; 26:16;
A heart that devises wicked plans	Gen. 6:5; Ps. 58:2; 101:5; 141:4; Jer. 17:9-10
Feet that hurry to run to evil	Pr. 1:16; Is. 59:7
A lying witness who testifies falsely	Ex. 20:16; Deut. 19:18; Pr. 14:5, 25; 25:18
One who sows discord in a family	Pr. 15:18; 16:28; 17:14; 22:10;

Table 21: Comparative passages for the subject matter in Proverbs 6:16-19.

We will now turn our attention to the meanings that the subject matter implies.

1.4.5 Social and cultural texture in Proverbs 6:16-19

The numerical saying initially gives an impression of a *conversionist argumentation* by describing the various characteristics that comprise unacceptable conduct, divinely speaking. The list that we now know as to be inexhaustive seems to give the impression that the world has been corrupted by such objectionable conduct. However, we then remember that this is a mere depiction or presentation of what would constitute divinely and socially offensive behaviour. Without making such an explicit claim, the saying here implicitly issues a *Utopian argumentation*. It seems that the assertion implied in this portraiture is for the inauguration of a social system, (family and by annexe - clan), that is free from the evil associated with the intolerable demeanour. Our thinking here is better clarified by a closer look at each of the itemised characteristics.

Firstly, *twmr ~yny* [“haughty eyes”, or literally eyes that are raised, refer in one word, to arrogance. Perdue (2000:125) correctly interprets the phrase to represent pride. To be conceited, as this phrase implies, was regarded as the chief of all sins in

early theological thought, as van Leeuwen (1997:77) reveals. That would explain the reason for having pride on the top of the list, although the movement from top to bottom also prescribes the order here. This is not in any way intended to lessen the other items, but we cannot think of any other vice that invites abhorrence as much as pride does (see Waltke 2004:346). The point that this description establishes, is that a proud person disassociates himself because of the predisposition to look down on others. Waltke (2004:346) aptly describes this aspect as that of “self-exaltation over another person and violates the fundamentally equal honour of each individual”.

Secondly, is the phrase *rqv !wv1* “a lying tongue”, speaks of someone who makes deceptive statements. Such falsehood would be detrimental in the legal context that Hubbard (1989:103) perceives to be in the foreground in this unit. What we are meant to see is that we tend to accept words that are spoken by someone on face value. When they turn out to be false it affects relationships, perhaps a deeper way than we can imagine. Waltke (2004:346) describes it as aggressive deceit intended to harm others. It results from contempt for others leading to the damaging of their social standing by giving them a bad name.¹³¹ Garrett (1993:98) describes a lying tongue as representing a person who has no regard for truth, who distorts “reality of one’s own purposes and bespeaks a refusal to submit to norms of right and wrong”. He continues to say that “by lying, one seeks to rear-range not just individual facts but one’s just place in the world and so avoid having to live by the normal rules of life” (1993:98). Clearly, there is a hidden agenda to harm others.

¹³¹ According to Proverbs 3:4; 22:1 and Ecclesiastes 7:1, reputation as in a good name is much more desirable than even wealth. One can only imagine the damage done to others through falsehood.

Thirdly, there is *yqn-~d twkpv ~ydy* "hands that shed innocent blood". Our attention here is drawn to the verb *\$pv* "pour" which is sometimes used in association with water, but here with *~d* "blood". In this setting the concept implies the high disregard for the lives of others. Hubbard (1989: 103) suggests that the concept has violence of many forms in mind. We must bear in mind that *~ydy* "hands" are presented as the instrument of murder. The concept also castigates personal responsibility on the part of the perpetrators who may actually use other means not their hands literally. However, the propensity to violence is heightened by the description of the victims as *yqn* "innocent", thus free from guilt. In other words the violence is unjustifiable, neither is it provoked. If the legal setting is in view, the victim would have been pronounced not guilty but nevertheless suffers the death sentence. Such violent acts can never win one a good standing with others in society.

Fourthly, we have *!wa twbvxm vrx bl* "a heart that devises wicked plans". As hidden as the heart is, so is the wicked scheming that goes on inside the person until an opportunity presents itself for the execution. The language employed in this description in terms of the "plans", according to Waltke (2004:347), designates creative calculation, or to compute or conceive others' downfall. The poignant reality here is that the victim has no way of telling what will befall him or her and will innocently associate with the schemer in the interim. The "heart" here is associated with the noun *!wa* "wicked". As the centre that gives rise to all of a person's physical and spiritual activities, (Waltke 2004:347), we can determine why this is unacceptable.

Fifthly, we have *h[r]l #wrl twrhmm ~ylgr* “feet that hurry to run to evil”. This hyperbole according to Perdue (2000:125) depicts the fact that the wicked do not think at all but quickly pursue actions harmful to themselves and others.¹³² Hubbard (1989:103) alleges that the action here captures a sense of urgency involved towards the crime to be committed in that no step is wasted, no base is left uncovered in the execution of the plot.

Sixthly, we have the first case of antisocial action *rqv d[~ybk xypy* “a lying witness who testifies falsely”. In a conflict situation where truth needed to be established, a witness was needed to authenticate issued statements (see Ellison 1980:1652). Embedded in the Israelite practice of deliberating issues was the chief role of a witness¹³³ and in some serious cases more than one was necessary.¹³⁴ In view of the critical role played by a witness, to consciously communicate falsehood, as implied in the description above, was unthinkable. In the court setting that Hubbard (1989:103) feels is in view here, this would amount to perjury. Perdue (2000:125) describes perjury from a legal perspective as injurious to the one against whom the lying words are directed.

132 We encountered a similar picture in Proverbs 1:16 in the description to the wicked men against whom the son is discouraged to participate in their scheme.

133 The practice here illustrates the important role of a witness and particularly in situations where someone’s livelihood counted on it (Num. 5:12-15; 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15-21). In other instances an object would be sufficient a reminder having been set at an appropriate time (Gen. 21:30; 31:48-52; Jos. 22:26-28).

134 In cases relating to murder, more than one witness was needed to implicate someone as guilty (see Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6).

Lastly, we have the second aspect of the antisocial action $\sim yxa !yb \sim yndm$ $xlv m$ “one who sows discord in a family”. The concept $\sim yxa$ translated “family”, has a broad range of relationships in mind from blood brother, kinsman to fellow countryman, which according to Waltke (2004:348) is motivated by the conception of being descendants of a common father. In saying this, the description brings into perspective the close ranging family loyalties that Gerstenberger (2002:19-84) has shown at length. However, at the centre of attention in the above statement is one who causes discord among members of the same family. Van Leeuwen (1997:77) perceives this to be evil that disrupts the natural bonds of society, beginning at a family level, clan and tribe then extending to the secondary bonds that evolve as society becomes more differentiated. Hubbard (1989:103) describes it as “an attempt to drive wedges into solidarity of the community or clan ... by spurious legal claims”. That for us is the crux of the matter.

1.4.6 Sacred texture in Proverbs 6:16-19

We have highlighted the relationship between Proverbs 6:12-15 and 6:16-19 in warning against malevolence. Among other variances between the two units is that in the latter matters are taken to the highest possible appeal by the placement of $hw hy$ “God” into the picture. The **sacred texture** here is based on the opening statement which Hubbard (1989:101) prescribes as an evaluation of the evil conduct from a divine perspective. The two concepts used hereto express God’s displeasure. The first is anf “hate” which is reemphasized by the second $hb[wt$ “abomination”. The depth of

abhorrence is brought to the fore by the unusual use of the word *wvꝑn* "soul" with specific reference to Yahweh. Longman III (2006:175) comments:

Needless to say, this is very strong language. It is hard to imagine a more definitive way to express God's displeasure than with these two sayings. As strong as it is to say that God hates something, *colon 2* heightens it. In the first place, this is a rare instance of the use of *nepes* (here translated 'soul' but meaning 'inner person') in connection to God. The meaning seems to be equivalent to saying that it is a hate emanating from the deepest part of His being. And then the word "abomination" is itself expressive of the most profound dislike.

As in previous instructions, (3:1-12) there is a clear message established here that it is impossible in the Israelite thinking to separate everyday issues from their spiritual implications. In our passage, interpersonal relationships, specifically within the family, are critical, hence the divine pronouncement against causing discord.

1.4.7 Reflecting on Proverbs 6:16-19

There are two things we would like to point out at this juncture. Firstly, the focus on the body in this unit as in the previous is symbolic of total involvement of an individual in wicked scheme (cf. Hubbard 1989:103). In issuing this warning, it seems that the extent to which one can get deeply engrossed in malevolence is clearly highlighted. Since the goal of these instructions is, as Murphy (1998:67) rightly puts it, *praxis*, which is how to live, in laying out a lifestyle that ought to be avoided this unit effectively offers the alternative.

Secondly, there is a stern warning against the kind of wickedness that disrupts the family welfare, if not the society at large. Undergirding the particularisation of several items denoting disruptive behaviour, are the relational values through which the

teachings of the book of Proverbs are also espoused through the parent/teacher depiction.

1.5 Personification of wisdom 1:20-33

The wisdom poem in 1:20-33 seems to be a major shift of scenario from what we have in the opening parental appeal. The voice of the parents seems gone and so is the *vocative* "my son". The new speaker is feminine **twmkx** "Wisdom" and the name appears in plural construct. She appeals to a larger audience (1:22). On the onset, as we prepare ourselves for the exegetical analysis, we need to ask and answer two significant questions. The first question has to do with what the wisdom persona is all about and the second has to do with what role the presentation of the persona plays at this point of the book of Proverbs.

In terms of the first question, concerning what the wisdom persona is all about, we note that the concept **twmkx** is a feminine plural absolute noun. That construct is reiterated in 9:1-6, but not in 8:1-36 where the persona also emerges. In all instances, we have the common setting or domain of Wisdom as the crowded city streets (see 1:22; 8:4-5 and 9:14). The plural form according to Ross (1991:910) signifies the intensity and comprehensiveness of the portraiture and the issues at stake. Lane (2000:19) sees the plural form as representing God "in whom all wisdom perfectly dwells". Hubbard (1989:56) sheds some light on that intensity and comprehensiveness when he reiterates that the "Hebrew word for wisdom (see 1:2-6) is plural (v. 20) and consequently may point to her majestic many-sidedness already made clear in the cluster of synonyms with which the purpose of Proverbs is stated". In view of such a

portrait of completeness, he concludes that "she is formidable, compelling and inescapable" (1989:56). For that reason, perhaps, her venture in a public setting is not difficult to fathom despite the fact that, traditionally speaking, this is not a feminine domain.

With regards to the setting, what is interesting about this observation is that this was not a common place for women in the Israelite culture. The same could be said about Shona women in the traditional setting. However, this general reality does not mean that it was impossible for women to break the barriers as Clifford (1999:42) points out:

It is possible that Wisdom's authoritative speaking reflects the behaviour of certain women in Israel whose uncommon wisdom gave them authority to address the public in crises ... cf 2 Samuel 20:16-19; 2 Samuel 14.

Koptak (2003:84) compares her to women like Deborah the prophetess (Jud. 4:4-5:31) who led and challenged her audience. "Yet", he continues, "no woman ever spoke to crowds in the city the way Wisdom does, and this calls readers to attention".

We do have in the persona a new concept here. The origins of this personification is debatable among scholars with some drawing parallels to a goddess, others to a prophetess as in Akkadian Oracles (see Waltke 1995:192; Koptak 2003:83). Whatever the origin, we have to concur with Phyllis Tribble (1995:179) who writes that "Wisdom is a woman of many talents. In the book of Proverbs she appears first as a poet who preaches, counsels, teaches and prophesies (1:20-33). Her podium is the public arena, there she speaks to all sorts and conditions of people". In view of what Tribble points out, we have to admit that Wisdom in this portraiture is distinctively Israelite in the way she is conceived.

Secondly, in terms of what role the personification plays, we should consider Koptak's (2003:83) opinion that this is a "literary creation spoken as instruction by the parental teacher of Proverbs 1-9". He regards 1:20-33; 8:1-39 and 9:1-6 as a form of a *frame* or *inclusio* that authors typically use to place matters of greater significance at the *beginning* and *ending* of their works. Other than that, these personifications appear as impositions to the text as they seem to depart from even the greater argumentative presentation in chapters 1-9. This may be a reflection of our own bias. With that in mind we can then briefly¹³⁵ point out the similarities that exist between the parental appeal of 1:8-19 and 1:20-33 as a way to illustrate their connectedness.

- ❖ Both poems urge the young man to listen 1:8 and 1:33 (cf.1:4)
- ❖ Both poems have a general orientation towards the city streets 1:11 and 1:20
- ❖ Both poems promise a reward 1:9 and 1:33
- ❖ Both poems use the metaphor "way" as a course of life 1:19 and 1:31
- ❖ Both poems have a negative clause 1:16 and 1:32

We can also point out that there is some vocabulary from the prologue 1:1-7 that is reiterated in 1:20-33, perhaps as a reprisal, namely: "wisdom", "simple" and "fools", and "Lord".

To answer our original questions, then, up to this point "wisdom" has been referred to in this account as desirable. The principle of the book found in 1:7, and reiterated elsewhere, firmly establishes that. To have wisdom personified as a woman venturing in the city streets is a novel idea, not only in this account, but also to Israel's outlook in

¹³⁵ We will revisit these similarities in our exegetical analysis below in more detail so as to avoid reduplication of our findings and analyses.

general. As Koptak (2003:88) points out, to have wisdom personified as in 1:20-33 perhaps “distinguishes this speaking voice of personified wisdom from the voiceless and faceless wisdom that was mentioned earlier”. To have her domain in the public arena means that no one is left without excuse for not being able to find her, as Garrett (1993:72) aptly puts it:

Perhaps the easiest and most common excuse for doing wrong and falling into trouble is ignorance, that one just did not know any better. That excuse is rejected here. Wisdom is not some hidden treasure that had to be dug from the depths of the earth ... (compare Job 28) or the sole possession of the lonely sage sitting atop a mountain. To the contrary, Wisdom roams the streets looking for someone to instruct.

The warning tone that the persona embodies in this poem serves to complement the parental appeal of 1:8-19. We concur with Davis’ (2000:32) interpretation that “competing with the voices of the tempters is another voice, that of Wisdom ‘herself’ who forcefully echoes the instruction of the father and mother”. The question of her gender as a worthy woman, according to Williams (1994:83), has to do with the audience of her message (1:22 cf. 1:4), young and inexperienced males who are tasting their first responsibility in public life. In this personification, the subtlety of a powerful poetic strategy has a relational motif as the underlying draw card, to “entice” these young men towards her. By way of comparison to the previous invitation, the present offers a much better prospect (1:33 cf. 1:19). This function becomes more apparent in that the succeeding poetic unit 2:1ff which presents the protection realised through wisdom with particular reference to the “enticements” of both wicked men (2:12) and the adulteress (2:16). Wisdom’s monologue is, therefore, not out of place in the greater scheme of things but rightly set in what both Fox (2000:96) and Waltke (2004:90) label as an “interlude” (cf. 8:1ff; 9:1ff). We suppose that this label envisages a necessary intermission from the dominant design of the material (1:8-19;

2:1-22; 3:1-35; 4:1-27 etc). It makes sense, then, to regard Wisdom's speech as an extension of the prologue (1:1-7) and the parental appeal (1:8-19). Koptak (2003:84) suggests a similar approach. With that in mind, let us turn to the text more closely for an analysis of this persona.

1.5.1 The text and exegetical framework

The use of a chiasmic structure here testifies to the meticulous effort employed in the construction of this poem. The structure is a deliberate attempt to ensure a persuasive stance. This is particularly interesting in the original arrangement where this poem follows the first parental appeal. It also gives credence to the role of the personification here which we will analyse in chapter nine as well.

A Wisdom's introductory announcement 1:20-21

tAbxor>B' hN"roT' #WxB;
tAmk.x' 20
`HI'Aq !TeTi
ry[iB' ~yrI['v. yxet.piB. ar'q.Ti tAYmiho varoB. 21
`rmeato h'yr,m'a]

B Wisdom' audience 1:22
 !Acl' ~ycilew> ytip, Wbh]aeT. ~yIt'P.
 yt;m'-d[; 22
 `t[;d'-Wan>f.yI ~yliysik.W ~h,l' Wdm.x'
 C Wisdom's appeal 1:23
 yxiWr ~k,l' h['yBia; hNEhi yTix.k;Atl.
 WbWvT' 23
 `~k,t.a, yr;b'd> h['ydIAa
 !yaew> ydIy" ytiyjinn" Wnaem'T.w: ytiar'q' ![:y: 24
 D Wisdom's advice 1:24-25
 `byviq.m;
 `~t,ybia] al{ yTix.k;Atw> ytic'[]-lk' W[r>p.Tiw: 25
 aboB. g[;l.a, qx'f.a, ~k,d>yaeB. ynla]-~G: 26
 E Wisdom's answer 1:26-27
 `~k,D>x.p;
 ~k,d>yaew> ~k,D>x.P; Îha'Avk.Ð ĵhw"a]v;k.À aboB. 27
 `hq'Wcw> hr'c' ~k,yle[] aboB. ht,a/y< hp'WsK.
 al{w> ynIn>rux]v;y> hn<[/a, al{w> ynIn>aur'q.yI za' 28
 D' Wisdom's advice withdrawn 1:28
 `ynIn>auc'm.yI
 al{ hA'hy> ta;r>yIw> t[;d' Wan>f'-yKi tx;T; 29
 `Wrx'b'
 C' Wisdom's appeal spurned 1:29-30
 `yTix.k;AT-lK' Wca]n" ytic'[]l; Wba'-al{
 30
 `W[B'f.yI ~h,yteco[]MomiW ~K'r>d; yrIP.mi
 Wlk.ayOw> 31
 B' Wisdom's audience attacked 1:31-32
 ~yliysiK. tw:l.v;w> ~gEr>h;T; ~yIt'P.
 tb;Wvm. yKi 32
 `~deB.a;T.
 A' Wisdom's concluding announcement 1:33¹³⁶
 @ `h['r' dx;P;mi !n:a]v;w> xj;B,-
 !K'v.yI yli [;mevow> 33

1.5.2 Translation

²⁰ Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice.

²¹ At the busiest corner she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:

²² "How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?"

136 The chiasmic structure of this poem first forwarded by Tribble has seen other scholars attempt their own schemes such as Garrett (1993:71), Koptak (2003:87) and Fox (2000:104) to mention but a few examples. However, Fox points out that many readers may not have the impression of a precise mirror inversion in the architecture of this poem because some passages that are supposed to reflect each other are too vague. He however concedes that there is an inverted structure prominent in the central section and as such we can afford to suggest a chiasmic structure (see Fox 2000:104).

²³ Give heed to my reproof; I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you.

²⁴ Because I have called and you refused, have stretched out my hand and no one heeded,

²⁵ and because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof,

²⁶ I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when panic strikes you,

²⁷ when panic strikes you like a storm, and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you.

²⁸ Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but will not find me.

²⁹ Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD,

³⁰ would have none of my counsel, and despised all my reproof,

³¹ therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way and be sated with their own devices.

³² For waywardness kills the simple, and the complacency of fools destroys them;

³³ but those who listen to me will be secure and will live at ease, without dread of disaster."

1.5.3 Inner Texture of Wisdom's poem

The speaker in this unit **twmkx** whom, in terms of **inner texture**, is not specified except through implication of the occurrence here and the subsequent pronouns. She presents a monologue that runs from 1:22-33 to espouse a *repetitive-progressive* pattern. A similar persona occurs fully in 8:1-36; 9:1-6, 11-12 and is suggested elsewhere in 2:3; 3:13-20; 4:8-9; 7:4; 14:1; 24:7; Judges 5:29 and Psalms 49:4). The *opening* 1:20-21 is depicted through her announcement in public areas,¹³⁷ where the speaker has gone rather than waiting for an audience to come to her. The daring nature of this initiative is made emphatic through the *dual parallelism* (see Tribble 1995:181) in verses 20 and 21, in terms of the specific names for the chosen public

¹³⁷ The concept **#wx** can be translated outside, outward, or street, which envisages the outdoors and in particular city streets. Similarly, **bxr** conveys the idea of a wide or broad expanse which means the busiest streets are the true setting for this encounter. To that we add the term **var** which means summit, head, top, or chief, to underscore once again the deliberate choice of a ready made audience where the speaker chooses to venture. And finally, the phrase, **yxtpb ~yr[v** which refers to the gateways of the city equally reveals that the intentions here are not secretive at all.

setting. While the issue at stake is not raised in these verses, the public nature of the setting indicates that the matter is indeed widespread.

By the same token, there is something to be read from the initiative taken by the speaker of going to the audience instead of the reverse, which evokes the *argumentative* texture. McKane (1970:273) says that the figure is emblematic of wisdom teachers who could easily take advantage of a ready-made audience at city gates, or other places of public assembly where all manner of business was transacted". We need to point out that McKane does not give examples of such occurrences elsewhere in biblical or historical accounts. Fox (2000:97) alleges that "in ancient Israel, the city was the arena of public life" and that "schools may have been located near the gates". Again we are not sure about the latter situation since the statement is not validated with evidence or specific examples.

On the contrary, Farmer's explanation (1991:29) seems valid when she says that "the woman known as Wisdom does not wait for people to come to her. She takes the initiative and cries out in the manner of an Old Testament prophet, confronting the people in the busiest parts of their lives". Whether a prophetic stance should be read into this persona or not,¹³⁸ there is, however, an interesting demand for attentiveness and/or recognition that she is, as McKane (1970:276) declares, "an authoritative teacher". By this he implies a wisdom teacher as he later on recognises wisdom vocabulary in this unit.

138 The comparative aspects of the persona will be dealt with in more details in the Intertexture aspect of our analysis.

In 1:22 we have Wisdom's audience specified. While it is true that the speaker intends a general appeal by virtue of choosing a public setting to project her message, she also has in mind specific members of the audience that she would like to instruct (see Garrett 1993:71). From the opening statement of her monologue she exclaims her impatience through the phrase *ytm-d*["how long"]. This is followed by the specific isolation of those against whom this expletive is being registered. This is followed by the naming of her audience as *~ytp* "the simple ones" in the same breath as *~yclw* "mockers" as well as the *~ylyskw* "the fools". The first and last groups are *repeated* in verse 32 to create a *chiastic* structure on the one hand, and perhaps a case where the three are *synonymously* paralleled. The first group we also encountered in 1:4 was identified as the target audience of the composition, while a dissimilar category of the last one namely *~ylywa* "fools" occurred in 1:7. The "simple" according to Fox (2000:97) are the naïve and innocent, indicative of the vulnerability of youth. The "son" of 1:8, 10 and 15 belongs to the same age-group or situation because he too is vulnerable to the sinners' enticement. The "simple" similarly occur as the addressees in 8:5 and 9:4. These are still educable and hence the book of Proverbs holds out some hope for them, an idea that Perdue (2000:82) rightly upholds when he writes:

The simple ones are not necessarily opposed to the teaching that the sages offer but are young, lack prudence and sapiential knowledge, and have not acquired the discipline of study, critical thinking and proper behaviour (Pr. 1:22; 8:5; 9:4, 16). They are easily seduced by the folly and led astray to experience disaster (Pr. 14:18).

The mockers known for their cynicism, portray a classic case of chronic arrogance which resonates from their inexperience. Along with the fools – the ones who have already rejected wisdom, the mockers stand condemned as indicated in 1:24. These sentiments are more pronounced in 1:31-32 where the fate of Wisdom's audience is brought to the forefront.

Thus, there is a strong case for assigning 1:22 alongside 1:20-21 as the *opening* since the issues at stake are therein raised. The attitudes of the simple, the mockers and the fools stand out as the cause for concern here. Tribble (1995:181) regards wisdom's voice in asking the rhetorical question "how long" as one that implores, pleads and implies judgment. In that rhetoricity Garrett (1993:72) suggests that it erases the excuse of ignorance since wisdom is not presented as hidden treasure, or as a privilege of a few. In fact she had already given time to forewarn her audience (1:23-25).

In 1:23 Wisdom's appeal, which marks the commencement of the *middle*, begins and is sustained until 1:31 where more space is dedicated towards the rejection of wisdom and the accompanying consequences. The repetition of *ytxkwt* "rebuke" or "reproof" in 1:23, 25 and 30 makes Wisdom's appeal central to this poem. Other constructs of the concept interestingly occur in passages associated with parental discipline (Proverbs 10:17; 12:1; 15:5, 10, 31-32). The idea behind this concept concerns a decision pertaining to what is right or wrong, to use Hubbard's words (1989:56). Fox (2000:99) points out that the concept calls for attention, and not necessarily repentance in particular relation to the rhetorical question "how long" posed in the previous verse. His perspective is also validated when one considers what ensues,

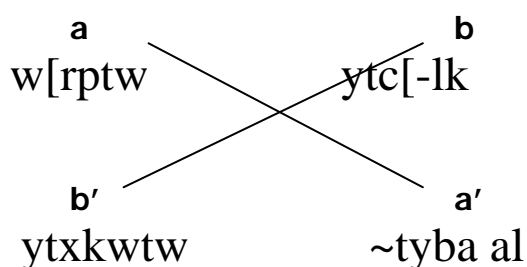
where Wisdom seems to speak retrospectively about the decision to reject her appeal and the impending judgment.

In 1:24-25 Wisdom's advice is spelt out. Clifford (1999:43) describes this unit as intensely personal because of the rationale (1:24-25) result (1:26-27) motif. There is the strategic use of parallelism of vocabulary herein to advance the *argumentative* texture. The crucial concepts include, firstly, the verb *ytaṛq* "I called" inversely repeated in 1:28 *yṇnarqy* "they call" in the third person construct to depict a *chiastic* block. This verb is *paralleled* with *ytyjn* "I stretched out" both describing wisdom's attempt to get her audience's attention. Both initiatives induce the same response on the part of the audience who reject, and do not give heed to wisdom's summons. Tribble (1995:181) believes that this development is at the core of the poem particularised by the carefully constructed *inverse parallels* of the vocabulary and motifs. Hubbard (1989:56) endorses that perspective by virtue of his observation that more coverage is given to wisdom's rejection than to her invitation. To that we add Fox's (2000:97) voice who regards the sentiments as signifying threat and intimidation as a warning towards the impending danger.

Secondly, a play on words, as the rationale for the impending results, is developed further. 1:25 is *repeated* almost verbatim in 1:30 with the only change being recognisable shift from first person construct to the third.¹³⁹ There is a careful

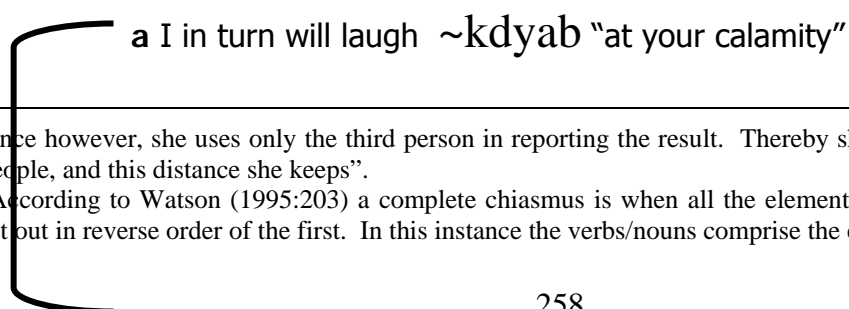
¹³⁹ The shift from first person construct to third is a device that is employed to underscore Wisdom's distance from her audience because of the apparent rejection. Tribble (1995:87) explains that the "change from second to third person in the reason is a waver between proximity and distance. Full involvement returns with the announcement which is completely in the second person. Proclaiming calamity, wisdom speaks directly and after this climatic

architectural design in the poetic structure conveying the disregard (w[rptw] of Wisdom's counsel ytc[which corresponds to reproof ytxkwtw which ends with the negative epithet ~tyba al "not accept". The arrangement effectively allows a *complete*¹⁴⁰ chiasmic structure perhaps for emphasis that commences with the verb followed by the noun and then appears in reverse order to create this type of diagram:



Thirdly, we observe the emphasis on wisdom's rejection through the collective verbs that are utilised in 1:24-25. In so doing the rejection is expressed using four different verbs for rhetorical efficacy. Garrett (1993:72) correctly observes that there is common vocabulary in 1:24-25 and 1:29-30 to accentuate the significance of Wisdom's rejection in this context and in the rest of the book of Proverbs.

At this juncture, in 1:26-27 we have reached the pivotal unit of Wisdom's poem. Here Wisdom offers an answer. The implications of her audience's rejection of her counsel and reproof spell out inevitable disaster. As in the previous section, we have the description of disaster built by *chiasmic repetition* and *accretion* (see Fox 2000:101):





- b** I will mock when ~**kdxp** "terror" overtakes you
b' when ~**kdxp** "terror" overtakes you like a storm
a' and ~**kdyaw** "calamity" sweeps over you like a whirlwind
c when **hqwcw hrc** distress and anguish come upon you

An analysis of the clauses reveals the introduction of the two terms for disaster namely "calamity" and "terror" in *a* and *b*. The appearance of two such concepts serves to stress the intensity of impending misfortune. To have the same concepts repeated in the clauses *b'* and *a'* again is for emphasis particularly with the *rhetoric elaboration* through comparative natural phenomena of a storm and whirlwind. Both aspects of the *sensory-aesthetic texture* are depicted with intensity, a devastating storm and a stormy whirlwind, that are unmistakable to the hearers familiar with nature's force in that context. With reference to the same clauses, Tribble (1995:184-5) observes, in the chiasmic structure, the alternation of object and verb, then a reversal order verb-object, which is a valid scrutiny. Similarly, Murphy (1998:10) espouses the use of both *alliteration* and *assonance* in the chosen labels of disaster, **hwav** "terror", **hpws** "calamity", **hrc** distress and **hqwc** "anguish" all in 1:27.

To add to this is the *c* clause which introduces synonyms of the disasters of the previous clauses as Fox (2000:101) suggests "a relentless snowballing of disasters". This analysis concurs with McKane (1970:275) who perceives the formulation of this threat as one that draws attention to the unusual and, we add, dramatic way.

There is a turn of events from 1:28 onwards as the absurdity of choosing to ignore Wisdom's advice becomes apparent. This is particularised in 1:28 with Wisdom's advice being withdrawn. Firstly, we observe the shift from the second person plural to the third as a poetic device to underscore Wisdom's withdrawal. That literary feature is sustained all the way to 1:31. Clifford (1999:43) suggests that this necessitates Wisdom's distancing herself from the hearers so that they can bear the consequences of their actions.

Secondly, the opening particle *Za* "then" serves as a conjunction to show that the distressing circumstances of 1:26-27 are the cause for the desperate action being taken in 1:28. What is peculiar in this instance is that Wisdom is no longer the one taking the action, but rather the circumstances have forced her hearers to do so. In another sense there is a role reversal as Wisdom begins as the one pleading with her audience but now her audience want to plead with her. Just like her pleas fell on deaf ears, in turn, theirs will also fall on deaf ears as there is no one to hear them.

Thirdly, we notice the connection of 1:24 to 1:28¹⁴¹ where in the former, Wisdom is projected as a willing advocate. In the latter scenario she is the opposite. That indifference is in fact particularised by her deliberate absence through her saying *hn[a*

141 Tribble suggests that 1:28 is an inverse return to 1:23 in her analysis because in both references there is the common occurrence of the verb *arq* "call" which in the first instance is on the part of Wisdom and in the second in on the part of her hearers (see Tribble 1995:186).

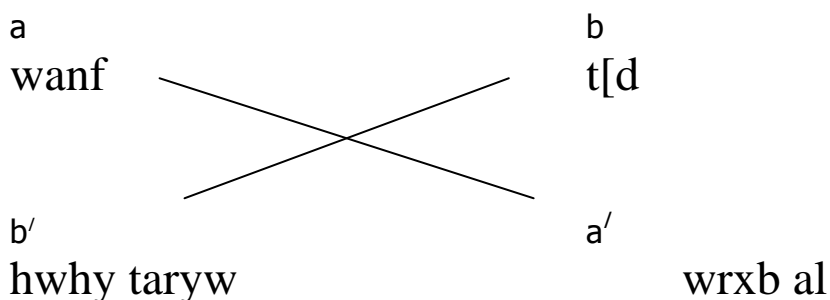
al “and I will not answer” and ynnacmy al “I will not be found”. Waltke (2004:209) represents the inversion as follows:

1:24 I call you refuse to listen

1:28 they will call I will not answer

Such refusal to respond is devastating in this context because it happens at a time when it is much needed. The statement being made through that silence or withdrawal is that “there are points of no return; when the storm is upon us, it is too late to seek shelter” to use van Leeuwen’s words (1997:40). He continues to say that “moments of decision pass and are gone forever. Timing is all” (1997:40). We know already that the point of desperation could not be any better since it is clearly described in 1:27.

In 1:29-30, which describes how Wisdom’s appeal is spurned, we have, in the first place, a double particle yk txt which Tribble (1995:186) says is a forceful way of presenting the basis of punishment. Waltke (2004:210) refers to it as a rare compound phrase. The sentence that follows also repeats the formulation of 1:25 where you have the verb-object-object-verb pattern *chiastically* fashioned:



Secondly, we have a repetition of the vocabulary of 1:25 in 1:30 as mentioned earlier in which case we have an inverse return to the former. At this stage of Wisdom's poem, however, the sentiments being expressed are not the same in terms of significance. In 1:25 the rejection of wisdom's counsel and reproof is what is purely being dwelt on more in the sense of registering an awareness of such. However, in 1:30 we have gone beyond that point to experiencing the consequences, a fact that Graham-Taylor (2001:22) affirms.

In 1:31-32 Wisdom's audience is attacked. It is most apparent in this section that Wisdom does not prescribe or personally bring the disaster on her audience. It is common knowledge that their complacency evokes such disaster as in the saying "You reap what you sow".¹⁴² Waltke (2004:211) equates it to the modern English proverb "You are what you eat". The occurrence of *yꝛp* "fruit" in 1:31 underscores the outcome as a natural consequence. Here the eating metaphor symbolism *wlkayw* "they will eat" progresses to *w[bfy* "they will be filled". Waltke (2004:211) correctly espouses that this eating and getting filled metaphor is an escalation to its "full and consummate measure". It is equally interesting to note the chosen imagery here *~krd yrpm* "the fruit of their ways" paralleled to *~hytc[mmw*¹⁴³ "the fruit of their plans/schemes". In both instances Wisdom's audience makes a deliberate choice.

142 This saying is used in a variety of ways in a number of passages in the Bible. However, the generic principle that it intends to put across is retained both positively and negatively. See Job 4:8; Psalm 126:5; Ecclesiastes 11:4; Jeremiah 12:13; Hosea 8:7; 10:12; 1 Corinthians 9:11; 2 Corinthians 9:6; Galatians 6:8-9; for some specifics.

143 A complex construction consisting of the *W* conjunction, followed by the particle preposition *!m* "from" or "out of" and then the noun *hc[wm* "plan" or "scheme" then the suffix in the 3rd person masculine plural construct. Just like the concept "the fruit of their ways" this construct is intended to depict the natural consequences of the particular choice that Wisdom's audience has made.

In so doing this imagery belongs to the *sensory-aesthetic* texture (Robbins 1996:22) where the sense of taste is invoked here.

That idea is reinforced in 1:32 through the reference to **tbwvm** “waywardness” of the simple which corresponds to the **twlv** “complacency” of the fools. Both expressions spell out disaster, resulting from a departure from the norm as suggested by the use of these concepts. In fact most commentators observe that **tbwvm** contains the idea of backsliding, or turning away. In the other eleven occurrences of this concept in the prophetic writings it is consistently used in reference to Israel’s apostasy and faithlessness (see Waltke 2004:212). Coupled with **twlv** the picture that comes to mind is that of falsehood, hence the dire consequences that ensue.

It is noticeable that the waywardness is directly linked to a self-inflicted death sentence **~grht** “will kill them”, and similarly, their complacency with regard to destruction **~dbat** “will destroy them”. With these expressions depicting a point of no return is the fate of the simple (**~ytp**) and the foolish (**~ylysk**) to whom Wisdom had made specific appeal (1:22) is sealed.

In 1:33 we have Wisdom’s concluding announcement. With that we now come to the closure of Wisdom’s self-introductory poem which ends with her surmising that the pathway to safety is found in listening to her. Our attention is drawn to the verb **[mv**

“listen” which we encountered as an imperative in 1:8. The admonition here is a reprisal of the sentiments raised earlier in the poem (see 1:22-23) which now forms the conclusive analysis of the developments here. What is rather sobering, is Wisdom’s change of tone in contrast to what she had said in 1:32-33. She offers a glimmer of hope to the individual who chooses not to go with the rest.

There is a shift from the plural construct of 1:28-32 to the singular *y1 [mvw* “but one who listens to me”. The conditional clause employed here naturally yields into the gratification of those who listen to wisdom as the antonym of those who reject her. The adverbial phrases emphasise the resultant state of contentment, *xjb-!kvy* “will live in security”, *!navw* “and be at ease”, *h[r dxpm*¹⁴⁴ “without fear of harm”.

There is an attractive prospect on offer through the use of the tripartite adverbial phrases that describe the tranquillity, awaiting whoever listens to Wisdom.

1.5.4 Intertexture of Wisdom’s poem

To begin with, there is a noticeable the absence of the use of the *imperative* in this monologue that we encountered in the first parental appeal, and in the subsequent exchanges as we will see later on in our exegetical analysis (2:1-22; 3:1-35 and 4:1-27). However, of more significance is the identity of a wisdom teacher which will be our first area of comment with respect to the **intertexture**. Triple (1995:179) describes the persona as “a woman of many talents ... [who] appears first as a poet who preaches, counsels, teaches, and prophesies (1:20-33)” as we pointed out earlier

¹⁴⁴ We encountered *dxp* in 1:26 and 27 referring to calamity which referred to external factors. The connotations here are not that subjective as we will see below.

on. She continues that “her podium is the public arena; there she speaks to all sorts and conditions of people”. She attributes this portraiture as distinctly Israelite and thus not influenced by, nor emblematic of, Egyptian literature. This observation is endorsed by Baumann (1998:47).

It seems that the head of the bustling roads, the noisiest intersections and the city gate where the Woman Wisdom ventures *echoes* the *cultural* intertexture in which some prophetic oracles were presented as in Habakkuk 2:2; Jeremiah 5:1; 11:6; to mention a few examples. As a result of this setting, Davis (2000:33) describes Wisdom’s call as a fervent piercing cry of exhortation, which to our imagination would be the kind that would bring everyone to a standstill. She commands attention.

Similarly, the same public setting brings to the fore the *social* intertexture by virtue of the many biblical instances that mention the city square, streets or gates commonly associated with public life (see Amos 5:15; Isaiah 15:3; Jeremiah 15:7 and Zechariah 8:4-5). People gathered here for trade, official business, or merely social contact. The elders of the city met here for deliberation. Interestingly, the husband of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31:23 takes a prominent seat among the city elders perhaps for judicial duties (see Ruth 4:1-12). With all this at the back of our minds we can begin to see why the public setting was the deliberate choice.

The second significant area has to do with the specification of Wisdom’s audience. The occurrence of *ytm-d[* “how long”, an interrogative particle, has already been identified as a device to register strong dissatisfaction in this instance as well as in

other passages in the book of Proverbs 6:9; 23:35, (cf. Hubbard 1989:56). However, the association with Wisdom's audience suggests a stance common to prophetic oracles (Isaiah 6:11; Jeremiah 4:14, 21; Daniel 8:13; Hosea 8:5; Habakkuk 1:2; Zechariah 1:12). Some scholars have, as result of this observation, concluded a prophetic figure in the personification. However, McKane (1970:273) counters that by pointing out that to assume the stylistic affinity as indicative of a prophetic role is misleading since "how long" is also common to the Psalms, and we add, other biblical genres (Exodus 10:3, 7; 16:28; Numbers 14:11, 27; Joshua 18:3; 1 Samuel 1:14; 16:1; 2 Samuel 2 :26; 1 Kings 18:2; Nehemiah 2:6; Psalm 4:2; 6:3; 13:1, 2; 35:17; 62:3; 74:9, 10; 80:2; 89:46; 90:13; 94:3; 119:84). The language is aptly that of a wisdom teacher as McKane (1970:273-4) reveals since the intended audience implies the untutored, immature who come to be shaped by the educational process. To further validate that point is the similar prominence of "how long" in wisdom literature (Job 7:4; 8:2; 19:2; Ecclesiastes 6:3 and Proverbs 6:9).

The third area of interest has to do with Wisdom's rebuke or reproof. We have already hinted to the association of Wisdom's rebuke or reproof to parental discipline. Wisdom's appeal to "turn back toward my reproof" perceives her as the source of the necessary chastisement that features in the references cited above. A similar appeal occurs in 8:33 where instructional intentions are clearly brought to the fore. Fox (2000:99) also regards reproof as an important educational concept in the book of Proverbs, although he does not state whether he has a formal setting in mind or not. All we can say for other texts outside wisdom literature is that reproof may take the form of corporal punishment in its broad implications (see 2 Ki. 19:3; Ez. 5:15).

The language and style here in Tribble's estimation (1995:181) is reminiscent of prophetic speeches in that it summons listeners to conversion. Koptak (2003:85) seems to prescribe a similar assessment by comparing Wisdom's call to that of the prophet Jeremiah in the following passages; 4:14, 21; 12:4; 31:22; 47:5. To that line of thinking we add Davis' voice (2000:340) who surmises that "Wisdom resembles a compelling and (sometimes) alluring woman, like the biblical prophets (whom she seems to imitate in this speech) she speaks to the heart, which in biblical physiology is the seat of the affections and the imagination as well as the rational mind". However, Wisdom's condemnatory tone in 1:22 seems conclusive in indicating that we are beyond the point of repentance or conversion that prophets seemed to hold out when similar speeches were made. While the similarity to prophetic oracles is undeniable, Wisdom's speech plays a different role in this context as Fox (2000:99) explains:

Her rhetorical question 'how long ...? (lit. 'until when...?') expresses frustration but also leaves open the possibility, albeit farfetched, that the fools may stop loving their folly. The call for attention in 'turn back toward my reproof' following immediately upon the 'how long' question, suggests that the giving heed to the reproof would indeed bring an end to their perverted values.

This perspective is upheld by Wisdom's statement in 1:30 where her **hc**["counsel"] was not accepted and her **ytxkwt** "reproof" despised. By the same token, in 1:24-25 Wisdom speaks of the rejection of her advice.

The fourth area has to do with the rejection of wisdom by her audience in 1:24-25. The four lines on the one hand individually convey the discourteous stance of the audience. On the other hand, they jointly build up a motif common to prophetic writings, namely

calling and not receiving an answer (cf. Murphy 1998:10)¹⁴⁵. Fox (2000:100) describes the rejection of wisdom in 1:25 as allusion to the brushing aside of all my counsel as in the loosening of hair, to let go as in to toss aside¹⁴⁶. Such vivid imagery portrays both the extent of the rejection and the inexcusable act of doing so.

What we know from the prophetic writings is that heeding such a call stands to benefit the audience from a disastrous turn of their fortunes. However, despite the language similarities, Wisdom's distinct voice is unambiguous for rhetorical effectiveness emblematic of a teacher. McKane (1970:274) suggests that "Wisdom harangues her audience like a wisdom teacher because of the inherent language *'ēša* "advice", *tokahat* "reproof" which is of cardinal importance in view of the looming danger".

In this context, however, the employed language indicates that Wisdom's calls have gone beyond signalling a warning to her audience. As we can establish from "how long" in verse 22, this is indicative of an extended disregard of her invitations resulting in her patience running out. Equally so, we read in verses 24-25 what are foregone statements of wisdom's rejection by her audience. Be that as it may, she fashions her poem from verses 22-31 into what takes the form of a lament¹⁴⁷ because of the unwillingness of her audience to heed her calls. We concur with Clifford (1999:42) that while there is an affinity to the prophetic stance, as most scholars correctly observe, Wisdom's concern, unlike that of the prophets which is with national life, is with personal life. The distinction is significant towards the furthering of our argument on

145 Isaiah 50:2; 66:4; Jeremiah 7:13, 24-27; Zechariah 7:13; are only but a few examples where the calling and not answering motif in prophetic writings occur. In such references the tone of frustration and impending judgment is well pronounced. It is as if all other avenues of tolerance of had reached their peak leaving no option but to pursue the punishment due for such discourteousness.

146 See Proverbs 4:15; 8:33; 13:18 and 15:32 for parallel passages to the description.

147 See Psalms 4:2; 6:3; 131-2; 35:17; 62:3; 74:9-10; 79:5; 80:4; 82:2; 89:46; 90:13; 94:3.

the instructional or nurturing perspective of the book of Proverbs. For that reason, Cox (1982:106) is right in prescribing a personalised approach to Wisdom's appeal when he writes:

In effect these verses are an educational poem which personalises wisdom who seeks union with mankind. The personalised approach makes the admonition more intimate and even more attractive. The fact that her invitation is given 'in the street, in the markets' emphasizes the fact that the pursuit of wisdom is a human, everyday affair affecting mankind at the level of life.

It is important not to miss out on Cox's viewpoint here that while personalised wisdom goes public, she does not lose her personal and intimate appeal once she speaks even in that setting.

Why then does she adopt the prophetic stance? To respond to that question, there are two possible explanations. Firstly, because of the subject matter involved here which is of a critical nature, it is imperative to adopt a communicative style that would reinforce that cause. The use of what are somewhat harsh but personable words invariably registers a sense of urgency on the part of Wisdom and her audience. Goldingay (1994:587) affirms this possibility when he suggests that "the image of the prophet helps to convey the urgency of Wisdom's challenge to people in a critical situation. She speaks as if it is too late, as prophets often do in order to jolt people into a response before it is really too late". However, in this context as pointed at above, it seems it is already too late.

Secondly, it seems that, just like a prophet speaks for God, Wisdom similarly speaks authoritatively, however without necessarily claiming direct divine inspiration for her utterances. The prophetic formula "this is what the Lord says", is absent from all three

of her appearances (1:20-33; 8:1-36¹⁴⁸ and 9:1-6). Yet there is a daring temperament to her utterances depicted in her personal pronouns "I" "my" and "me" that, as Davis observes (2000:32), occur almost in every line of the self introduction poem. Despite such personal confidence, Davis denies a goddess ascription to wisdom in this poem or elsewhere in the book of Proverbs as she explains fully:

[Lady Wisdom] has her counterparts in Mesopotamia and Egypt, where goddesses were thought to oversee education and the production of wisdom literature. But how could a figure reminiscent of pagan goddesses have passed muster in rigorously monotheistic Israel? "Lady Wisdom" is not a full-blown goddess and there is no indication that a goddess of wisdom was ever worshipped in Israel. It seems that the sages are here inventing a bold literary device that compels attention and lends seriousness to their message (2000:32).

However, there is an undeniable association of wisdom with God particularised in 1:29, which is reminiscent of 1:7. As a result of this connection, we understand that heeding her advice and rebuke is not optional. Just like the prophets of old, rejecting or ignoring her has disastrous consequences – which in her case are assumed, not because she prescribes them. (see Fox 2000:101). Just like the parental appeal of 1:8-19, she offers refuge to anyone who responds positively in disastrous situations. In verses 24-25 we realise that those strong statements on regarding the rejection of wisdom cannot just be a waste of breath. Goldingay (1994:588) assists us in capturing the role of the prophetic stance here adopted when he writes:

The image of wisdom as a prophet helps to make the point that wisdom speaks for God and from God ... Her teaching is derived from experience but it is not mere human opinion. God is involved in the human activity whereby people seeks to discern the truth which life itself can teach them. Wisdom herself teaches that the chief hindrance to growing in insight is a moral one, an

148 In 8:22-32 are the closest claims to divine authority although in these references she speaks of her enduring presence right from the beginning of creation to argue for her significance. That association with God is also out rightly compelling, and remains a phenomenon that deserves full attention.

unwillingness to learn uncomfortable truths. She also teaches that once you are morally open to living by wisdom's insights, they will open to a successful and protected life.

Needless to say, wisdom herself does not claim to be a prophet. Neither does she claim to be God. She certainly plays an important role in affording her audience the opportunity to hear her appeal. In so doing she would have been of benefit (1:23), as she presents herself as one of the agencies of divine instruction for life (1:29).

The fifth area of interest has to do on the one hand with the posture of laughter and mocking that Wisdom adopts and on the other the natural disasters that her descriptions evoke. With regard to the first aspect, the laughing and mocking is an inverse of the mockers in 1:22 who are interestingly omitted in 1:32 where wisdom's audience are revisited. Perhaps this is because their fate is sealed here and, therefore, not necessary to invoke what is settled. A similar view is forwarded by Fox (2000:101) who points out that "the ostensive audience of Wisdom's words includes [the mockers] the impudent ones who characteristically 'laugh' and mock words of wisdom. Now Wisdom will return their scornful laughter". As mentioned earlier, the mockers along with the fools are the stock characters of the Proverbs in chapters 10-29 where their profiles are developed in detail (see Davis 2000:34).

To come back to what seems to be Wisdom's sarcasm, her laughter in cultural intertexture *echoes* a position of an awareness of power on the part of the speaker and of utter helplessness on the part of the audience. This underscores Hubbard's (1989:57) perception that sarcasm here is representative of how one would laugh or mock at one's enemies. He cites Psalm 2:4 as an example of this posture where God laughs at the kings of the earth who take their stand against Him. A similar pair of

sarcastic concepts occurs in Proverbs 17:5 and 30:17 but not to the same magnitude as in this context. Van Leeuwen (1997:40) only sees parallels of this stance in passages such as Deuteronomy 28:63; Psalm 37:13 and 59:8 where God Himself takes that position of laughter. It is also good to bring into perspective what Waltke (2004:207) says when he distinguishes that "Wisdom does not laugh at disaster, but at the triumph of what is right over what is wrong". The cause of these unfortunate developments rests squarely on the shoulders of the rebellious youth.

With regards to the second issue of the cited natural disasters, we observe along with Murphy (1998:10) that the language takes the form of prophetic and apocalyptic literature in the pronouncement of judgment. Clifford (1999:42) compares it to Isaiah 66:4; Jeremiah 11:11-13; 23:19-20; where in each case a dramatic description of the impending disaster seems irreversible. We need to single out Wisdom's laughter from the prophetic threats in that Wisdom in this context does not prescribe the disaster rather than merely predict what the natural outcome of ignoring her is. To that effect, McKane (1970:275) comments:

It is unlike the prophetic threat in which Yahweh declares that He will execute judgment. Wisdom laughs as a mere spectator at what befalls those who refuse her admonishment and reject her advice, and does not herself make any personal intervention to effect judgment. A time will come when it is too late to turn to wisdom for instruction, and when it will be inaccessible to those who search frantically for her.

For that reason, Ross (1991:910) says that the "figure of laughing reveals the absurdity of choosing a foolish way of life and being totally unprepared for disaster". This is a case of retributive justice which is only avoidable by heeding her warning of 1:22-23 as much as in that of the parents in 1:8-19.

The sixth area of interest has to do with wisdom's aloofness. Davis (2000:32) draws our attention to the similarity between 1:28 and Micah 3:4 which reads:

Then they will cry out to the LORD,
but he will not answer them.
At that time he will hide his face from them
because of the evil they have done. (NIV)

A similar expression occurs in Psalm 18:41 where as in the Micah reference the person withdrawing is the Lord. Micah cites the people's sin as the reason for God's withdrawal which would in some measure correspond with the offence of Wisdom's audience particularly in view of what we will learn from developments in Proverbs 1:29. What is different about Wisdom's withdrawal is that it is not necessarily an expression of her anger, as would be the case in the prophetic writings. On the contrary, her action here is preceded by laughter.

The seventh area of interest has to do with the reiteration of the fear of the Lord motif. On the one hand we notice that the equation of 1:7 is reiterated in 1:29 in the negative. This is significant, at this point of our discussion in that the statement reinvigorates the deliberate hostility not only directed towards Wisdom but to Yahweh Himself. In this instance it is made obvious that "submission to Wisdom is equated with submission to Yahweh" (Waltke 2004:210). The expression *wanf* "they hated" is paralleled to *wrxb al* "they did not choose" which corresponds to the respective qualities, namely *t[d* "knowledge" and *hwhy tary* "fear of the Lord". As we can tell from what this poem reveals, Wisdom places herself in the position of the provider of that knowledge through her earlier claims (1:23) and what she reiterates in 1:30.

On the other hand, the recurrence of her rejection in 1:30 (cf. 1:25) represents the finality of judgment where the choice represents a conscious decision that in turn seals their fate (see Waltke 2004:210-11). The real dilemma here is that it is not only Wisdom whom they reject but, as Fox says (2000:102), the very foundation of life. He compares this action to the cultural intertexture of loosening of hair or as in tossing aside which indicates the carefree attitude with which this was done (see Fox 2000:100). In similar vein, Koptak (2003:89) describes the significance of Wisdom's identity which implies that "her listeners are to show their fear of the Lord by turning to her for correction and counsel (Pr. 1:29-30)". Her words apparently resemble those of the Yahweh in Ezekiel 39:28-29¹⁴⁹ where knowing Him bestows blessing on the part of the people. What we need to point out here, however, is that Wisdom does not call her hearers to fear her, but the Lord.

The eighth area of interest is related to the used of the concept *grh* which is used some 172 times in the Old Testament and suggests the idea of murder, to slay or to kill. It depicts a situation that has gone out of control as in Psalm 59:11-12.¹⁵⁰ Other passages where such a tone is expressed include Genesis 4:15; Judges 8:20; 9:24, 45; 1 Samuel 22:21; 2 Samuel 14:7; 1 Kings 9:16; 19:1; 2 Kings 9:31; 2 Chronicles 22:1; Isaiah 22:13; 27:7; 30:25; Ezekiel 26:15 and Hosea 9:13. Of these the prophetic

149 Ezekiel 39:28-29 reads "Then they will know that I am the LORD their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind. I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit on the house of Israel, declares the Sovereign LORD."

150 Psalm 59:12-13 describes a situation that would be emblematic of the sentiments that Wisdom expresses here. It reads, "For the sins of their mouths, for the words of their lips, let them be caught in their pride. For the curses and lies they utter, consume them in wrath, consume them till they are no more. Then it will be known to the ends of the earth that God rules over Jacob". That double emphasis on "consume" indicates the sense of finality that we would like to highlight.

oracles are more dramatic, particularly with the translation of the concept "slaughter" that the NIV employs in these references.

To add to that, we can also bring up the *cultural intertexture* that the concept of "fruit" evoke here. Since we are dealing with an agrarian community, they would not have missed out on the fact that action of the simple and the foolish is likened to growth that culminates in produce (see Ross 1991:911). Delitzsch (1978:74) describes the eating of the fruit of one's ways in connection with Isaiah 3:10-11 where good fruit is a result of good ways and the reverse is also true.¹⁵¹ Eating the fruit of their ways is a process that once begun will lead to regrettable circumstances.

Lastly, we refer to the shift from the plural to the singular person construct. That adaptation reveals a track reminiscent of Israelite history. In his description, Waltke (2004:212) says that the shift resembles Israel's history "in which only a remnant remains at the end". We see that sentiment in 2:21 where it says, "For the upright will live in the land, and the blameless will remain in it".¹⁵² By the same token, the use of the adverbial phrases piled on the closing line, echo the remnant motif by emphasizing the quality of life that is held out for those who listen¹⁵³. The "security" that one will experience implies being unconcerned (cf. Waltke 2004:213), confidence or trust. The idea of being at "ease" means to be at rest, to experience quietness. To add to this is

151 Isaiah 3:10-11 reads, "Tell the righteous it will be well with them, for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds. Woe to the wicked! Disaster is upon them! They will be paid back for what their hands have done". In other words no one can blame someone else for the consequences.

152 For parallel passages see Deuteronomy 12:1ff; 31:13; 1 Kings 8:32-40; Jeremiah 35:15; 43:5; Ezekiel 36:28-30.

153 See Waltke's discussion on the various evolutions of these adverbial phrases within the Old Testament which has both positive and negative connotations (2004:213). Here the positive notion is unmistakable as he rightly points out in his analysis.

the idea of “without fear of harm” which is based on objective reality. In other words there is no reason for fear.

1.5.5 Social and Cultural texture of Wisdom’s Poem

We begin our social and cultural texture as with the previous textures by looking into the contextual arena. Hubbard (1989:55) interestingly reveals that the public setting in verses 21-22 is espoused as “the very place that offered such opportunity and such temptation to Israel’s future leaders”. That comment then prepares us for what is largely a *gnostic-manipulationist* argumentation that is emblematic of this unit. The appeal that wisdom makes in 1:23-27 is largely based on specific and distinctive knowledge. Not following her advice leads to regret (1:28-32). At this early stage of our poem, however, this texture is not as well pronounced.

In 1:22, however, the text seems to initially pursue a *conversionist* argumentation by depicting a corrupt scenario having already expressed frustration with her audience in 1:22 and rejection of her advice in 1:23. At the same time we see a *Gnostic-manipulationist* posture through the insistence and particularisation of her knowledge as formational. The statement “If you had turned back toward my reproof I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you”, certainly resembles not only Wisdom’s authoritative speech, but also her self-portraiture as barring the way to disaster (1:24, 26).

This assertiveness is also reiterated in 1:31 where rejection of Wisdom, which is equated to the absence of her advice, inevitably brings about self condemnation. Commenting on Wisdom’s tendency, Davis (2000:34) writes:

The best explanation, then, for Wisdom's aggressiveness is that she is meant to sound like the prophets. Like them, she speaks transparently for God, and like them she risks public contempt in order to reach them perhaps only the few – who can hear her message and choose the 'fear of the Lord' ...

In other words, what is necessary for life cannot be found apart from Wisdom here personified. These thoughts will become clearer in the monologue where her advice is explicitly stated as the equivalent to the important epithet in this account "the fear of the Lord" (1:29). To that Garrett (1993:72) says "wisdom is not abstract or academic but personal" thus underscoring the relational obligations. He continues to make the bold statement, "to reject wisdom is to reject God" to endorse the obligatory nature of Wisdom's appeal.

A similar stance is seen in 1:24-25 which maintains the *Gnostic-manipulationist* argument. Wisdom claims to have the knowledge that by and large is both particular and distinctive in bringing about better fortunes for her audience. The specification of "my rebuke" (1:23, 25, 30) alongside "my counsel" (1:25, 30) places her as the pinnacle of knowledge. This status is also reiterated through the personal pronouns in 1:24-25 as in almost all the lines of this poem. This is even more pronounced against the backdrop of Near Eastern ideal, as Davis (2000:33) points out, that she "does not match the common [practice] both ancient and modern of the woman who is demure in public life, however assertive she may be in the private sphere".

There is also a hint of *Utopian* argumentation in this unit, by virtue of the sentiments above, but also represented in the prohibitive gesture "when I stretched out my hand" (1:24). As in most Semitic cultures, it was a common tendency to accompany words

with gestures (McKane 1970:274). However, in this particular situation, Fox (2000:100) suggests that this gesture signifies threat and intimidation because it is of power or aggression like shaking a fist at someone. He disputes that it is never a signal to approach but rather serves as a warning concerning impending disaster. McKane (1970:274) attributes the gesture to how Wisdom harangues her audience in a stance typical of a wisdom teacher. He states that "there is no reason, however, to suppose that the wisdom teacher did not also use his hands for rhetorical effectiveness in order to make his point" (1970:274). If that is true then, we can deduce from this gesture a *Utopian* argumentation which seeks an inauguration of a new society free of the gangsters cited in 1:8-19 and the dangers described in 1:26-27 and 32.

In the link between disasters and wisdom's audience's rejection the text seems to adopt a *conversionist argumentation*. Tribble (1995:1850) is right in saying that "trouble come because the unwise spurn Wisdom, but Wisdom herself does not send it". In a similar vein, Perdue (2000:83) points out that without the guiding counsel of wisdom, "that is the careful planning designed to lead to success and to secure life, both the community and individuals could be vulnerable to the threats of disaster ... This unprepared state of the simple, who do not fear Yahweh, and like fools, hate knowledge ... leads to devastation when calamity comes upon them. Thus, in the language of retributive justice, the simple who reject Wisdom's invitation will suffer the results of their own folly". Robbins (1996:147) points out that this argumentation adopted here encourages revivalism and public preaching at mass meetings, which interestingly is what Wisdom does at the onset of this poem. We can therefore close this unit with van Leeuwen's (1997:40) comments when he writes:

Wisdom addresses the paradoxical mixture of naiveté and scorn that sometimes affects the young and arrogant (cf. 1:29; 5:12; 12:1). When people persist in ignorance, in defiance of Wisdom's teaching, they become culpable. It is not wrong to be young and naïve, it is blameworthy, though, to want to stay that way (1:22). There is no hope for 'scoffers' and 'fools' who 'know it all' yet 'know what they like' and only 'love what they know' (15:12; 26:11-12; 28:26; Isa. 5:21).

This tone is sustained in 28-32 where the *conversionist argumentation* once again sounds a condemnatory note because of the belief that humans are entirely responsible for their actions. Wisdom's withdrawal is a sure way to see the enforcement of such liability. At this stage there is no attempt on her part to do anything about their self-induced calamities. Fox (2000:102) is right when he says that "this scenario presumes that in their predicament the fools will somehow realize that wisdom is a source of help and that they lack it". What is important to note here is that the realization, however, "does not mean that they will truly repent of their folly and their earlier repudiation of wisdom [since] real fools do not believe that they are repudiating wisdom", Fox continues to explain (2000:102). In 1:33 the *Gnostic-manipulationist* argument is once again revisited as in 1:22-23 where Wisdom insists on the fact that she offers particular and distinctive knowledge for a better situation.

1.5.6 Ideological texture of Wisdom's poem

What could be a fairly obvious matter is the portraiture of Wisdom as a woman in view of the seemingly andocentric orientation of the Israelite culture. This brings us to the **Ideological Texture** with particular reference to the wisdom gender. We discern from this portraiture a daring personality who seemingly goes against the grain of her cultural norms. In this setting, women rarely featured in public life, or at least at the level in which she is here presented. Murphy (1998:10) equates this appearance to

that of a prophet(ess) in that it would be aimed at the entire populace by virtue of that public setting. Clifford (1999:43) alleges that this stance would be representative of certain women in Israel who had such a public role to play (see 2 Samuel 20:16-19 and 2 Samuel 14:1ff). Which biblical women would that audacity be emblematic of is the question we ought to raise as we delve into the passage.

First of all, the daring stance of Woman Wisdom suggests a platform away from the court setting. She is in the streets, at major intersections, in places where only the elders sat for settling matters of justice. While commentators do not refer to this development, it is a revealing example of Wisdom's attempt to leave an all embracing appeal irrespective of her audience's known status. Having said that, however, her audience is exclusively male since the nouns employed here are in the masculine construct. Be that as it may, this could also be interpreted as the very aspect of breaking new ground as it were by this feminine figure who presents herself where only "significant" men dare to tread.

Secondly, as much as we might want to read from her stance here and from occurrences that ensue, it is simply not that straightforward to portray Woman Wisdom as an advocacy for the ideal Woman. Her agenda seem to be other than "political" if you like. On the contrary, the personification that Murphy (2001:5) rightly views as the most extensive in the Bible, and Waltke (2004:197 cf. Fox 2000:95) sees as an interlude, seems to function here as a literary device for efficacy. In writing of Wisdom's counterpart the "Strange Woman", Camp (2000:72f) implies a similar efficacy by depicting her in a rather paradoxical rubric, "Wise and Strange : Woman Wisdom as a Trickster in Proverbs".

Thirdly, with the mention of the “mother” in the preceding unit (1:8), we ask, could this be her poem?

1.5.7 Sacred texture of Wisdom’s poem

The most significant unit as far as the sacred texture goes is 1:29-30 in that it introduces **hw**hy “Yahweh” - the covenantal name of the Lord which is not featured in the parental discourse of 1:8-19. Here it occurs as a reminder of the interconnectedness of knowledge to the fear of the Lord as we saw in 1:7. At the same time it is a reminder that “like the wisdom teacher and the prophet, the persona of wisdom is a means by which the thoughts and desires of Yahweh are communicated to a wayward humanity” (Koptak 2003:89).

1.5.8 Reflection on the role of Wisdom’s poem

In summarising our findings it is important for the purposes of this study to reiterate the questions that ask what role does this poem play in the overall scheme of things, and also why is it placed where it is in the collection, since we believe this was not coincidental. To answer the first question, the appearance of Wisdom herself in the scheme of things is to take the lesson of the parents as her own and “she is now the enticer” (see Lane 2000:19). There is a sense of determination that Wisdom possesses that one does not quite detect in the parental appeal. Not to downplay the significance of the parental appeal, in her soliloquy Wisdom plays the competing voice on the side of the parents against that of the gangsters of 1:10-14. We refer to Koptak (2003:84) who writes:

The literary context presents this speech of Wisdom as quoted speech, spoken by the parents to the same son in the same way the parents quoted the enticement of the violent men. Both examples of quoted speech illustrate the deadly direction of a life that rejects Yahweh and his wisdom (1:18-19, 25-28). The parents offer Wisdom's speech as another word of warning.

If we are to endorse what Koptak says here, the true speaker and audience in the full schemes of things has not really changed. The same parents who spoke in 1:8-19 continue their address in 1:20-33 to their son using the persona of Wisdom as a literary device to heighten their appeal. The same approach is used in 8:1ff where the persona reappears against the backdrop of the adulteress 6:20-7:27. What is interesting in this exchange is the specific adoption of wisdom as a sister in 7:4 to particularly counter the seductive motions of the adulteress. Since we know that both the father and mother are represented in these encounters, could Wisdom's poems (1:20-33; 8:1ff and 9:1ff) be specific compositions of the mother along other speeches directly attributed to her in these collections?

While we may not have the answers to that question, what is perhaps a significant discovery, is that Wisdom's poem functions in the same way as proverbs do in a conversation. Firstly, the speaker takes an authoritative stance. Lieber (1995:99) describes the rhetorical power of proverbs in interpreting and transforming a situation, as such proverbs are universally subscribed to as unquestionable source of information. The speaker here adopts a similar stature in her addressing her audience without necessarily seeking their endorsement of what she has to say. She is her own authority. According to Penfield (1981:316) authoritativeness is associated with highly respected experts in the community.

Secondly, her speech is associated with educational objectives. She comes across as if she has been involved with her audience at an instructional level for some time hence the complaint "how long" (1:22). She makes use of educational terms in reference to her speech, knowledge (1:22, 29), reproof, my thoughts (1:23, 25), and my counsel (1:25, 30). Longman III (2003:81) describes a proverb as a poetic form that expresses an insight, an observation, or advice that has been popularly accepted as a general truth". We see a similar perspective in the way that Wisdom's speech is composed.

Thirdly, the speech is viewed as an expression of wisdom. The sighting of the fear of the Lord motif in 1:29 validates this claim since elsewhere it is equated with the quest for wisdom. Grobler (1994:94) describes proverbs as strategies for handling situations and by that he implies a wise way. Habtu (2006:565) says that as far as the book of Proverbs is concerned, "the presence or absence of the fear of the Lord divides humanity into two camps" of the wise and the unwise. Wisdom's speech is associated with the fear of the Lord, and therefore being wise.

Fourthly, is the association of Wisdom's poem with local morals in the same way as proverbial statements. In writing about Northern Sotho proverbs, Masenya (2001:134) says that there is a worldview or an order to which people must adhere, and those who fail to submit to its demands are punished while those who adhere are rewarded. In speaking about Bassa (Liberia) proverbs Karnga (1996) says that "generally, the emphasis of all Bassa proverbs is placed on morality and how to teach rules about right and wrong behaviour of people in healthy societies". Enugu (1972:82) describes proverbs as the "backbone of African law and education. They embody the values, the cultural generalisations and the philosophical precepts by which the African lives". This

suggests that the way of life or set of principles are derived therein. Wisdom's speech comes across as such, particularly in the conclusion that she reaches. Dell (1997a:31) captures the comprehensiveness of the morality when she writes:

The worldview of the Wisdom writers bears striking similarities to today's views. Both come from experience, from relationships, from basic observation about how to treat people. Both offer advice that is universally true for each generation. Both share a profound understanding of human characteristics – good and bad – carefully spoken words, responsibility, neighbourliness, good food, marriage, money – and warn against bad things – quarrelsomeness, foolishness, estrangement, deception, sloth lying.

Wisdom's speech takes the same moral route in addressing her audience who have, however, lost it.

Fifthly, Wisdom's speech comes across as quoted speech as would be the case with proverbs. According to Joyce Penfield (1981:311) skilful quotations can often assist the speaker in achieving communicative goals more readily in order to give credence to what is being said by citing expertise. She explains:

The functional properties of the quotation combine to produce a more powerful message than ordinary language might have conveyed, while also protecting the integrity and reputation of the addressed person. The speaker is also protected from the implications that he or she might suffer as a result of the message conveyed (1981:332).

Lastly, there is the use of poetic language in Wisdom's speech as you would have in proverbs. As we will discover in chapters 1-9, the poetic mode is sustained throughout. Dell (1997a:5) describes the proverb as the basic form of all wisdom. Wisdom poem can be looked at as a more complex or expanded form of wisdom in view of the maintained poetic form. There is value in the poetic and stylistic features

in containing information in a memorable form for the sake of passing on this information from one generation to the next. In the original setting this was done orally. To a large extent, since wisdom is mostly a verbal art form, it is likely that the poetic form still assists in maintaining currency among a given people.

To answer the second question on the placement of Wisdom's poem at this juncture of the collection, we have already partly responded to the complementary role that her voice plays to that of the parental appeal. In a unique way, Wisdom's poem plays an introductory role to the major section (2:1-22) which ensues. This section focuses on wisdom as both desirable and obligatory. Having already heard such sentiments in her speech, the subsequent parental appeal then utilises the relational bond to underscore the compulsion of wisdom on the part of the son. In this study we are arguing that this relational bond is both the conducive and the necessary environment for nurturing young ones for life, an ideal that the ancient world seriously upheld by divine specification (Deut. 6:1ff and Pr. 22:6). With that in mind, we now turn to the final text with a juxtaposition of Woman Wisdom and Woman Folly as yet another lesson in discernment.

1.6 Invitations by Woman Wisdom and Woman Folly 9:1-18

The final unit presents the important matter of discernment with the view to making the right choice. Rival invitations are brought into sharp contention by the juxtaposition of Woman Wisdom (9:1-6) and Woman Folly (9:13-18) targeted to the same audience, and presented in similar fashion, to make the decision making process exigent. Our interest in this passage lies in the fact that in the context of family religion that we have argued is the bedrock for the first nine chapters of the book of

Proverbs, Woman Folly represents a real threat that even after the careful parental instructions, she still contends to be heard. In so doing, it is imperative once again to bring the motif of competing voices under a single unit to assist with the ability to discern. With Woman Wisdom's poem in 1:20-33 still fresh in our minds, we would like to bring the rivalry presented in 9:1-18 into contest. The parents will not always be there to offer their advice hence the placement of these highly symbolic rival feasts.

There is, therefore, validity in Perdue's (2000:148) insight when he writes:

[The Woman Folly] represents the seduction of alien religion and culture that threatened to lead to the undoing of Jewish tradition and its virtues and values, by outright apostasy or by slow assimilation of unwise, even nihilistic behaviour that could contribute to the disassembling of the conservative Judaism that was seeking to take shape and survive in the early Persian period. Family religion, and some measure of Jewish identity within the larger Persian Empire were the real stakes in the conflict between Woman Wisdom and her nemesis Woman Folly.

If that then is the case, which falls in line with the late dating of the material in Proverbs 1-9, then there is some scope for Perdue's perspective here. For our purposes, he singles out family religion as being under threat during this period. He adds that "the value of education, honour, wealth, long life, and family were placed within the contours of extremes of revolutionary activity and outlawry and the more ordinary pitfalls and entrapments of imprudent and foolish behaviour that undercut the stability of colony, national religion and traditional family style" (2000:148). Koptak (2006:263) also regards the two speeches in chapter 9 as an intended reminder of parental instruction when he writes:

Therefore, like the two speeches of chapters 7-8, these two speeches in chapter 9 contrast the two ways of wisdom and waywardness. As readers study this contest of words and ideas, they can also imagine the parents getting ready to send their son out to make his way in the world, once again urging

him to remember all they have taught him. It remains to be seen whether he will remember his parents' instructions.

Our attention is drawn to Koptak's invitation to imagine this final parental instruction as a send off in which we should get the sense that all that had to be said, as far as the intentions of the first nine chapters are concerned has been said. It is particularly significant to have such a perspective in view of the fact that these addresses deviate from the typical form of Instruction as we have seen elsewhere in this book. We have neither the vocative "my son", nor the customary call to attention and accompanying charge and motive clause. However, we need to point out that as in the previous cases where Wisdom speaks, she does not address the "son (1:20-33; 8:1-36; 9:1-6). In line with Koptak's view the material in Chapter 9 can be argued as yet another example of parental instruction and literary creativity in addressing their son. This is also the only place within the first nine chapters that the Woman Folly specifically emerges as a fully fledged personification and particularly as a competitor against Woman Wisdom for the same audience. Not only that, but the principle of the book which we saw in 1:7 is reiterated in 9:10 as we draw to a close in these exchanges. Let us look at all these factors more closely.

1.6.1 Text and exegetical framework

Our text divides itself into three equal portions in terms of verse distribution. The first six verses deal with the feast prepared by Woman Wisdom, and the last six verses the feast of Woman Folly, to use Habtu's words (2006:760). The six verses in between these two sections according to Longman III (2006:217) show wisdom in a positive light and folly rather negatively. His thesis is endorsed by Byargeon (1997:372) who purports that each type of individual mentioned in 9:7-12 corresponds with the two

women in Proverbs 9 and also in chapters 7 and 8 which play a precursive role. This view makes more sense as opposed to the majority of scholarship that regards Proverbs 9:7-12 as intrusive (see McKane 1970:359; Whybray 1994:52; Koptak 2006:267). We go along with van Leeuwen's (1997:100) chiasmic structure of A B A' in terms of these subunits.

`h[(b.vi h'yd,äWM[; hb'Pc.x' Ht'_ybe ht'än>B' tAmk.x'â 1
 `Hn")x'l.vu hk'îr>[") @a;÷^a Hn"+yyE hk'äs.m' Hx'b.jiâ hx'äb.j' 2
 `tr,q") ymeroåm. yPe^aG:÷-l[; ar'_q.ti h'yt,äro[n: hx'äl.v'(3
 ▲ Woman Wisdom's Invitation `AL* hr'm.a'ä ble©÷-rs;x]
 hN"hE+ rsUåy" ytip,â-yimi 4
 `yTik.s'(m' !yIy:åB. Wt^av.W÷ ymi_x]l;b.(Wmåx]l; Wkl.â 5
 `hn")yBi %r,d,äB. Wr^av.aiw>÷ Wy=x.wI) ~yIåat'p. Wbåz>[i 6

 `Am*Wm [v'är'l. x;ykiPAmW !Al+q' Alå x;(qEå!{ #le^a
 Yrse'yOÝ 7
 `&'b<)h'a/y<w> ~k'^{ia}x'l.÷ xk;îAh &'a<+n"f.yI-!P, #leâ xk;ATå-
 la; 8
 @ `xq;l,(@s,Ayæw> qyDI^ac;l.÷ [d;îAh dA[+~K;x.y<w>
 ~k'x'l.â !TEå 9
 ■ Invitational Interlude `hn")yBi ~yviädoq. t[;d;Pw> hw"+hy>
 ta;är>yI hm'k.x'â tL;äxiT. 10
 `~yYI)x; tAnæv. ^aL.÷ WpysiîAyw> ^ym,_y" WBår>yI ybiâ-
 yKi 11
 `aF'(ti ^iD>b;l.(T'c.l;^aw>÷ %L"+ T'm.k;äx' T'm.k;x'â~ai 12

pillars, she has prepared the meat, and mixed the wine. She has also set the table and she has sent out her maids and having sent them she calls from the highest point of the city.

Habtu (2006:760) draws our attention to the thoroughness and generosity with which she prepared her feast. To that we add that she is portrayed as the centre of attention which is clear in the speech she makes in 9:4-6 as she invites her guests, *ytp* "the simple", to her feast. Interestingly, acceptance of her invitation on the part of her intended guests in 9:6 is directly linked to forsaking their simple ways, to life and also to walking in the way of understanding. The "simple" here, we must point out, fit the attributes of the "son" whom we have encountered as the beneficiary of these Instructions. This concept applies to the naïve or immature, to those not yet committed to either side of the wise or foolish, and it is the goal of the one named Wisdom to turn them to her side, to use Longman III's words (2006:217).

We are reminded, through the **intertexture**, of this personality *twmkx* whom we have encountered in 1:20-33. She also appears in the most extensive coverage of her intentions in 8:1-36. Interestingly, her audience, among others, includes the "simple" to whom we are introduced in 1:4; 8:6 as part of the target group to whom this account is directed. The concept of *twmkx* "her house" in 9:1 is a common theme in the book of proverbs pregnant with symbolic meaning (see 2:18; 5:8; 7:8, 27; 9:14; 14:1). In this instance it seems to epitomize her positive influence specified in 9:6.

The attached details pertaining to her house also refers to the generosity with which she intends to lavish her guests. In this regard, there is first of all the mention of the **h[bv hydwm]** “seven pillars” which some scholars believe to represent perfection (Ross 1991:908; Habtu 2006:760). However, what comes out of the same description is her industriousness based on the verb **bcx** “hew”, usually associated with hard workers (see 1 Ks. 5:29; 2 Chr. 2:1,2,17; 24:17; Is. 5:2; 22:16). In his article, Luke (1999:205) compares it to the decorative aspects associated with great building of the ancient time, (Jud. 16:25-30; I Ks. 7:7-22; Jer. 52:17; cf. Ez. 42:6).

Secondly, to stay on that theme of industry, we have the lavish preparations that go into the hosting of this banquet. The preparation of meat carried out by Wisdom was usually an activity reserved for males (see Gen. 18:7; Jud. 6:19; 1 Sam. 25:11). Luke (1999:196) points out that mostly rulers in the ancient Orient used to give sumptuous banquets to their noble and notables, as well as dignitaries from foreign countries. Lavish banquets seem to have been the activity of royal members (Est. 1:5; 3:1-3; 5:4, 8 Dan. 5:1). Luke (1999:199) clarifies that “the evidence here adduced from ancient oriental sources serves to clarify the background of Proverbs 9:1-6. When the author speaks of Wisdom’s erecting a palace and the banquet connected with it, he is simply reproducing an ancient oriental tradition which, to be sure, was well known to his readers”. By the same token the mixing of wine in 9:2 and 5 represents adding either honey and/or herbs to make the wine more spicy, potent and enjoyable (Waltke 2004:433) as we would read in other OT passages (SoS 8:2; Ps. 75:8; Is. 5:22). It was a specialized skill which required adding the selected spices at proper proportions to make it delicious. To that time consuming exercise is **hnxlv hkr** the arranging

of a table in 9:2 is a metonymy for the food it represents (Gen. 43:34; Jud. 1:7; 2 Sam 9:7-13; 1 Ks. 4:27; 10:4-5; Job 36:16; Ps. 23:5; Neh. 5:17-18).

Thirdly, her industriousness is also embodied in the fact that she issues an open invitation to anyone who would attend her feast. In so doing she suggests her preparedness to cater for all who care to come. At the same time she goes against the grain of the known practice where feasts were usually by invitation (see 2 Sam. 3:20; 1 Ks. 1:41; 3:15; Is. 25:6; Jer. 51:31; Lk. 14:8, 12-14, 16-24). However, Waltke (2004:432) also points out that the scene depicted here is particularly close to the dedication of Baal's palace in Ugaritic texts where the sequence of building>slaughtering>inviting>feasting is also present. What this suggests is that this was a common ancient practice. However, in this instance there are no religious connotations.

With regards to the **social and cultural texture** we are reminded by the seven pillars that seem to indicate the length of the room and its overall size. Waltke (2004:433) points out that typically, three supporting pillars were used in what we know to have been a restrictive building space in Israelite towns. He also cites an Arab saying about a rich man which goes "His house stands on twelve pillars". Seven pillars is exceptionally large. The idea of perfection could also be in mind here since the number seven has such connotations in this culture (Ross 1991:947).

Turning our attention to the meal preparation itself, we also know that meat, mixed wine and even a table were not a common feature in the average household. Koptak (2003:265) affirms this when he writes that "the meal is luxurious, for wine and meat

were not daily fare for the commoner. The slaughter of meat says more about the richness of the meal than any religious rite”.

There is a sense in which a *Gnostic manipulationist argumentation* can be gleaned from this subunit. Wisdom’s invitation to the “simple” and her instruction for them to leave their simple ways in order to live and walk in the way of understanding, directly insists that she is the embodiment of specialized knowledge that will bring about that transformation. The fact that she finds the highest point in the city to issue her invitation tells us of her intentions to make her sentiments known as broadly as possible. Koptak (2003:265) who sees the speaker here under the guise of the parental teacher of chapters 1-8 suggests that the house is symbolic of her teaching and its decorative aspects depict splendour and security. He comments:

In sum the images of personified Wisdom together create a picture of a woman who is self-sufficient, industrious, wealthy, and concerned for the welfare of others, particularly the hungry simple youth. She is the embodiment of the wise person of Proverbs, a person who is careful to learn wise ways and teach them to others. This picture of Wisdom will take many forms throughout the book, male and female, but will reappear as a competent female provider again in chapter 31 (2006:266).

Despite Wisdom’s self sufficiency portraiture, her intention to instruct the simple is a significant service. This is epitomized by her indication that she holds the key to life and the faculty of **hnyb** understanding. According to Murphy (1998:59) the significance of the meal is explained in this claim. These thoughts are further elucidated in the subunit that ensues.

1.6.4 Invitational interlude Proverbs 9:7-12

As was said earlier on, most scholars perceive this subunit to be an intrusion to the text. However, Murphy (1998:61) asks “if it is a bias on the part of the modern reader to characterize these verses so”. He continues, “if they are an insertion, are they interruptive? What was the intention behind this?” In response to this question we refer to Byargeon (1997:367) who raises similar questions and favours an integrative nature as he sees the contrasting aspects being drawn between Woman Wisdom (9:1-6) and Woman Folly (9:13-18). He concludes that the subunit represents theological navigation that assists the young man to decide in favour of Woman Wisdom and against Woman Folly (1997:372).

The **inner texture** commences with the shift to third person which makes one wonder who the speaker is at this juncture. The first person reappears in 9:11 which sounds like Woman Wisdom. The dominant features in this subunit are the contrasting statements that are set in typical Hebrew poem where parallelism delineates the proceedings. On the onset we are introduced to a #l “mocker” in 9:7 and repeated in 9:8 and 12. In 9:8 and 12 he is *antithetically paralleled* with a ~kxl “wise man” to highlight the futility of trying to correct a mocker as opposed to the benefit of rebuking the wise. In 9:7 however, the mocker is *synonymously paralleled* with [vr1 “wicked” man. The result of either correcting a mocker or rebuking a wicked man is similar !wlq “abuse” and wmwm “hurt” respectively.

We also have an array of concepts with an instructional thrust. First in that list is rSY “correct” in 9:7b which suggests an attempt to assist a mocker whom we already know from his cynicism is unteachable. Secondly, is the concept xky “rebuke” repeated twice in 9:8 with a contrasting audience. In 9:7b it suggests that the attempt will cause one to incur physical abuse at the hands of a wicked man or a criminal, since the concept has such connotations. The same applies to the mocker in 9:8a who responds with hate while the opposite is suggested in 9:8b with reference to a wise man who responds in love. With particular reference to the “wise” Lane (2000:76) speaks positively of the evident openness to instruction which will strengthen a bond with the teacher whom he will love.

Thirdly, the concept !t “give” in 9:9a, which appears in the imperative construct, assumes the giving of instructions to the wise with the predictable result that they will become wiser. Ross (1991:949) says that profitable response to corrective teaching underscores “the interrelatedness of qualities and disposition of those who are teachable”, as we will see below. By the same token, Koptak (2003:268) says that this suggests that the intended listener is either a teacher or is expected to become one. He asserts that “a learner by definition is one who becomes a bearer of the tradition” since Wisdom intends for those who accept her learning to teach it to others (2003:268).

Fourthly, the concept $[\text{dwh}]$ is also in the imperative construct which is connected with gaining knowledge or perception. In this context it is linked with the noun xql in

9:9b (cf. 9:7) which suggests a teaching/learning process with reference to a righteous man. Interestingly, this is *paralleled* with the wise in 9:9a which also presents the predictable idea adding to his learning. The verb @sy “add” here indicates some progression realized in the instructional exercise implied here. This is very significant for the purposes of this study. Koptak (2003:268) espouses that “in Wisdom’s view people show their character by their response to correction, mockers by rejecting correction or the wise by receiving it”.

Fifthly, having somewhat *repeated* the key concept ~kx in 9:8, and twice in 9:9 we come to 9:10 where is it highlighted, and twice again in 9:12. Twice it is referred to in an adjectival construct (9:8b; 9:9a) and 9:12a) in qualifying the type of person open to instruction. Twice in 9:9ab and 9:12ab it appears in the verbal form prescribing it as a practice and only once in 9:10 is it a noun. These repetitions underscore the importance of this concept in all three uses, but also as an instructional apparatus.

The **intertexture** commences with what seems to be a preparation of what is to come by the constant use of the short sentence here which we find to predominate the chapters that ensue. This idea is fully espoused by van Leeuwen (1997:103) who writes that “through repetition of key phrases and themes, these verses create links both forward and backward in the final form of Proverbs. These verses anticipate the short sentence sayings and admonitions that will predominate in chapters 10-29”. The contrast between the righteous and the wicked form the central focus of chapters 10-15 in particular. The necessity of the son to distinguish himself from the wicked men

(1:8-19; 2:12-15) and to disassociate himself from the promiscuous woman (2:16-19; 5:3ff etc) is re-lived in these contrasts.

To that we would like to add the idea evoked by Koptak's (2003:268) comments above that we can surmise is an intention here to see the learners achieve to a level where they can also teach. This brings to the fore the idea promulgated in Proverbs 4:1-4 where the father speaks to his sons with the intention to pass on this wisdom heritage on the basis of a personal experience of a similar exercise with his own parents. What is significant in this context is the fact that this is one of the few places in the book of Proverbs where both parents feature (4:3) suggesting a corporate effort in this instructional exercise (cf. 1:8; 6:20). This reminds us of Gerstenberger's (2002:68) thesis on the role that parents played when he writes:

The appointment of parents as mediators of the divine will for members of the family is an extraordinary far-reaching decision. According to the understanding of Hebrew Scriptures it concerns not only discipline with the family, the good behaviour of children, but all ethical spheres and dimensions and also what we would call the content of religious instruction. The parents as mediators of the will of God are the decisive authority for the family in the teaching and life of the small group.

Our perception then is that parents instructed their children in such a way that it would be conceivable to see the same exercise continue with succeeding generations.

Even more significant is the reiteration of the principle of the book in 9:10 (cf. 1:7; 2:5; 10:27; 14:27; 15:16, 33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17). With regards to this commonality, Murphy (1998:60) says that "this teaching is familiar, and could indicate that the speaker is the parent/teacher". He goes on to raise the question pertaining to the precise intention of the editor in positioning these verses between the two invitations.

Perhaps he answers his own question by suggesting the parental identity. Additionally he perceives the central importance of 9:10 without which the wisdom enterprise would be in vain. To follow Murphy's logic here, there is a strong affirmation about the value of wisdom as a virtue precisely after the futility projected in 9:7 and overcome by the sentiments in 9:8-9. Thus 9:10 becomes noteworthy in that culminative sense followed by what sounds like Woman Wisdom's statement (cf. 3:16, 18; 4:13b; 8:35). This closes with the consequential clause which contrasts the outcome of wisdom against that of arrogance 9:12.

The **social and cultural texture** presents a *Gnostic manipulationist argumentation* by insisting on the benefits of a teachable personality. In so doing, there is an underlying insistence upon the blessedness of a life open to instruction. In conjunction with the rest of the unit, we note that this is a well constructed poem, which as Wee (1999:59) says, serves as the climax and conclusion of Proverbs 1-9". She suggests that 9:10-11 is the core of the poem where the theme of the book "fear of the Lord" and the blessing of a godly life" are spelt out.

Along the same lines, Murphy (1998:62) regards this subunit as a presentation of character formation which is the same ideal seen throughout the first nine chapters.

He writes (1998:62):

The instruction is a program in character formation portraying the several values that should be exemplified in the conduct of youths. Although knowledge and learning are stressed because there are 'lessons' to be learned, there is a tradition to be followed. One may not stop there. The goal is praxis : how to live ... To this end the educators, ... lay out a lifestyle that must be followed, if one is to avoid a lifestyle that must be followed, if one is to avoid folly (=death).

The stage then is set for Folly's invitation since it really holds no sway if the sentiments in 9:7-12 are to be taken seriously. This is not in any way intended to downplay Folly's influence but to actualize the realities the world has to offer.

1.6.5 Invitation to Woman Folly's feast 9:13-18

Just about all we saw in Woman Wisdom's in issuing of an invitation, is reiterated by her nemesis *twlysk tva* "Woman Folly". The **inner texture** makes the parallel obvious:

- They both call out from a high place 9:3 and 14
- The same invitation is issued 9:4 and 16
- A meal is offered 9:5 and 17

However, despite these similarities, they are differences equally observable.

- There is no evidence of industriousness on Folly's part 9:13
- Folly waits for those passing by 9:15 cf. 9:3
- The meal she offers is different 9:17 cf. 9:5
- Her guests are heading for disaster 9:18 cf. 9:6

Let us look at Folly more closely. Firstly we notice the descriptions employed here consolidate her image in 9:13. She is introduced as *hymh* "loud" which seems to suggest being riotous as Ross (1991:949) indicates. This description is further qualified by the statement *hm h[dy-lbw twytp* "she is ignorant and knows nothing". Garrett (1993:116) associates this description with rootlessness or carelessness of the temptress.

Secondly, she **bvy** “sits” at the door of her house which is situated at the highest point of the city. Her position here according to Koptak (2003:269) tells us that she really has nothing to offer since there are no prior preparations traceable to the invitation she issues in 9:15-16. In fact what she offers as “water” and “food” is not truly hers to claim for it requires stealing.

Thirdly, her rivalry is magnified by the fact that in 9:16 she repeats Woman Wisdom’s invitation verbatim. At this juncture, we realize that the symbolic function that Woman Wisdom projects in her invitation in 9:1-6 is here replayed with a different end in mind unfortunately hidden from the candidates here. Hence we have the metaphor of stolen water and food eaten in secret which suggests the idea of trying to get away with something. By 9:18 the implications of accepting Folly’s invitations are made known. Unlike her counterpart who pronounces the destiny of her guests, Folly’s secrecy is magnified. The phrase [dy-**alw** “and he does not know” which the NIV translates in the third person masculine plural “But little do they know”, depicts the veiled consequences of accepting Folly’s invitation here. She hides more than she reveals by using lust as her entry point.

The **intertexture**, firstly, reveals Folly as being in the same category as the wayward wife of 7:5-27 and invariably of 2:16-19; 5:3-23 and 6:20-35. The picture of her indiscipline, as depicted in 9:13, is reiterated in 7:11. The symbolic portraiture of “her house” as holding disastrous consequences for all who enter in 9:14 is reflected in 2:18; 5:8 and 7:8, 14, 27. What is of particular interest in 9:16, is that her targeted

victims all seem to be young and unmarried (2:16; 5:7, 20; 6:24, 29) but in 7:7 are similarly described as “simple” “young” and “lacked judgment”.

Secondly, in all instances her seductive words as in 9:17 are projected as her most potent arsenal (2:16; 5:3; 6:2; 7:5, 21). Garrett (1993:116) suggests that her seduction is emblematic of the criminal conspiracy that tempts the young man to easy money (1:11-14; 4:14-17 and 6:12-15). Van Leeuwen (1997:104) says that “Dame Folly masterfully integrates the portraits of Folly as a seduction to bogus good, in contrast to the genuine good of Wisdom” what he calls a parasitic ambiguity of evil as it masquerades as good. This is particularly significant in that it is mostly through speech that the instructions in the book of Proverbs are issued. The ability to use words exceptionally as Folly seems to be capable of, is in itself a serious threat not only to Wisdom’s invitation, but all else that has been said.

Thirdly, is the consequential clause in 9:18 which brings to light the harsh realities of **lway** “Sheol” or the underworld as in 2:18-19; 5:5, 11, 14; 6:32; 7:22-23, 26, 27.

The graphic portraiture of Folly’s guests as already in the depths of the grave is striking. The concept **qm** [“unfathomable” suggests the impossibility of a reversal of their misfortunes. And on this solemn note the message concludes as the writer clearly portrays the options available to the listener.

In terms of the **social and cultural texture** we focus our attention on the symbolic role that Folly represents in offering this rival feast. Waltke (2004:444) calls her the pretentious hostess thus prescribing her feast as a non-event. However, she attempts

to make use of two methods as potential drawcards, the location of her house and her attraction (cf. Lane 2000:78). With regards to the first aspect, Murphy (1998:60) suggests that it seems that her house was situated on the city walls from whose height she could address passersby. In that ideal location, she could then take advantage of the “simple” that would easily fall prey to her promise of a good time as indicated in 9:17. Lane (2000:78) comments:

She knows Wisdom has a house on the hill, prominent and a good place from which to call (vv.1, 3), so she emulates her. Temptation is good at advertising itself, a public relations expert, employing the best marketing techniques. [She] sees to it that we all know what sinful pleasures are on offer and that we cannot afford to miss them.

Waltke (2004:444) comments on her posture of sitting as representative of a position of authority. He writes that “sitting is the posture of authority that teachers take. The scribes and Pharisees sat on the chair of Moses (Mt. 23:2), and the Lord Jesus sat down to teach (Mt. 5:1; Lk. 4:20-21). When the pope speaks *ex cathedra* (“from the chair”), faithful Roman Catholics bow to his authority. The pretentious imposter presents herself as an empress who rules a city, and the gullible bow to her authority” (2000:444). Again the rivalry, not only with Wisdom, but with parents is unmistakable. With regard to the second aspect of her method, she continues to present herself at the point of attraction by metaphorically using water and food to speak of herself. Lane (2000:79) says that she “makes no attempt to conceal the unlawfulness of the pleasure she offers. It is stolen – adultery is stealing intimacy from one to whom it rightly belongs – and therefore has to be indulged in secret”. Also, in saying so, she presents what is formulated as a proverb (cf. Murphy 1998:61; Waltke 2004:445) to present her invitation in 9:17. In quoting authority as it were, she tries to make her sentiments convincing. Murphy comments:

In what sounds like a proverb, she throws out a suggestive advertisement that promises, at the same time that deceives. That is the slippery style, the 'smooth talk' employed by the stranger, which the parents so often warns against (1998:61).

We need to hear Murphy's observation in the light of the fact that the proverb, if we can call it such, is half truth, in that "although it is pleasant for a season, in the end it is repulsive", to use Waltke's words (2004:445) as he points out that "water" is an incomplete metaphor for sexual pleasure. However, we must not be fooled by this pointer. So much else is at stake as Murphy (1998:61) concludes:

This final chapter may be viewed as a kind of either/or: Either Wisdom or Folly. A summons to a decision has been issued to the reader from the beginning, and is sustained throughout. Now it is dramatized in the depiction of Woman Wisdom and Woman Folly extending dinner invitations to the 'simple' or naïve.

In terms of the **sacred texture** here the mention of Yahweh in 9:10 once again brings to the forefront the pointlessness of life apart from God. Israel's quest for Wisdom could not be comprehended outside of the zone of divine influence and relationship. What we have in this poem 9:1-18 is the literal adultery or fidelity definitively revealed in their metaphorical function as symbols of folly and wisdom respectively speaking (see van Leeuwen 1997:100). This argument is inconceivable outside of the divine perspective since fidelity evokes the sanctity of a relationship with God.

1.6.6 Reflecting on Proverbs 9:1-18

On the one hand, the poem in 9:1-18 is a climatic consolidation of the use of the feminine figure as a literary device for instructional purposes. The woman motif is prominent in the book of Proverbs such that we have to raise the question as to why this is so? The author makes use of the personification in 1:20-33; 8:1-36 and 9:1-6

as a drawcard to the young by use of the sexual appeal perhaps that is implicit in these passages. With specific reference to 9:1-6 Longman III (2006:217) says that for a woman to invite a man to a meal has erotic overtones. We know that this is not Wisdom's intention. However, this is not quite the first time that intimacy is suggested in this account (see 3:18 and 7:4). If anything, the author makes use of a device that commands the young hearer's attention.

Equally so is the intended repulsion that Woman Folly is intended to effect. In 9:13-18 is the only instance in this account that a full personification of Woman Folly appears. Previously, her interests were represented via the strange woman and the prostitute against whom the son is warned. Nevertheless, the text does not attempt to hide the compelling seduction that these characters possess. In these instances, enough is said to show that while the appeal is strong, yielding to it is catastrophic.

On the basis of these factors, we can understand, therefore, the prominence of the woman motif in the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs, as the table below clearly reveals:

CHAPTER	WISDOM PERSONIFICATION	STRANGE/FOREIGN WOMAN	TOTAL VERSES IN CHAPTER	%
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1	1:20-33		14/33	42
2	2:2-4	2:16-22	10/22	45
3	3:13-18		6/35	17
4	4:5-9		5/27	18
5		5:3-23	21/23	91
6		6:24-35	12/35	34
7	7:4	7:5-27	24/27	89
8	8:1-36		36/36	100
9	9:1-6	9:13-18	24/36	67
TOTAL			152/274	55

Table 22: Woman motif in Proverbs 1-9 adapted from Wee (1999:54)

On the other hand, we are fascinated by the thought that the material in 9:7-12 is presented in such a way that the learner will with time pass on the lessons learnt. If the climatic ethos that Wee (1999:59) proposes for the entire unit (9:1-18) holds water, then in retrospect, the nurturing implied here applies to all material in the first nine chapters. What we then have in the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs is an exchange between a parent and a child emblematic of the Gerstenberger's (2002:29) thesis of a family theology that never completely lose its reference to family.

CHAPTER FIVE

HOME BASED NURTURING IN THE LIGHT OF SHONA WISDOM POEMS

1. Shona perspectives on home based nurturing

In this chapter we would like to explore the subject of home based nurturing from the perspective that Shona wisdom poems yield. We will commence with a brief description of the wisdom poem which will prepare us to analyse the Shona wisdom poem. This will be followed by an analysis of select Shona wisdom poems as secondary material for our general purposes of this study. As mentioned in the opening chapter, the Shona wisdom poems are intended to play a supportive role to biblical texts that we have analysed in this study. As such we will not necessarily employ the same methodological approach but rather attempt to capture the essence of these poems. We also realize that in these Shona compositions, there is a subscription to traditional religious notions that we would not automatically agree with.

This discussion will be followed by a comparison of biblical and Shona wisdom poems with particular reference to the implications for home based nurturing. We will close with a summation of the exegetical findings which we will use as a backdrop for contemporary possibilities for home based nurturing, which is the focus of the final chapter of this study.

1.1 Description of the Wisdom Poem and its function

In our exegesis of select texts from opening chapters 1-9, the genre we were dealing with is wisdom poem. The material is distinct from the proverb sayings that are found, for example, in 10:1-22:16. We are also impressed by the obvious revelation of the wide range of subject matter covered in this section. However, the question is then

why do we have this material in a collection given a title “The book of Proverbs” and yet the first nine chapters are wisdom poems which are not necessarily true to that label? To add to that question, why is this material presented in the guise of parent-child encounters?

To respond to these questions, we seek to argue using a comparative study of the Shona wisdom poem. On the one hand, we have the association of this genre with proverbial wisdom as already demonstrated by the title of the book of Proverbs and its connection with wisdom poem in the first nine chapters. On the other hand, we ought to discover its function and the intended communicable arena. In our exegetical analyses, we have already been introduced along the way to various traditional values of the Shona culture that are similar to those of the Israelite world projected in these texts. We have also considered the similarities of the nature of the family in both cultures. Our idea in taking that route was in preparation for the dialogue between biblical and traditional Shona practices as possible fertile ground to assist us with the exegetical methodological approach. Ultimately, the question we would like to raise is this; does the African traditional context assist us in our exegetical analysis of biblical material?¹⁵⁴ Before we answer that question, let us consider some aspects of the Shona and their wisdom poems. However, in citing the Shona wisdom poem, the present writer does not suggest equivalence of this material to the parallel biblical genre. As an exercise undertaken by the author to present his material in the form of wisdom poem, we are saying that the Shona composition offers a point of departure for applicational purposes in a contemporary context.

¹⁵⁴ The findings of van Heerden (2006:429-40) and (2006:500-24) will be of assistance to our intentions as we will discuss these considerations later on.

1.1.1 Nature of Shona wisdom poem

The best description of the Shona ancient wisdom that we have come across is found in Hamutyinei's account *Chiparurangoma Chamudyadzozo : A Drumming Prelude to Ancient Wisdom* (1992). The 2001 reprinting of this account is indicative of the ongoing interest in his presentation. In the preface (1992:5) we read:

A drumming prelude to ancient wisdom is in the nature of epic verse closely detailing the statuses and cultural occupations in a traditional Shona person's life from the cradle-sling through childhood, adolescence and adulthood up to the grave, and perhaps beyond, to the person's eventual elevation to the highest and most respected status, that of spirit elderhood. The poem is very rich in cultural material covering all aspects, material and spiritual, of traditional Shona life. This should be a source of pride and inspiration for our modern rootless and deculturated youth, which was, no doubt, what the author had in mind in composing it so laboriously but expertly. It is "salted" throughout with proverbial lore and sayings.

To unpack this description, our first observation is that the nature of the epic verse is comprehensive in subject matter. In his book, Hamutyinei (1992) covers a wide range of subjects:

1. *Kupfimbana nokuroorana* – Courtship and Marriage

This poem describes the rules governing relationships with the opposite sex and particularly discourages irresponsible sex and the heavy penalties associated with it.

2. *Kuzvarwa nokurerwa kwavana* – Childbirth and rearing

In this poem the various religious beliefs associated with childbirth and an assortment of rites that would be undertaken to ensure protection from evil spirits are discussed. This is followed by specific steps that would be taken to ensure that a child grows up with a clear understanding of roles and good character.

3. *Zipfeko nezvishongo zvechinyakare* – Traditional dress and ornaments

This poem reveals the ancient dress code from an informative point of view and what was appropriate and for what specific occasion. Some of the traditional dress code had religious connotations.

4. *Kutsvaga Usavi* – Hunting

This poem describes the role of the bread-winner in providing for his family. As in ancient Israel, meat was not an everyday luxury and for that reason providing some commanded a lot of respect among other things.

5. *Mitambo nokuzvivaraidza* – Traditional dances and entertainment

Here we have a description of dances/games that kept people entertained usually after the evening meal. Embedded in these were methods that fostered interpersonal relationships since the neighbours would be involved.

6. *Mushandirapamwe wokurima* – Farming co-operatives

This poem describes how community members assisted one another during the planting and harvesting season. There were procedures and ceremonies that people engaged in to invite others' help at the cost of some local brew that they shared.

7. *Uroyi noun'anga* – Witchcraft and traditional healers

This poem on the one hand describes herbal knowledge for the common good, and on the other, such knowledge supposedly used for harm. In both cases it seems that this was exclusive knowledge given to a privileged few.

8. *Zvokudyidzana nekutengeserana* – Mutuality and Trade

This poem dwells in how people assisted the economically disadvantaged as a moral duty. People found ways to respond to the plight of others as a gesture of goodwill.

9. *Kutongwa kwemhosva nezvirango* – Matters of Justice

This poem describes how interpersonal conflict was handled at the chief's court and how justice was exercised in such a way as to retain good relationships.

10. *Zvokufa nokuvigwa kwavanhu* – Death and burial

This poem describes the various rites observed during a funeral and the religious connotations for such practices. It attempts to keep the young informed so as to ensure these traditions are not lost.

11. *Zvipirwa* – Offerings

The final poem deals with the various religious ceremonies and the attendant rites to appease the departed and the creator. It reveals on the one hand the belief in life after death and on the other, the mediatory role of the departed in taking up the concerns of the living with the creator.

12. *Takasiya zvakadaro* – We gave up

This poem is a historical reflection since the coming of the whites and the colonization which included among other experiences the displacement of people from their land and forced participation in the Second World War.

As one reads this wide array of subject representation, the attention to detail is unmistakable in the compositional strategy.

The second observation is that the poem is stipulated as a rich source of cultural material about the traditional Shona life, which is much needed by "our modern rootless and decultured youth" (Hamutyinei 1992:i). In saying so, this statement admits on the one hand to the status of our modern youth as having lost traditional cultural practices. In the book *Pasichigare* (Kabweza *et al* 1979) which contains essays on Shona culture, the editors interestingly include, on occasion, a poetical composition

that prudently represents some aspects of cultural heritage. Although this strategy is not explained by the editorial team, in our estimation, it underscores the literary value and content of the poem in passing on of such information. At the same time the poetic form, as we have seen in our exegetical analysis of the book of Proverbs, contains *mnemonic* devices that assists with better retention of information as opposed to prose. However, the valid question we would like to raise at this juncture is what is the cause of this loss? Before we go there, we would like to register, on the other hand, the perceived instructional value of the wisdom poem as covering all aspects, material and spiritual of the traditional Shona life. The instructional composition of the wisdom poem is of particular interest to this study in view of the apparent structure of the material in the book of Proverbs 1-9.

The third observation is the "salting" throughout, of the wisdom poem with proverbial lore and sayings. This is an important strategy based on the universal subscription within a given setting of the obligatory advice of proverbial lore and sayings. As cited earlier in the study, we reiterate what Joyce Penfield (1981:310) says, that "skillful use of quotations can often help the speaker achieve his communication goals more readily than does the use of other types of verbal behaviour". This readiness resonates from the high regard for traditional values and wisdom true of any cultural people group. This means that the deculturation of our young people is not necessarily a result of their disregarding traditional values, but perhaps a product of sheer ignorance.

Fourthly, the assumption of the persona of an elder in this composition whose intention is to assist with passing on of these important values is noted. In his opening poem, Hamutyinei (1992:7) assumes the name "*Mudyamadzo*" (interestingly translated Ancient

Wisdom) who claims paternal ancestry, which in itself is a claim to authority and obviously commands attention. As a known ancestral fatherly figure, his concern is to revisit traditional values as his purposeful agenda not to leave them in the dark as it were. A similar concern seems to be at the father's heart in the book of Proverbs particularized by his reiteration of the need to pay attention, which could be another way of saying that he does not want him to be ignorant (see Pr. 1:8; 2:1; 3:1; 4:1; 7:1). The role of the patron here seems to be similar to that of Solomon in the book of Proverbs.

Lastly, to come back to the question to what we could attribute the loss of traditional cultural values by our modern youth, in our opinion, is the absence of a forum where such an exchange used to take place. In her book *Vatete vachabvepi*¹⁵⁵ – *The Aunt's advice is no longer available* (1976), Makura decries the non-availability of *vatete*, (paternal aunt), whose role was to instruct her niece(s) on matters of marriage preparation. Already in the 1970s, she recognised the absence of this traditional setup where young ladies would have received such instructions. If a young lady ended up not pleasing her husband the blame would rest squarely on *vatete* and the name of the concerned family would be tarnished (Makura 1976:7). Gelfand (1979:26) writes the following:

Although much of a child's education in a traditional village is of an informal nature, there is a certain amount of formal social and moral teaching known as *tsika*. This is considered of utmost importance ... this type of teaching was conducted in two places in the villages – in the house (*imba*) and the council place (*dare*). The teachers were the grandmothers (*madzimbuya*), paternal aunt (*vatete*), and the wives of the uncles on one side and the grandfathers and maternal uncles on the other. The most important were the paternal grandfather and his wife who lived in

155 Reprinted in 1980, 1985 1991 and 1996 to indicate the much needed advisory role that this publication plays.

the same villages as their sons, whereas the maternal ones lived in their own. The father and mother taught more practical things like woodwork, smithery, housework and cooking, whereas the relatives were responsible for the children's moral teaching.

Gelfand's comments reveal that within the extended family household there were enough teachers to instruct children about all matters of life. The stipulation of the moral teaching of the children by the relatives as most important, pinpoints the high regard for personal qualities as the main focus. The word "*unhu*" describes the sum total of the qualities of a person which in the Shona culture makes him or her admirable.

Bourdillon (1976:314) attributes the breakdown to this functional educational program within the traditional setting to urbanization as he observes:

The most fundamental change brought about by the urban situation on the Shona social life is in their family structure. In towns, one has to take accommodation where one can find it, which is usually away from family and kin. Also, where houses cater for families at all, they are designed for small elementary families each consisting of simply the husband, his wife and their children, and the accommodation is often cramped even for these ... As a result, the rural system of the extended family living together must break down.

We would like to attribute the breakdown of that family social structure as directly responsible for the collapse of the instructional arrangement that naturally worked itself out. Thus, Makura's (1976) account is an attempt to bridge the gap. What we know, then, is that in the traditional setting, instruction was home based, a portraiture that is projected in Proverbs 1-9. The home setting seemed to have provided ready-made expertise from the wide range of relatives as well as the parents in instructing young ones on matters of life. That subject matter seems to be a common agenda in both

the Shona and the biblical world. Let us take a closer look at examples of Shona wisdom poems.

1.1.2 An analysis of Shona wisdom poems

The first poem we have selected here is the prelude to the collection that Hamutyinei presents in his account. The selection is based on the perceived dynamics that are at play between this composition and the biblical poems examined in this study. As such, it offers a number of discussion points that are relevant for our purposes as we will see below. Not everything in the Shona wisdom poems, however, is relevant to our purposes. We will therefore select one other poem which differs from the first one to enrich our discussion.

1.1.2.1 An Opening poem

Go go goi kunemi vana vapasi idzva
Musarohwa nehana muchiti zvimwe ndiri mubvakure
Ndini tateguru wenyu Mudyanadzo
Ndini dzinde rorudzi ramakaviga mugomo ramapa
Ndauya kuzokupangidzai matsonzoro apasichigare
Ndine nyaya dzangu zhinji dzine mhakaswa
Ndaramba kukusiyai makapingwa norukova rusina zambuko
Ndauya nendenhe ramatsonzoro apasichigare
Kugara nokugara ndiro denhe ramadzimambo amangwana
Mune nhorooondo dzamagarirwe enyika kare
Teyai nzeve muchinzwa Chiparurangoma chaMudyanadzo

My Translation

Knock knock to you children of the new world } Address

Do not be alarmed into thinking that
I am a stranger from afar
I am your ancestor Ancient Wisdom
I am a branch of the tribe you have
buried in that mountain reserved for chiefs
I have come to guide you on accounts
from days of old } Purpose

I have stories with many leads

For I do not want you to remain ignorant
I have gourds of accounts pertaining
to days of old
For ever and ever this will remain
the guide for our leaders of tomorrow
There are narratives concerning ancient life

Listen to the drumming prelude
of Ancient Wisdom

} Rationale
}
} Imperative

Firstly, the poem opens with a customary greeting that a guest/stranger pronounces upon arrival at a homestead. The greeting serves on the one hand to register one's presence and, on the other, to seek reception with the hosts. In this poem, the speaker uses both notions of stranger/guest in that he seems unknown to his audience who he identifies as "children" of the new world. We already detect the fatherly figure that the speaker assumes which is further described in the lines that ensue. The opening line then plays a similar role as the vocative "my son" in the biblical account by drawing attention to it. However, once the introductions are over and done with, estrangement is taken away.¹⁵⁶

Secondly, we notice that the speaker takes a moment to make his identity known in order to command his audience's attention. This he does in two ways. On the one hand he claims to be an ancestor, which in the Shona culture accords him a fatherly role, or that of a patron. A deceased person continued to have an active role in the lives of the living. As an ancestor, he had attained "spiritual" power to enable him to attend to the family matters much more effectively (Hamutyinei 1992:8). On the other

¹⁵⁶ I have observed similar situations in real life in Zimbabwe today where a visitor enters a home where he is virtually unknown. But after the formal introductions are done and relations established, the visitor is warmly received. So it is not uncommon to have a "stranger" pitch at one's home and then introducing him/herself to his/her hosts to whom he/she is presumably related. *Mudyamadzo* here takes a cue from this common practice.

hand he claims royalty by insisting that he was buried in the mountain reserved for chiefs – which usually was a cave. These claims then bestow upon the speaker the right to be heard. A similar role is true of the association of Solomon and the book of Proverbs. A king or even a chief could not lose his status in life or death. He still commanded respect whenever his name or memories were mentioned. It was also rare for a king or chief to be removed from power. People offered unwavering loyalty.

Thirdly, there is use of direct speech here by the speaker who in his self identification assumes the name "*Mudyana**dz**o*" which literally means one who eats with them. The reason for this name is perhaps better explained in Hamutyinei's (1992:7) translation to "Ancient Wisdom" which would to some degree implies the assumption of a personification or at least the claim to being the source of ancient wisdom. We already know that the speaker is male and so we could not make any parallel claims to Woman Wisdom other than to say at least there is a hint of impersonating wisdom. However, the claim to being the source of or at least being associated with wisdom is significant. We can also discern from the above subjects that "wisdom" implied the application of of gained knowledge to everyday situations as revealed by an elderly person with life-long experience. This also tallies with the biblical conception of skillful living (see Davis 2000:14).

Fourthly, we notice the pronouncement of the purpose for his appearance purely as instructional – "I have come to guide you on accounts from days of old". In making this statement, the speaker seems to indicate the necessity of this exercise because of ignorance on the part of the intended audience as he will explicitly enunciate. To that end he claims to have numerous accounts that he will utilize to assist his audience to

be better informed. In saying so, he anticipates a number of exchanges with his audience to cover a wide spectrum of subjects. At the same time, the encounters will take place over a period of time. To his mind, the speaker has a set “curriculum” to explore that will supposedly leave his young audience well informed. That instructional claim is pertinent to the book of Proverbs as we already know (2:1-22; 3:1-12; 4:1-4). So is the coverage of a wide range of topics as highlighted in the third chapter of this study.

Fifthly, the speaker offers some rationale for his intentions by articulating that he does not want his audience to remain ignorant since he has gourds pertaining to the days of old which he maintains as necessary guides for leaders of tomorrow pertaining. There is a concern here for the preservation of this relevant information which is given much value by its description as guides for leaders. Although the leaders are not specified, one could take a cue here of a reference to royal members. However, the audience of primary concern, as we have already said, is the youth. It sounds like an all-embracing piece of knowledge that the speaker has in mind for them. The same is true of wisdom poems in the book of Proverbs, where the speaker anticipates future roles that the son will play. For that reason, whatever is relevant towards that goal is understandably covered.

Sixthly, we have the use of the imperative to call to attention in the closing line of the poem. Not only does this signify the necessary compulsion to listen, it also carries the obligation to learn on the part of the listeners. We find this closure interesting in that the speaker assumes that the information he offers cannot be missed. It is as if all he

hopes for is the preservation of his instructions by his listeners particularly when they put into practice what they hear.

Lastly, we also sense the focus on the community in this exchange. The survival of all is crucial in the communal ethos as reflected in the biblical accounts and now in the Shona culture. We have already discussed this in the second chapter of this study in dialogue with Gerstenberger's (2002) thesis. The prelude here reminds us that it is the ways of the Shona people collectively speaking that the speaker is concerned about.

To sum up, there are parallels between the Shona wisdom poem and the biblical account that, if we are willing to look at these matters closely, there are lessons to be learnt for such an exercise (see Proverbs 1:1-7 and Hamutyinei's opening poem above; the role of a patron by "Solomon" and that of "*Mudyamadzo*"; use of the address, rationale and imperative in 1:8-19 and Hamutyinei's poem above; to mention only a few examples). Before we bring these parallels into fuller perspective, we will consider another Shona wisdom poem, whose structure deviates from the one analysed above, but also yields interesting parallels.

1.1.2.2 An extract from "Childbirth and Rearing"

Pasichigare vana vaikura vachidzidziswa marayirwa namabasa
Vanakomana vaigara pachivara panguva dzamanheru
Mumwe nomumwe achinzi ngaauye nehuni
Anenge asina huni aiita chikwereti chedezahuni
Panguva dzechando mumwe nemumwe aiuya nomuguri wechibage
Kana anenge auya asina aipihwa chikwereti chorugande
Aitarwa nedota pahuma, runova rupawo rwechikwereti ichi
Hapana mwana aingotenderwa kudya zvavamwe mumudazvo

Ndiyo nguva yaidyiwa nyaya pamatare
Vanakomana vachidzidziswa zvetsika nokukudza vakuru pachivara

Kwaitaurwa ngano dzechinyakare nehondo dzakarwiwa kare
Ndipo paidzidziswa vanakomana nhoroono dzetsika dzechinyakare
Nyaya dzoumhizha, unyanzvi, uhombarume nougamba
Zvose zvaitanangurwa kumajaya panguva dzamanheru pachivara
Hakuna mwanakomana aivirirwa akatanangira mwoto womumba
somunhukadzi
Panguva yokurara vanakomana vaienda mugota ravo, kure nevanhukadzi

My translation

In the days of old, children would be brought up under instructions and educated about their roles

In the evening sons would sit at the courtyard

Each one would provide firewood

Anyone who failed to do so would be fittingly indebted

In winter each one would also bring a cob of maize

The maize was roasted as pop-corn

Anyone who failed to provide the maize would be indebted

Using ashes a mark would be inscribed on his forehead as a reminder of his indebtedness

No son would be allowed to eat others' provision

This is when they feasted on matters for discussion at the courtyard

Sons would be taught on culture and respect for the elders at the courtyard

They were told folk-stories and wars that were fought in the past

This is where sons were taught concerning the history of ancient customs

Stories of craftsmen, expertise, successful hunting and heroism would be explained to these young men in the evening by the courtyard

No son would be found around a fire inside a house which was the domain of women-folk

At bed-time young men would retreat to their sleeping quarters away from the women

Firstly, our attraction to this poem is the clear instructional intention that takes place informally at the courtyard which was the meeting place for men. This place is mentioned some five times in this poem, perhaps emphasising its significance in the nurturing exercise. The courtyard sometimes called the kraal was where the menfolk retreated in the evening for dinner and to wile away their time. Naturally it brought together the younger and the older, and as such became a natural setting for the older to impart the younger. Gelfand (1979:26) calls it the council place and expresses the following thoughts:

Although much of a child's education in a traditional village [was] of an informal nature, there [was] a certain amount of formal, social and moral teaching known as "tsika".¹⁵⁷ This is considered of utmost importance ... this type of teaching was conducted in two places in the villages – in the house (*imba*) and at the council place (*dare*).¹⁵⁸

We are also struck by the fact that this was an established socialization process that played an instructional role in this setting. To our minds, it evokes the process described in Proverbs 4:1-4 where a father reminisces about a similar experience with his sons.

Secondly, the poem immediately dwells on the fact that the young men or sons were brought up under some instructions and would be educated about their roles. The poem specifies details of matters for discussion that were enjoyed which included cultural values including respect for the elders. Respect was an important value, particularly in the courtyard setting without which it was impossible to have the instructional exchanges. The assumption here is that in order for the young men to receive the guidance of the older, respect was an underlying virtue on the part of the younger. The father in the book of Proverbs assumes a similar position through use of the vocative "my son" and also the "imperative" as well as the "prohibitive" which are features in the instructional genre which command respect. Although the son's response is never reflected nor commented upon in these exchanges, one can assume that the silence represents compliance.

157 The concept "tsika" would be equivalent to what Kapolyo (2005:34-5) calls "ubuntu" in his native language which he describes as a Bantu ontological noun describing what it means to be a member of humankind. He adds that in relation to any person "ubuntu" indicates the presence in one's life of such human characteristics such as kindness, charity and love of one's neighbour. Of interest here is the confirmation that what we are seeing about the Shona cultural practices is endemic to the rest of the African continent – a study that deserves more attention.

158 The education that took place in the house was mostly for girls while that outside which took place at the courtyard was mainly for boys.

Thirdly, we notice the enactment of responsibility integral in the roles that the young men would play. Their being asked to contribute some firewood or maize was part of enforcing industriousness. We are particularly interested in two aspects here towards that enforcement. First, the indebtedness prescribed upon failure to make a contribution, and second, the fact that no one would be allowed to eat from another's effort. We can only hypothesize what such practices established in minds of these young men. The sluggard in Proverbs 6:6-11 comes to mind here, and also Gerstenberger's thesis (2002:20) on the acquisition of food as a necessary responsibility shared by all members within the family.

Fourthly, we also notice the historical reflection through folk stories, traditional customs and a focus on vocational skills. The poem tells us that these issues were explained extensively. Gelfand (1979:27) produces a list of subjects that were taught among other things:

- Craft such as blacksmithery of husbandry
- When and how to clap hands and how to show respect in general
- General behaviour to men, chiefs and the mediums of the clan spirits
- Respect for other people's property and wives
- To reason in disputes and to play chess (*tsoro*)
- To hunt big game
- To look after the village and livestock
- What not to say in the presence of women
- Rough anatomy and animal anatomy
- How to react towards married life
- How to begin polygamy (*barika*) if desired

- Behaviour in the presence of and due respect for father-in-law and family
- How to test where one had the power of making a woman pregnant
- What medicine to take to make his male organs big and be attractive to a woman and medicine to increase semen (*urume*)
- The good or bad aspects of masturbation

What is interesting about this wide array of subject matter is the practical orientation of all that was discussed. The disseminated information was not simply intellectual but relevant to everyday life. For that reason, there are instructions on crafts, responsibility and being productive which evoke Gerstenberger's (2002:20) thesis on ancient Israelite family practices. Family survival was highly dependent on practical efforts that the individual members would contribute towards the common good. That practical orientation is strongly evoked in Proverbs 3:1-12.

Closely related to this is the fact that embedded in the subject matter is respect for others, which reflects the primacy of community. In his description of community within the Bemba culture of Zambia, Kapolyo (2005:41-2) argues that to call a person "*umuntu*" is immediately to associate that person with "*abantu*".¹⁵⁹ Thus only among other people will a person find security and completeness, hence the obligatory requirement to respect others. This reminds us of the numerical saying of Proverbs 6:16-19 as well as the sentiments on being neighbourly that we discussed as derived from 3:27-35. The numerical saying, as we may recall, highlights six matters relating to the improper use of body members to harm others and ending with the seventh which singles out a man who causes discord among family members. The sentiments

¹⁵⁹ The concept "*umuntu*" is the singular for a person and the plural is "*abantu*" which has a connotation that human beings were made for community. Kapolyo (2005:42) cites Genesis 2:18 which is mostly used for a marital context to argue for the accent of the words used therein on the one hand to reflect the inappropriateness of being alone without community and on the other hand to depict the males and females as complementary.

on being neighbourly in 3:27-35 begin with five prohibitive statements that speak against socially unacceptable behaviour and end with stating the rationale for such prohibitions by introducing divine disapproval of such actions.

To add to all this is the concern raised in matters related to sexuality that is implied in the instructions concerning marriage and fidelity. The statement that at bedtime the young men would retreat to their sleeping quarters away from those of womenfolk (Hamutyinei 1992:27) is pregnant with meaning. It implies a strict sexual code by virtue of that separation, and sends a message that there were set boundaries that one could not cross. We therefore concur with the notion that sexual instructions, according to Stanton and Brenda Jones (1993:9), has a lot to do with character formation. They offer (1993:9) the following comprehensive explanation:

If we want to equip and empower our children to live godly, wholesome and fulfilled lives in adulthood, we need to prepare them for the best kind of marital relationships, parenting relationships and friendships possible. The vast majority of adults will marry, and for the vast majority of adults, their marital relationship has a most powerful influence on their general life satisfaction as adults.

For this reason and conceivably others, we can appreciate the domination of the subject of sexuality in these instructions, as much as we see in the book of Proverbs (2:16-19; 5:1-23; 6:20-35; 7:1-27). We see in these instructions the attempt to shape character by insisting on values, a worldview and the compelling need for discernment to prevent premature death, and in our times disease and societal collapse.

Fifthly, twice the poem makes mention of something that a son would not be found doing. The first, we have mentioned earlier on was about eating others' provision. The second, was not being found warming himself inside the house which was the domain

of womenfolk. The reason for this is partly that a similar exercise as that of the men in the courtyard would happen with the women in the house. This is reflected in the rest of the poem in a section we chose not to reproduce in our extract. More comprehensively, the reason is that the prohibition here rests on high value placed on the exchanges that took place in the courtyard. The nurturing exercises were imperative. At the same time, we detect in these statements a hint of a “prohibitive” which is a major player in the biblical wisdom poem.

Lastly, we need to point out, the fact that as would be the case with the wisdom poems in the book of Proverbs, the instructor is not necessarily identified but assumed. The addressee(s) are depicted here as “*vanakomana*” (sons) which presumes fathers as the addressers. We must however understand the Shona relational dynamic in which any married older person played a fatherly role.¹⁶⁰ Because of the traditional setting in which grandparents remained in the home they participated in the instructional exchanges here with the trusted concern that parents would equally express. Gelfand (1979:35-6) goes to great length to show us this reality in which grandparents, aunts and uncles participated in this nurturing endeavour.

2. Dialogue between the Biblical and Shona Wisdom Poem

In the process of analysing Shona wisdom poems, we have already indicated areas of commonality with biblical material. We would like to bring these issues under proper discussion in an attempt to draw towards the formulation of conclusions both for our

¹⁶⁰ A case could be argued for similar relational dynamics in 1 Timothy 5:1-2 where the young pastor is given guidance on handling tricky relationships with the following words: “Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity”. The central concern here is to treat others as members of one’s family. This would be true of the Shona conception of the “extended” family where family is a much stronger and broader concept.

study and that of the OT. The perceived dialogue between the biblical account and cultural practices within the Shona traditional life is an issue that we are not just grappling with in our context, but even within the African context. Van Heerden (1997:512) remarks that “in Africa Christian theology is grappling with the issue of how to relate Christian perspectives of faith to other perspectives from which people derive meaning and by means of which they express their deepest convictions”. In a similar vein, Habtu (2006:747) indicates this process of inculturation as a symbiotic and byzantine reality when he writes:

We feel at home and yet distant when we read the book of Proverbs: at home because proverbs are a universal phenomenon in various cultures and societies - and particularly in traditional societies; distant, because we live in completely different times and cultures. Yet as Africans we can make a contribution to an enhanced understanding of the message of the book of Proverbs, for we still maintain a semblance of traditional community and there is much proverbial lore in our own languages.

In his comment above, Habtu assists us in realising that in the first place, there is a universal appeal in the subject matter that proverbs address. While he makes this assertion specifically with proverbial statements in mind, we would like to contend that the same could be said of the wisdom poem found in chapters 1-9 of the book of Proverbs. As we have discovered in our exegetical analysis, the subject matter in this section also has an equally universal appeal.

In the second place, the semblance of a traditional community that we maintain in our African context, we argue, is much more pronounced within the home setting than any other where such practices as the use of proverbial lore are easily transmitted. The assumption of the home base in the exchanges that take place in these chapters, is perhaps indicative of how these principles could be best utilised particularly in view of

the pragmatic encapsulation. Gittay (2001:456) says that the question of the argumentation is important because the book has a pragmatic aim; the pupils learn for a concrete benefit, hence must be persuaded that the principles of wisdom that they seek to gain are really beneficial. In these exchanges, amongst others, are these powerful nuggets of wisdom passed on.

In the third place, despite the admission to the reality of "distance" between the biblical world and that of the contemporary culture, that aloofness is not an impediment to inculturation. Van Heerden (2006:430) affirms that "dialogue takes place where there is difference (or distance) and the possibility of connections". He bases his view from, among other things, the common practice in wisdom traditions to borrow from the wisdom material of others. In so doing, wisdom recapitulates life's experiences as a form of universalism. Van Heerden (2006:433) deduces the following:

Dialogue is not only about similarities or differences in wording, imagery, content and so forth. These features are inherent to the proverbs and Bible texts themselves. But a person uses a proverb, and/or Bible text in a particular situation. The mere juxtaposition of Bible texts, and African proverbs already elicits a proverb 'meaning' and therefore creates space for dialogue, but this dialogue only comes to life in real life situations.

Although van Heerden says this with particular reference to proverbial texts, in his sentiments he is careful to implicate biblical texts in general. We add on that possibility to include the wisdom poem in these remarks. If all this is true then, the question that we have to ask and answer is, to what extent do indigenous cultural texts assist us in the interpretation of biblical texts?

2.1 Using the Shona context to interpret Proverbs 1-9

In his approach to biblical theology, Murphy (2001:4) argues that more is achieved from recognising how the literature is to be read, than the attempt to synthesise theological truths. That pluriformity of biblical data is endorsed by Gerstenberger (2002:1-3) where he views the OT as a collection of many testimonies of faith in as much as it is hard to offer any unitary theological or ethical view. To go back to Murphy, the proper reading of a text in its literary form and intent is a better way to go about it. With particular reference to the book of Proverbs, he (2001:5) describes the disparate character of the exhortations of chapters 1-9 which displays a striking difference from the staccato style of chapters 10-29, including the inherent personifications which he says are the most extensive in the entire biblical account.

In the third and fourth chapters of this study we have undertaken a closer look at some selected texts in an attempt to read the material from a reasoned approach. From these readings we table the following observations:

1. The Biblical and Shona wisdom poems share the common pragmatic agenda.

It is interesting that the Shona wisdom poems are introduced as having proper behaviour at the core of their concern (Hamutyinei 1992:7). The same concern is true about the wisdom poems in the book of Proverbs as Gittay (2001:55) clearly states the aim as that of a "perfect model of behaviour". This reminds us of Mbiti's (1995:1) outlook on how his childhood experiences as a shepherd enriches his spiritual and academic life. A similar rubbing of shoulders of the biblical and Shona wisdom poems could be envisaged in our prospects here.

2. The Biblical and Shona wisdom poems issue an instructional motif.

Closely related to the above, is the fact that, by and large, both the biblical and Shona wisdom poems maintain an instructional motif throughout. While we admit that this common element does not place the Shona instructional contents at the same level as the biblical, it is more than coincidental that we have a similar projection in both situations. Van Heerden (1997:515) says that "generally, wisdom teachers are intent on gaining a sound, practical grasp of reality based on insight and understanding, and living accordingly". Carpenter (1999:71) agrees with that point of view and the idea of normativity. This is true in all cultural settings as far as wisdom is concerned. Be that as it may, our analysis of Proverbs 1-9 can be enriched by the common approach that it shares with Shona wisdom poems.

3. Biblical and Shona wisdom poems cover a wide range of subjects on life.

The specific subjects that are covered in biblical and Shona wisdom poems could form yet another arena for exegetical consideration. We have already hinted in this study on the common communal and clan identities that are celebrated in both cultural settings. Specific elements of that could form informative strands or fertile ground for laying biblical foundations. As far as the Shona culture is concerned, we could rewrite Mbiti's (1995:1) sentiments as follows:

[Wisdom] is God given; culture is made by men, women and children. What comes from above does not descend into a vacuum; it finds human culture on the ground.

The culture on the ground then is of cardinal importance in the analysis of biblical material, more so where there are perceived common positions.

4. The Biblical wisdom poems and Shona wisdom poems illumine each other.

In the whole theological framework, van Heerden (1997:516) alleges that "Western confessional theology of salvation history often found the wisdom literature of the Bible to be an embarrassment". The same experience is described by Dell (1997:26) when she writes:

For decades, the Wisdom literature in the Hebrew Bible has been the "poor relation", living in the shadow of other supposedly more significant biblical genres, such as the Law and the Prophets, as well as the stories in Genesis. Wisdom literature (primarily the book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Job), we are told, is "secular", intended mainly to educate courtiers and administrators. It has more in common with Egyptian and Mesopotamian Wisdom texts than with Israelite theology, and its concerns have little or nothing to do with the great events of Israel's salvation history.

Through the process of inculturation, the perceived dialogue between biblical faith and indigenous cultures, we discover assistance in dealing with the Wisdom literature that scholars, for whatever reasons, have glossed over. The Shona wisdom poems, if anything, are an example of how they can illumine biblical wisdom material. This way we have a basis for encouraging Wisdom literature scholarship.

5. The biblical wisdom poems offer a proper premise to analyse Shona wisdom poems.

Shona wisdom poems, as much as the culture represented therein, contain aspects of traditional religious practices that are, biblically speaking false. In their original settings these practices reflect the way these matters were viewed within the respective traditional and cultural guidelines. In such a situation then, the authentic biblical viewpoint becomes the trustworthy source of revisiting and, if necessary, restating such perspectives.

6. Biblical and Shona wisdom poems employ the same literary and stylistic features. Proverbs represent one of many forms of wisdom that are common to both biblical and indigenous texts. Apart from that, we also have the use of paradox, imagery, juxtaposition, prohibitive, imperative and rationale, among other features, which enrich the literary makeup of the text. Comparing the way in which the original composers of these texts make use of these various literary devices is an area that will yield more findings on the dialogue between these texts.

7. Biblical and Shona wisdom poems project face to face communication.

The father-son exchanges represent the importance of people and relationships that are highly esteemed almost above everything else. In his study of preferred learning style among students in East Africa, O' Donovan (2000:8) explains as follows:

The high value placed on human relationships in Africa is the reason why extensive greeting, even between close relatives, is so important. There is often quite a ritual of greetings between people upon their meeting of the day. This time of greeting is an enjoyable time of sharing, but it also serves to continue and extend an existing relationship. It is felt that a person cannot presume upon the relationship of yesterday or last month to care for the relationship needs of today.

The father holds his son in high esteem hence the carefully constructed messages that are exchanged. The same is true in the Shona culture.

8. In both biblical and Shona wisdom poems, telling a story to teach a lesson is a common practice. The father in the book of Proverbs creates such stories to illustrate his points. Just like proverbs that are sometimes described as compressed parables (see Pr. 1:17; 3:27-31), the accounts that are used in wisdom poems function to validate a point from observed phenomenon.

These are lessons that we would like to take away from the exercise and now would like to consider how they affect the study of the OT.

2.2 Implications for the study of the Old Testament

The nature of the wisdom poem as portrayed in the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs, is a compelling fascination of the African mind. Our curiosity is raised by virtue of the subject matter that is covered therein, as well as the platform in which the material is raised. The father-son relationship is as highly upheld as the subject matter. Dell (1997a:31) describes wisdom in general as having as its starting point “the quest for the meaning, for order, for understanding and fulfillment in the human life. In a wisdom context, the theological significance of God is different : God is the one who creates, maintains and sustains the earth and all its creatures. In wisdom literature, God reveals himself through societal order and through the personification of wisdom”. This study was primarily interested in the holistic approach to life as the missing dynamic in contemporary settings. When we prepare our young people for life, it is more about a given career and not necessarily about life itself. There are some important lessons we can learn from this study that are worth passing on.

Firstly, wisdom by nature offers a holistic approach to life. Even the subject matter covered in the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs, let alone the rest of the book, is on a wide range of subjects that affect almost all areas of life. The scope covered is comprehensive enough and each unit pays adequate attention to detail, to the satisfaction of any reader. To that we add the aspect of the practical nature of the

approach to the advice that is given. The father does not speak in abstract terms, nor is his advice far removed from the everyday situations the son will face.

Secondly, the so called "secular and sacred" dichotomy is non-existent in wisdom texts. The material in the book of Proverbs has been viewed in some circles as secular or non-theological which is perhaps a reflection of the exegete's incompetence. Our reading of the first nine chapters in particular has dispelled that perspective.

Thirdly, wisdom's synthesis of the sacred and the secular, to use those terms, allows for God's self-disclosure to be expressed through the natural world and societal order. Human observations, from which proverbial wisdom resonates as they capture this perspective, are given credibility when viewed through a divine lens. Thus, the father's speeches are not purely personal opinions about life, but rather divinely endorsed strategies.

Fourthly, the dialogue between biblical and Shona wisdom poems offer us fertile ground for legitimizing the finding of meaning of the OT through Africa. However, this is not a claim of equality in the status of the indigenous African wisdom texts to biblical records. Rather, it is the recognition of the genuine contribution, in our case, of Shona wisdom texts to biblical interpretation. While there are considerable religious differences in their outlook, that "distance" nevertheless offers reflective possibilities towards a correct understanding of a given doctrinal matter.

Fifthly, the quest in both biblical and indigenous African wisdom texts towards the meaning of life offers warning signals to possible dangers that one may fall into. In

doing so, a picture is painted of what the ignorance of such advice will lead into on the one hand, and on the other, the fruitfulness of obedience. Our study was originally motivated by the observable societal collapse and the apparent lack of warning signals, perhaps, leading to the levels of anarchy that we now experience. O' Donavan (2000:1) offers a comprehensive portraiture:

Along with these changes have come such problems that no one seems to know what to do or where to start to solve them. Governments are caught up in political power struggles, war and endemic nepotism. Meanwhile, poverty, overcrowding, pollution, sickness, crime, unemployment and the breakdown of traditional family life threaten to destroy the very core of existence of the people these governments control. What kind of future does Africa have?

What seems apparent as revealed from this study, is that the rich reflective habits that once blossomed in our cultural practices have been lost. It was through such an exercise that these witty statements, the gourds of knowledge found expression and currency among people. This wisdom contained in the advisory statements of proverbial lore addresses some, if not all, the issues that plague our continent.

Sixthly, is the projection of the home in certain biblical texts as well as in the Shona context as the centre of instruction for these matters of life. We believe that the disruption of this medium through a number of factors, including urbanization, is costly. People who years ago lived harmoniously have been displaced from the traditional home set-up of a closely-knit community. In biblical texts, instructions that parents offer their children are castigated as the chief responsibility.

On an individual level, this forum is critical in addressing the typical challenges that are prevalent among our people as O' Donavan (2000:4) writes:

On the individual level, loss of traditional values, loneliness, moral collapse, sexual immorality, breakdown of marriages and families, personal struggles for power and influence, psychological and emotional problems, bondage to tribalism and ethnicity, personal insecurity and temptation to suicide have come to plague a multitude of city people in African – including some Christians.

The rapidity in the development of these problems is dispiriting, particularly in view of the fact that traditional values in our indigenous cultures seem much closer to biblical ideals. Home based instructions represent one place, perhaps among others, that we can strategically re-introduce in our society to regain lost ground. It has been the intention of this study to promote that ideal and simultaneously restore viable family life and a sense of community. After all, the family is not only the fundamental unit of society but the primary social group as well. As such the well-being of the dependent children begins at this level, and so does their preparation for societal challenges. In the past, the parents in the book of Proverbs and Shona traditional society excelled in this responsibility to their benefit, that of the concerned children and the society at large. Charity begins at home.

2.3 Recreating the instructional environment

What needs to be emphasised in this study, is the status of the husband-wife relationship and their critical role as parents in the communication of sapiential literature. Unlike Egyptian wisdom literature, the book of Proverbs mentions both the father and mother as actively involved in the instruction of the son. That joint effort of concern implies a good marital relationship on the part of the parents in order to facilitate the obligatory environment supportive of their objective. This dual function presented implicitly and, according to Pezhumkaltil (1994:69), metaphorically in the book of Proverbs is a critical factor to this study for a number of reasons.

Firstly, family life is foundational to societal stability. A good spousal relationship goes hand in hand with good parenting. O'Donovan (2000:49) writes that "there is a great need for Christian family life teaching in the church. The family is the bedrock of human life and civilization. Many Christian marriages are in serious trouble today and because of pride, shame and embarrassment, few Christians are willing to admit that they urgently need help in their marriages and homes. To make matters worse, the subject of sex cannot be mentioned in many cultures". In the book of Proverbs sexual purity and even guidance towards choosing a good wife are subjects that take considerable space. Such coverage reflects the magnitude of family life to everything else. Our failure to address this critical area of such importance to the upbringing of children has devastating effects. Clouse (1995:67) refers to a study that reveals the significance of what we are suggesting here when she writes:

Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck (1974), criminologists at Harvard Law school, studied the characteristics of over 2 500 male offenders in reformatories, correctional schools, jails and prisons, matching them with non delinquent boys and men by age, ethnic origin, intelligence and place of residence. They wanted to see how the two groups differed. The kind of homes the men grew up in appeared to be the most important factor.

Although the study in question of the Gluecks may seem a little old and also from a first world context, it however, reinforces the fact that there is a link between delinquency and the kind of home that usually lacks discipline, parental love and marital stability which we are presenting here as core issues. Similar deductions were reached by Lickona (1991:4), an educationist, who espouses that "Children with the most glaring deficiencies in moral values almost always come, their teachers say, from troubled families. Indeed, poor parenting looms as one of the major reasons why schools feel compelled to get involved in values education".

Secondly, the family is the primary place for moral instruction. The parents in the book of proverbs initiate the instructions that ensue and, as Bland (1998:225) correctly suggests, shoulder the teaching responsibility. That initiative is indicative of the chief responsibility that parents have and that is to nurture their children. The book of proverbs clearly shows that wisdom is not a matter of the mind only, but of morality and all of life. Intellectualism can be a menace to society. However, Clouse (1995:61) points out that “the desire to become mature morally does not appear to be universal. As parents and educators we cannot count on a natural inclination on the part of children to be good persons to produce the kind of citizens society needs”. Clouse’s remark underscores the importance of parents in the communication of and raising awareness to the need for character development or moral growth on the part of their children. Lickona (1991:30) concludes:

Common sense tells us that the family is the primary moral educator of the child. Parents are their children’s first moral teachers. They are also the enduring influence: Children change teachers every year but typically have at least one of the same parents all through their growing years. The parent-child relationship is also laden with special emotional significance, causing children to feel either loved and worthwhile or unloved and unimportant.

Thirdly, and related to the above, parents are most influential people in a child’s life. We have already indicated that the most consistent reality in a child’s life is the same set of parents unless divorce or death changes that certainty. Although other influences may come into play, the book of Proverbs consistently presents the father and mother at the forefront of the instructions. The occasional appearance of personified wisdom does not take away from the parental tone that one hears from this account. However, the appearance of the Woman Wisdom may shed some light on the

status of women in the family, as Proverbs 31:10-31 seems to idealize (cf. Block 2003:63). By the same token, the call to shun the “foreign” woman underscores the undesirable influence from quarters foreign to what was regarded as the norm.

To come back to the parental influence asserted here, Bland (1998:222), who views the book of Proverbs as a post-exilic anthology, writes that in the absence of a temple, monarchy and land to depend on, Israel had to struggle with how she could maintain her identity. Thus, wisdom helped reshape religious beliefs by placing “religious beliefs in a different literary form and extracting the exclusive language of covenant” and then, in our view, framing the responsibility within a familial setting for its instruction.

His standpoint is reiterated by Dell (1997a:29) when she writes:

The family context would have provided stability amidst a context of changing political fortunes of Israel, with a particular emphasis on the family perhaps developing at times of crisis, when national life was in a state of flux.

From this perspective, oral preservation of the material can be perceived as would be the case with many Shona traditions which were passed on from one generation to the next until recordings began.

Fourthly, parental authority exercised in the book of Proverbs is set as preparatory for the son to accept authority elsewhere. The process of preparation of life that the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs present, and indeed the rest of the book, takes into account that the son is being prepared for greater societal responsibility. Even if the court setting was to be taken into account at this point, the fact remains accepting the authority of the teacher is foundational to future roles, whatever that might turn out to be.

Fifthly, the book of Proverbs projects the accepting or rejecting of parental instruction as the best predictor of whether a young person makes it in life or not. The father's appeal to his son to "accept" or "listen" to his instructions seems to be placed in such a way that his directives have incontestable power in prescribing the future. The inclusion of a divine perspective in the instructions adds to the weight given to the father's advice, particularly within the Israelite culture where the sacred and the secular are not separated. Estes (1997:230) describes this as follows:

The book of Proverbs is about youth who journeys beyond the protected walls of home into the mainstream of society to fulfill their roles responsibly so that righteousness exalts the nation (14:34). Such is a description of one who truly fears the Lord. This is the goal of wisdom's instructions.

2.4 Reading the book of Proverbs today

We would like to close this chapter with final thoughts for the contemporary reading of the book of Proverbs. Firstly, our study has shown that there is, within the Shona culture and presumably other African cultures, feasible dialogue that offers fertile ground for exegetical endeavours. This calls for ongoing research into other possible arenas that may yield greater scope into the study of this genre particularly with the subsequent sections in mind that this study has not looked into.

Secondly, the practical scope that we gain from the book of Proverbs, which Murphy (2001:6) calls "intelligent living" is an area of much need in our study of the Old Testament which is dominated so much by scholarly doubts and debates. As one reads

the book of Proverbs, one encounters the undeniable impression that there is almost a non-existent division between theory and practice.

Thirdly, one must ask the question that Murphy (2001:4) raises, "Can the book of proverbs be a player in biblical theology?" To respond to that, Gerstenberger (2002:1) reminds us of a pluriformity of Old Testament data. To that observation the question must be asked, how does the book of Proverbs contribute to the study of the Old and New Testament? That process undoubtedly calls for a well argued reading of biblical material and the book of Proverbs is one such account.

Fourthly, it is suggested that the instructional practice depicted in the book of Proverbs can be relived in our world today. Although the book of Proverbs does not prescribe a systematic way in which the instructions therein can be carried out, it however, takes seriously the task at hand and one can discern the engaged processes. We have already hinted on good marriages in society as a starting point, but there are many other possibilities.

Lastly, the words of Crenshaw (1995:248) remain true that "present knowledge about education in ancient Israel is astonishingly incomplete". His perspective has basically set the motion going for further studies of the book of Proverbs and other Wisdom literature accounts which he had in mind when he wrote these words.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTION ON HOME BASED NURTURING AS A CONTEMPORARY IDEAL AND CONCLUSIONS

1. Realising the compelling task of home based nurturing

As we draw towards the close of this study, we would like to suggest some applicational points that would necessitate home based nurturing in the contemporary setting. Our desire is that the findings of this study would not remain property of a select few but to be made available to as many players as possible towards the promotion of what we regard to be a contemporaneous challenge. What will it take to translate this into reality?

1.1 Revisiting the issues

We commenced this study by exposing a whole array of possible causes attributed to societal instability. We would like to revisit these and suggest how wisdom poems in the book of Proverbs as well as in Shona wisdom literature shed some light in pointing us in the right direction. The first one related to constraints brought about because of urbanisation. In this regard, we highlighted the fact that urbanisation, which is an unstoppable present-day experience, has undeniably given rise to typically impersonal environments and thereby replacing community identity with individualistic ideals. The unfortunate side to this development in the Shona context, perhaps as much as elsewhere, is the replacement of traditional values and practices embedded in the socialisation process with modern developmental quests. By and large, modernisation is viewed as the extent to which Western ideals have become part and parcel of life within a given indigenous culture.

In his study, Musasiwa (2003:6) questions “whether the underlying assumption is correct that the more Western Africa becomes, the more developed it is [since there is] a danger that ‘development’ is being read in mainly economic (industrial, technological and monetary) terms”. He continues that “if Africa were to lose her spiritual values in the name of the “African Renaissance”, that would be a sad loss indeed”. In similar vein, Holness (1997:25) argues that “the holism of African spirituality is best articulated in the notion of *ubuntu: umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person because of people), an understanding and experience of life that renders Western individualism incomprehensible”. Writing from a South African context she adds that in Africa “a sense of community lies at the heart of faith, life and identity. Individual salvation and spiritual nurture are inconceivable outside of a living and caring community, deeply involved in every aspect of life” (1997:25).

Through the emphasis of home based nurturing, the book of Proverbs ensures the retention of such values. This, we argue can only take place if the home itself is recastigated as the centre of nurturing. Not only that, we also have the location of the home where it rightly belongs – at the heart of the community to whom all belong and share almost everything. We saw a similar setting within the Shona culture as reflected in extract from Hamutyinei’s “Childbirth and Rearing” which we analysed in this study. In this poem we recall the statement that sons would be brought up under the instructions of the elders. The elders were fatherly figures within the family who used the courtyard as the place to instruct the young. Similarly, the father in the book of Proverbs took the necessary time to define and describe various aspects that made up their Israelite identity in all respects (see Pr. 2:1-22; 3:1-12; 4:1-9). In this we see the partnership between biblical and Shona wisdom poems towards a common goal.

In terms of the book of Proverbs, we recall from our exegetical analysis the description of a person in 6:12-15 who is a menace to society. His depiction comes across as a representation of a departure from communal values. While on the one hand the malevolent character is self destructing, on the other his actions have a bearing on the rest of society. In this way, the community's beliefs and practices take the centre stage, to bring into perspective Gerstenberger's (2002:25) notion. No one lives in isolation and as such the malevolent character impacts society and in this case negatively. We would like to particularise the concept "discords" in Proverbs 6:14 notably in the plural form to suggest a variety of ways in which this personality affects others. At the same time, the fate of the insurrectionist is sealed when the passage (Pr. 6:15) predicts disaster. Hubbard (1989:101) says that although we are not told the precise form in which the disaster will occur, among the possibilities could be communal decision by the elders as they consider this person an unnecessary menace to society. We also realise that the presentation of the insurrectionist's defeat is so injurious that it dispels any intention to copy such perversity. In this statement we realise how greatly communal life is celebrated in the book of Proverbs.

It is equally important to bring into perspective the Israelite conception of "honour and shame" which was communally determined, as we pointed out in our analysis of Proverbs 3:1-12. Along with that we also would like to point out the metaphor of "path" which is prominent in the book of Proverbs (2:8; 3:23; 4:11, 14, 15; 5:6; 6:23; 8:20; 9:6, 15). In the positive conception of the metaphor it has a dual connotation which on the one hand implies abiding by divine principles and on the other living by

what is generally subscribed to by the community. Needless to say, both concepts are intertwined.

In recalling this passage, we are in fact asserting the significance given to communal life which in our context has been affected by urbanisation. The urbanisation process itself has given rise to individualistic tendencies such as are encapsulated in the characteristic of the insurrectionist highlighted above. Other forms of delinquent behaviour supposedly emblematic of urbanisation also come into view here. The strategy in the book of Proverbs in curbing this problem is starting earlier on in life with instructions within the home that reinforce one's commitment and loyalty to the family and invariably to community. Gerstenberger (2002:20) speaks of the utter reliance of an individual on the family/community in such terms that it is impossible to exist independently.

The second cause of societal instability that we castigated is the challenge of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In Zimbabwe, sadly, we have experienced astronomical deaths wholly attributable to this cause. WHO reports that there are encouraging signs on change of sexual behaviour in recent months, one realises by the same token that the unfortunate loss of life at the levels that we experienced could have been averted. A majority of players who are concerned about this scourge are beginning to pinpoint to the absence of a forum where sexuality and relevant code of conduct, as it were, could be undertaken. The question is, what precisely should our goal be in sexual education or instruction? The best answer put forward in this regard is interestingly found in a book written by a couple concerned about this issue. Of significance to our cause here

is the fact that they offer their advice from a parental perspective. Stanton and Brenna Jones (1993:9) write:

[The goal of sex education should be] to protect [our children] from [death, disease and sin] by preparing them to become the kinds of adults who can have deep and meaningful marriages filled with spiritual, sexual and emotional intimacy, who can have loving and deep family relationships.

The Jones' perspective here suggests sex education which is going to be more than the single dramatic sex talk with our children, if the cruciality of the matters they raise is to be satisfactorily addressed. In fact several sessions, ongoing encounters, clearly planned and well orchestrated talks are not only critical but mandatory. There is also the important dynamic concerning preparation for adulthood, which brings into scrutiny the deepest and most satisfactory intimacy through shared spiritual, sexual and emotional experiences. In this regard it is premature to view sex education purely as information giving but character formation. This can be achieved through an insistence on values, attitudes, world view and discernment that will customarily influence their choices and priorities for life. This will then enable them to "be able to love and trust believe enough to commit their whole selves and their whole futures" (S and B Jones 1993:9).

Interestingly, next to the woman motif, which in itself is very suggestive, the most significant space in the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs is dedicated to this subject of responsible sexual engagement (2:16-19; 5:1-23; 6:20-35; 7:1-27). By the same token, Shona wisdom poems take a particular interest in that subject (see Hamutyinei (1992:7-17)¹⁶¹. We also considered the imposed distance between young

¹⁶¹ In Hamutyinei's arrangement, the subject of courtship and marriage is the first poem that he has after the prologue. If his prioritising of this subject is anything to count on, it shows the importance of this subject matter, to

men's quarters and that of women as sending a message as well as setting boundaries that could not be transgressed (Hamutyinei 1992:27). Within these texts emphasis is placed on sounding the warning against yielding to the seemingly compelling advances of the seductress. Presumably, this is where most of those infected by HIV/AIDS have been most vulnerable. The message of the book of Proverbs is clear, irresponsible sexual engagement is a death sentence. The Shona wisdom poems echo similar sentiments, there is no place for such an offender in the community. How relevant that message is today!

In the book of Proverbs, we specifically analysed the passage on the wayward woman 2:16-19 from whom the son would be delivered if he abides by wisdom's guidance. This woman is introduced in this unit as "strange" which describes a tripartite estrangement, firstly from her husband (the companion of her youth); secondly from the Israelite community by virtue of socially unacceptable behaviour; and thirdly from God by disobeying a covenantal requirement. We recall the woman's staunch arsenal of "smooth words" which according to Waltke (2004:231) represents the corruption she embodies. Longman III (2006:84) reminded us on the significance of marriage based on the importance to the Israelites of a strong cohesive family. In saying so, the Israelite culture denigrates anyone who erodes that bond because adultery threatens communal harmony. Even so, Perdue (2000:92) perceives economic, social and spiritual implications from adulterous engagements. In 2:20-22 we pointed out exclusion from land as one of the unfortunate consequences of being sexual immorality

his mind, as deserving that lead position in the wide array of other equally compelling subjects covered in his account.

together with keeping the wrong company of wicked men as well as choosing to walk away from the pathway of wisdom.

Outside of the book of Proverbs, we pointed out that Song of Songs is regarded as deeply rooted within the family ethics, as Gerstenberger (2002:69) reveals. In the Shona cultural and wisdom literature that we considered, we came across specific location of sexual instructions within the family. We saw concerns raised by Makura (1976), over the fact that the aunt is no longer present, as an expression of regret over the outmoded role of the paternal aunt from her role as instructor in sexual matters. Boys within the Shona setting would similarly have had instructions with the uncles or other men at the courtyard again to underscore the family role in these matters. In all this the aim was to get things done right, as in proper marriage and raising a family and to avoid irresponsible sexual engagement.

To come back to the adulteress in the book of Proverbs, at the heart of the warning against the adulteress here is the fact that it is a direct contravention of divinely instituted obligations. Koptak (2003:102) is correct in attributing the "strangeness" with specific reference to the way of Yahweh. Irresponsible sexual engagement goes beyond just a physical encounter between two individuals. Atkinson (1996:34) appropriately says that family loyalty was intended to reflect loyalty to the covenant of Yahweh. For that reason, the marriage covenant and the covenant of Yahweh are analogous of each other. We also bring into discussion here Graham-Taylor's sentiment that "adultery goes right to the root of our relationship with God, and by extension to one another". Satisfactory social relations are based on trust. Illicit sex robs us of that.

What has to be said is that in the book of Proverbs family influence in sexual instruction is a highly upheld practice. S and B Jones (1993:20) explain this fact from a contemporary experience when they write:

Very few children report having informative and comfortable interactions with their parents about sexuality. Many initially remember no sex education at all, but when prompted can recall one or two isolated instances of instruction as being confusing and unconvincing, with inadequate justifications being offered for the principles that were taught ... Yet parents continue to have *the greatest* influence. A number of studies have suggested that one of the best predictors of sexual conservativeness in young people is closeness to one parent. Teens who now report being able to talk to a parent and who feel close to that parent appear to have a solid foundation in that relationship that allows them to make better decisions and better resist peer pressure towards sexual activity (my italics).

What is important to note in this valid comment is the fact that parental influence is regarded as the most sufficient and satisfactory encounter as well as adequate resistance against peer pressure. Here, notably, is the stipulation that sexual conservativeness is directly linked to a young person's closeness to one parent – any one of them. Put in another way, responsible sexual decisions are directly correlated to the solid foundation of strong parental instruction. In this the book of Proverbs, as well as Shona traditional practices plays a leading role.

The third cause of societal instability that we brought into contention had to do with economical hardships, a current and highly concerning matter in Zimbabwe. The unprecedented levels of poverty and desperation have pushed some people into a sheer loss of personal dignity, high levels of political contentions and intolerance. There is also the grave matter of the breakdown of the family. In his book *Africa in Chaos*,

Prof. George Ayittey reveals the experience common to African democracies. He writes (1999:7):

The nationalists who were freedom fighters for their respective countries were hailed as heroes, swept into office with huge parliamentary majorities and deified. Currencies have their portraits and statues were built to honour them. Criticising them became sacrilegious and, very quickly, the freedom and development promised by Nkrumah and other African nationalists transmogrified into a melodramatic nightmare. In many countries these nationalist leaders soon turned out to be crocodile liberators, Swiss bank socialists, quack revolutionaries, and grasping kleptocrats. After independence true freedom never came to much of Africa. Nor did development.

To our mind, the worst scenario in view of the failure to deliver on promises by African governments is the bondage to other forms of oppression that came about. The never ending cycle of civil wars, economic collapse, poverty, malnutrition, corruption and the brain drain are among the many issues of concern. The last factor in particular is gravely serious as it robbed Africa of those best equipped to potentially redress the emerging challenges.

Needless to say, the move by some individuals needing to search for greener pastures elsewhere, has introduced novel developments emblematic of our times. In particular is the breakdown of the family due to physical separation of members necessitated by the search for economical survival. Reports that we have come across regarding our people in the Diaspora are not always encouraging. Similarly, one is saddened by the state of affairs of the families left behind. Some have left high positions of employment only to get engaged in deplorable and despised jobs overseas. The money earned and sent home can never replace the contentment experienced by the family being together. Again the book of Proverbs, as well as Shona wisdom poems, offers some

obliging guidelines towards human dignity (a good name, for example Pr. 3:3-4) as the accompanying quest for wisdom. The concern by Hamutiyinei (1992:1) of our modern young people as rootless and decultured no doubt presents rural and traditional Africa as the ideal. Ayittey (1999:15) argues along the same lines when he suggests that a careful study of the “primitive” society reveals an astonishing degree of functionality, forms of democracy, rule of customary law and accountability to eldership among other attractive standards. Retracing these roots is therefore a critical step towards recovery.

It seems, then, from Hamutiyinei and Ayittey’s perspectives that most of Africa’s problems emanate from the modern sector. The book of Proverbs and Shona wisdom poems in their sharp focus on the centrality of the family and its protection as a unit is critical in addressing the socio-political and economic challenges that we face. What really kept people together and subscribing to common values was crucially in keeping the family bond intact. In terms of economical survival, we again notice some advice given within the family setting by the father to the son in Proverbs 6:6-11. As we saw in our exegetical analysis of this passage, the arguments employed here are in line with Gerstenberger’s (2002:20) thesis of the acquisition of food as a family concern. For that reason, a family could not afford a lazy member.

We also noticed the tone in this passage (6:6-11) is sharper than the previous encounters in the book of Proverbs. In retrospect, the analogy of the ant offers more insights than we previously highlighted in our exegetical exploration. For example, the ant colony itself represents some form of governance or administrative system that functions properly towards productivity in contrast to our current context plagued by serious challenges. Longman III (2006:172) reveals that modern scientific studies

have in fact uncovered a functional hierarchy of operations within the ant colony that democratically serves that community. Ironically, the son who is called upon to observe an ant has to his advantage governmental and other support structures to aid his efforts but he still fails miserably. Such obtrusive failure has serious implications towards the sustenance of family and invariably of the community. For that reason, a rather sharp tone is justifiable in this unit.

The fourth cause of societal instability that we discussed relates to the concerns raised about our deteriorating educational standards. Parents in various settings have expressed discontentment with the educational standards in the country hence the establishment of private schools and the rise of home schooling as an option.¹⁶² In particular we raise the issue of morality among other concerns as the foremost contention. It seems that there is some confusion here as to whose responsibility it is to address the subject of the moral conduct of our children. We sighted the concern raised by Erricker & Erricker (2000:81) on the seemingly immoral product of our educational system. In short, we have a crisis of character as our greatest challenge within the educational sector. Whether one can blame it totally on the educational system is debatable. However, Kennedy (1994:13) registers that of all the properties that belong to honourable men and women, not one is as highly prized as that of character. Writing with the American government in mind he comments:

If responsible changes are made by men and women of strong character and moral vision, then things should improve; but if we turn over the reins of government to men and women of weak and questionable character, and if we empower people to rule this nation whose views are absolutely contrary to the beliefs of the founders and deliberately opposed to the

¹⁶² By the way, one of the reasons attributed to the better performance by home schooled children than their counterparts can be attributed to parental contact (see Wiechers & Bester 2006:456-460).

principles that made this nation great, then the changes they bring about will not – indeed cannot – be for the better (1994:13).

What we ought to glean from Kennedy's comment is the inseparability of education and character on the one hand, and position and conduct on the other. He continues to state that "if a man's character is his fate, as the philosophers have suggested, then we must understand that what we believe and how we behave will determine whether or not we can survive: Our destiny, both as individuals and as a nation, hinges on the decisions we make today" (1994:18). These comments are suitably applicable to any context. Our suggestion is that the educational system ought to be aware of this critical issue and find ways to address it.

The concern for the moral instruction of our young people is addressed in the book of Proverbs and Shona wisdom poems as a matter of central concern. Murphy (2001:5) is correct in saying the "theological thrust of the book of Proverbs comes from its obvious intent to shape the character of a human being, to provide moral formation of a worshipper of the Lord". The same concern is raised in the Shona wisdom poems as reflected by what Kapolyo (2005:34) presents as a Bantu ontological reality which prescribes what it means to be a member of humanity. Hamutiyinei (1992:26) refers to a similar episode. It is a gripping discovery to consider the fact that wisdom compositions do not dichotomise the religious from the social and moral in their educational approach. That holistic approach is certainly something we can learn from. In preparing our children, it is not only their careers that matter, but their lives as comprehensively as possible.

In the book of Proverbs, the educational motif comes out in the prologue 1:2-7; in wisdom's poems 1:20-33; 9:1-18; and in the general parental instructions which insist on offering rules to live by. To begin with, the opening poem in the book of Proverbs 1:2-7 clearly has an instructional motif detectable through the spelling out of the purpose of the book as we saw in our exegetical analysis. In an attempt to qualify what wisdom is, the poem employs synonyms (1:2-5) which collectively imply an intellectual process of engagement with the ultimate desire being what Ross (1991:905) calls "skilful living". McKane (1970:262) qualifies this as a strenuous intellectual activity towards the production of the right attitudes according to the moral standards of the community. Besides the synonyms, the poems also cites wisdom's various literary forms (1:6) as an intended learning process that students must attain. Talking about the students, the passage identifies "the young" and "simple" as the target audience who represent the naïve but educable personalities. Clearly, an instructional process is implied throughout the book if the argument holds water that the prologue introduces the anthology in its entirety. The link between the prologue and the rest of the account can be discerned through what we referred to as the principle of the book, found in 1:7 and reproduced in the rest of the account (2:5; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:27; 15:33; 19:23; 22:4; 31:30). The fear of the Lord motif according to Hubbard (1989:48) implies a life lived in conscious obedience to divine requirements.

To move to wisdom's poems that we analysed that are found in 1:20-33 and 9:1-18, an educational motif is implied by the assumption of a persona emblematic of wisdom teachers to a larger extent, and to a lesser that of a prophet as we saw in our exegesis (1:20-21; 9:1, 7, 14-16). The persona is complimented by a target audience in all

cases identified or to whom an invitation is extended (1:22; 9:4, 6 7, 9, 12, 16). In all cases, a *Gnostic manipulationist* argumentation is maintained by the insistence of the speaker's speech as formative or nurturing (1:23; 9:4, 9. In saying so, there is the promise of a reward from paying attention to Wisdom's instructions (1:33; 9:6, 12).

We also have the various parental instructions which imply a nurturing exercise through the use of suggestive vocabulary. In the opening parental poem in 1:8-19, the father's instructions in 1:8 are paralleled to the mother's teaching. These phrases imply the involvement of both parents in the instructional exercise as indicated elsewhere in the book of Proverbs (6:20). However, these phrases are preceded by the imperative "listen" which is reiterated in 4:10; 8:34; 13:1, 8; 19:20; 23:19. 22; 25:10), as a significant command employed to draw attention. As in the above scenario, the *Gnostic manipulationist argumentation* predominate the parental instructions as a way to assert parental authority as well as to insist on the value of what they have to offer. In so doing, we discern that these exchanges are ongoing, and as such they seek as the ultimate goal more than pure comprehension on the part of the son but life change.

The last cause of societal breakdown that we raised, pertained to the collapse of the family which traditionally was the centre of nurturing. Taking a cue from the sociologist and futurologist Alvin Toffler's book *Future Shock* (1970), Gary Collins (1995:7) wrote his account, *Family Shock*, in which he registers that the whole society is in the midst of powerful change that rocks every part of our lives including our families. We have already mentioned, among other factors of this powerful change in the family experience, the high divorce rate, the increase of single parent homes, step family scenario, career families, as some of the indicators of the breakdown. Collins

(1995:7) goes on to say that many people fear these changes, sensing that they will tear apart our nation and our homes. For that reason, they call for a return to the nostalgic families' traditional values. This is an admission that the traditional values are not only highly admired but also dearly missed. Hence, we have the definitions of family still embedded in such traditional values as Soungalo (2006:1178) writes:

A family is defined as a social group whose members live together and share common property and interests. Families are always regarded as being the heart of community life. But all of the distinctive features of African culture is that the family and community are totally blended.

What we recognise from Soungalo's description is that as a basic function, the family by definition and prescription ought to live together and share common interests, as we already suggested above. Being situated at the heart of community, we can understand why the family and community are totally merged so as not to see a dichotomy. Soungalo (2006:1178) further qualifies this definition in broader terms as follows:

African family is defined in very broad terms and embraces more than the nuclear family of parents and children. Anyone with whom one shares blood ties, whether close or distant, is regarded as part of one's family. Thus a family includes brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, cousins and nephews, as far back as anyone can remember. In some cultures, every adult who associates with my parents is my parent, and everyone in the same generation as myself is a brother or sister.¹⁶³

Soungalo's description here assists us in locating the family as "central to a healthy society" as Barna (2003:11) correctly surmises. Therefore, in view of the inevitable changes, we cannot afford to ignore the impact of the highlighted causes on the family life itself since this unit is the basic structure of the societal building block. We also

163 Interestingly, Edwards (2002:162) reveals that in the Hebrew Bible of the Old Testament there is no word for grandchildren, grandson, granddaughter, grandparents, grandfather or grandmother. For this reason the word 'father' and 'mother' can refer back a long way.

have to recognise that change is the only constant in life and as such we cannot cope by resisting its impact or denying its reality but rather by learning to manage it. This is where biblical and Shona wisdom poems have played a critical role. Change management in our view begins with preparing ourselves and our children for it. Edwards (2002:162) comments:

Significantly, although Hebrew has no word for grandparents/grandchild relationships, it is rich in words expressing the development of a child. There are no fewer than eight words expressing the development of a child from the baby in the womb, newly born (*yeleth*), to the suckling child (*yonek*), the child asking for food (*olel*), weaned (*gamul*), clinging to its mother (*taph*), becoming firm (*elem*) shaking itself free (*naar*) and finally the ripened one (*bachur*). God's deep and lasting concern for children and their relationship to their parents is revealed frequently, not least in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Nehemiah 8:2-3; and 2 Timothy 3:15.

If the welfare of children is a divine concern, the same ought to be true of us. That is the challenge the book of Proverbs and Shona wisdom poems present to us. We are reminded of the frequent occurrence of the vocative "my son" in the book of Proverbs (1:10, 15; 2:1; 3:1, 11, 21; 4:10, 20; 5:1, 7, 20; 6:1, 3, 20; 7:1; 19:22; 23:25, 19, 26; 24:13, 21; 27:11; 31:2). It seems that there is an intended parental commitment to the instructional exercise as can be derived from the frequency of this term of endearment. Hinds (1998:213) discerns from this a grand movement of a young person's journey from immaturity to maturity in the context of a home and from the authority of parents.

In Proverbs 6:16-19 the concept of "brothers" (NIV) or "family" (NRS), is employed. In this context, we have a numerical saying that expresses what God considers abominable. The characteristics portrayed collectively reveal what culminates into what would rent the fabric of society. The family is very much in view here particularly if the

last item, as is typical of numerical sayings, is the most emphasised. However, in enumerating each characteristic as abominable to the Lord, the poem employs a *Utopian argumentation* to depict the ideal society that would be free of evil systems. Bland (1998:221) is correct to suggest character formation as the core issue in the book of Proverbs. No one can live with the personality described in 6:16-19.

This study intended to explore the primacy of home based nurturing as an ideal that would promote societal stability. From our analysis of the various wisdom poems found in the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs, the projection of the home as a centre of instruction is unmistakable. While the prologue opens with a general orientation towards the young, the opening poem situates the concern it raises as a parental instruction. Of the passages we analysed the fatherly voice is maintained in 2:1-22; 3:1-12; 3:27-35; 6:1-5 and implied in 6:6-11; 6:12-15; 6:16-19. In the passages that personify Wisdom, 1:20-33; 9:1-18, which we considered in this study, the instructional agenda espoused in 1:2-7 is sustained in these passages.

We also brought to the fore Shona poetical wisdom for comparative purposes. We saw the similarities not only on the common genre, but also the subject matter and central concern on the quality of human character as the key parental concern. This consternation, we discussed, has lasting implications for the community and its stability. We also mentioned that in the Shona society, traditional values were highly upheld where the status of a husband and wife depended, among other factors, on the quantity and quality of their offspring. By the same token, home based nurturing was not only a parental preoccupation but also involved various relations to the family and community. Mhondoro (1970:78) reminded us that in Shona traditional society there

was hardly an individual who could go his/her own way because of the control and dependence on relatives. That, in summation, actualises our conception of home based nurturing as an ideal necessary for societal stability.

2. Summation of exegetical findings

The exegesis of the individual passages that we looked at in Proverbs 1-9 assisted us in establishing certain conclusions. In their address of matters relating to life as a whole, these wisdom poems are instructional, a designation that relates to both their literary form and contents. Various aspects comprise what Morgan (2002:29) calls the educational roles and pedagogical methods.

2.1 Objectives of the instructional premise

There are four aspects that form the objectival intention of the exchanges that take place in this unit. Firstly, we have the issue of the development of the personal competence of the listener as the means to understand all matters of life. The prologue of the book of Proverbs (1:2-7), where the agenda is set, makes use of terms such as understanding, prudence, discretion, discerning, which implicate a certain level of intellectual capacity necessary to competently handle the puzzling challenges of life. It intends to impart a skill in living. In similar vein, Hamutyinei's (1992:7) opening poem employs the word "listen" as a call to attention.

Secondly, we have the question of the formation of the personal character of the listener as seen from the lurking dangers against which the son is sternly forewarned. The opening parental instruction 1:8-19 as well as the exchange recorded in 2:1-22 presages against the undesirable characters of the wicked men and the wayward

woman (cf. 5:3-6; 6:20-35; 7:5-23) who have the potential to send one on the route to damnation. The preservation of character is insisted upon in these occurrences by the avoidance of these polluters. We discern the parallel intention in Shona wisdom poems analysed in this study. At the same time we have already indicated character development as an important concern within the Shona value system.

Thirdly, there is the obligation of personal commitment on the part of the listener to the learning process. We notice the consistent pattern of raising that awareness through the address, "my son", which is characteristically followed by an appeal not to neglect the parental instructions (1:8-9; 2:1; 3:1; 4:1; 5:1 etc). The idea of personal commitment to the quest for wisdom is expressed in the principle found in 1:7. As the account unfolds, heeding to parental instructions cannot be divorced from wisdom itself. In Proverbs 2:1-22 the search for wisdom is equated to the quest for God. That search demands unwavering personal commitment to the educational purposes set in this unit. The Shona wisdom poems in this study, as well as discussions on the nature of the Shona family, have provided sufficient evidence towards a similar end.

Fourthly, there is the ideal of the personal relationship to God by the listener. The educational agenda of Proverbs 1-9 by design should produce "fear of the Lord" (Pr. 1:7; 2:5; 3:7; 9:10). Wisdom cannot be achieved outside of this relationship. We endorse the comments of Estes (1997:85) when he writes:

The goals of education stated in Proverbs 1-9 focus for the most part on the cultivation of the learner as a mature godly person, rather than upon transmission of a discrete body of knowledge. The teacher endeavours to create in the learner a personal commitment to diligence, discipline and devotion to wisdom. In other words, a primary goal for education is that the learner may

accept for himself the values that wisdom propounds so that his life is shaped according to Yahweh's desires.

The spiritual dynamic here is perhaps the most significant in every person's life. Barna (2003:28) argues that every dimension of a person's experience hinges on his or her moral and spiritual condition. While the other dynamics of life are important, the physical, emotional, intellectual, relational, professional, moral and socio-economic and political, are all rooted in the spiritual dimension. We can represent the dynamism diagrammatically as follows:

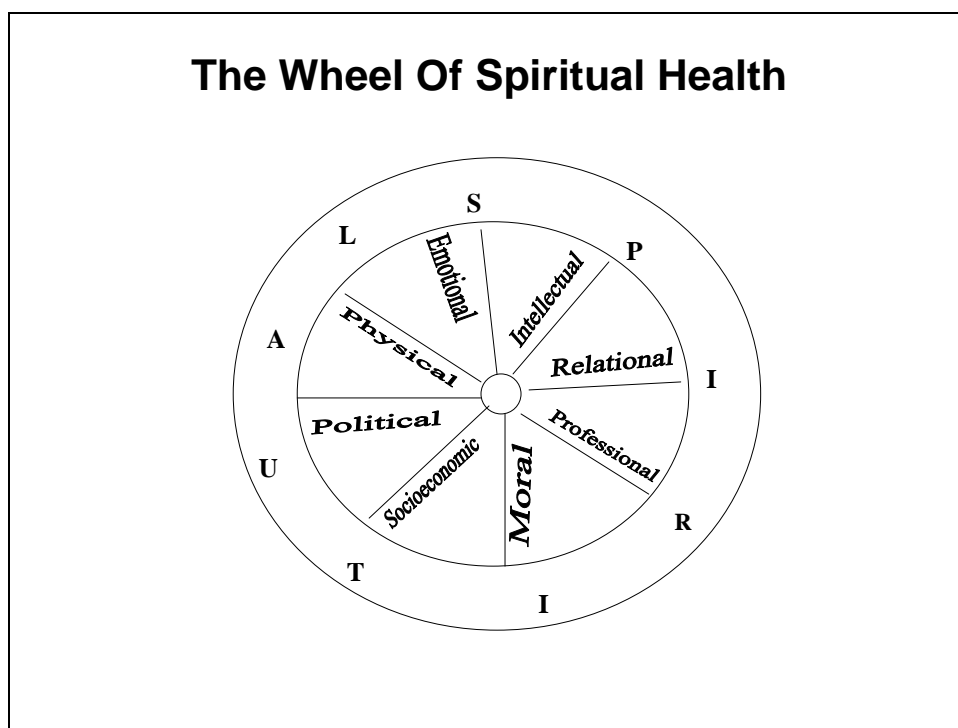


Figure 7: Wheel of Spiritual health

As far as the book of Proverbs is concerned, we have already shown the link between the quest for wisdom and the quest for God. The Shona philosophy is similar although we cannot equate it to the Israelite faith. A similar idea of honour can be read from Hamutyinei's (1992:13) notion of sons bringing cobs of maize and firewood at the council. There is a special link between produce and particular disciplines in both instances.

For that reason a similar reckoning is applicable to other areas of life as there is no dichotomy between spirituality and all else. As we discovered in the Proverbs 3:1-12, prosperity and long life are directly linked to abiding by the father's instructions. In the same breath, productivity in 3:10 is a direct result of honouring the Lord with one's firstfruits, an acknowledgement that Yahweh is the true source of all that we are and have. For these reasons, we can deduce the primacy of spiritual development as the revolutionary idea behind the exchanges that occur in the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs if not in the rest of the account. With that in mind, we now need to turn our attention to specific rhetorical strategies that are employed within the first nine chapters towards the primacy of spiritual development.

2.2 Adopted rhetorical strategies

In this section we are interested in the rhetorical strategies that are employed in the pedagogical exchanges. Gittay (2001:456) says that "the question of argumentation is important because the book has a pragmatic aim; the pupils learn for a concrete benefit, hence they must be persuaded that the principles of wisdom that they seek to gain are really beneficial". What then were the teaching strategies that were employed?

Firstly, we have the assertion of parental authority in both biblical and Shona wisdom poems. This is seen through the address "my son" that is frequently used, the employment of the imperative and the prohibitive statements. The vocative "my son" functions more than just a call to attention or a term of endearment. It also exerts the father's authority. Gerstenberger (2002:20) presumes that the father "did not exercise an absolutist rule, but rather was the representative of the family in the outside world",

as such speaks more than just offering a personal perspective. The father, if so deserving, would have held a seat among the elders (cf. Pr. 31:23). We ought to bear in mind that in the sentiments that he shares in Proverbs 4:1-4 project an ongoing exchange for future generations. Even if we are to take the sentiments by Baumann (1998:47) who disputes the family as the forum in Proverbs 1-9, he admits that the expressions such as father and child or son “not only describe actual blood relations in the [OT], but also the relationship between teacher and pupil” again that of authority on the part of the teacher.

However, we need to qualify that the father does not come across as authoritative or an authoritarian as such but to exhort his son. Block (2003:41) prefers the term patricentrism to patriarchy which emphasizes the inordinate power exercised by the father over his household. He says that this patricentrism “reflects the normative biblical disposition toward the role of the head of a household in Israel more accurately than the word patriarchy”. The preferred concept pays little attention to the actual power of the household head. Of primary concern then is the instructional role the father plays. Gittay (2001:50) adds that “wisdom is instructive in terms of moral behaviour and personal benefit ... the language of the lecture indicates that the personal benefit of the follower of Wisdom depends on the acceptance of the premise : ‘My child, if you accept my word ...’” For that reason, the exchanges are argumentative, which leads us to the next point. Block (2003:52) concludes by saying that “when scouring the [OT] for evidence concerning the relationship between fathers and sons, it is tempting to concentrate on the authority that fathers exerted over their sons and to forget that the father’s own interests were best served when he secured the well-being of his children”.

Secondly, we have the presentation of well reasoned arguments throughout the recorded exchanges. Hamutyinei's prelude (1992:i) presents a good case for the Shona context in this regard. The material seeks to impress rather than impose an idea which we see in the imperative/incentive pattern. The father does not ask the child to make any form of commitment without providing the accompanying rationale for such an undertaking. The best example of this that we saw is in 3:1-12 where six requirements are paired with six corresponding reasons. It also suggests the manner in which the father strategically speaks in order to validate the reasons for these exchanges. Gittay (2001:55-56) provides even greater scope to the modes of argumentation when he writes:

The major question of argumentation revolves around the body of the book, the originally self-contained units. However, acknowledging that act of drawing up a list is actually a literary endeavour of establishing a new text, we can show that this text is arguable on the basis of analogies. That is to say, the new text was intended as presentational discourse, which establishes patterns of common ground between the three components of Proverbs.

Gittay's attempt here suggests that even the arrangement of the material was a deliberate effort on the part of the editor in order to present the material in the fashion we have for a preconceived cause. This strategy is particularly clear because of the scope that encompasses a recurrence of themes.

Thirdly, we have the adoption of a reflective practice. The exchanges introduce a lot of religious moral matters. These are carefully designed to cater to the individual. In proposing his views, the speaker does not come across with experimental options but well reasoned principles (see Hamutyinei 1992:i in terms of the strategy for casting the compositions with proverbial lore and sayings). In the instructions issued in 2:1-22,

the father commences with the specific issues at stake in terms of the quest for wisdom. He then cites two threats to the pursuit the wicked men and the wayward woman and concludes with a statement that captures the essence of his sentiments. Kuntz's (2001:121) perspective on the opening and closing units of the book of Proverbs could be said about its internal units found in 1-9 when he writes:

When readers engage biblical books as canonical artifacts that ask to be viewed in their wholeness, the way in which the text achieves closure is often as telling the way in which it commences.

Kuntz regards chapters 1-9 as an introduction into chapters 10-29 which, to use Murphy's words (2001:5), display a staccato style of the various proverbial statements that are in all intentions reflective. The idea therein is that the father modeled the strict requirements of the instructions that he passed on. Block (2003:53) says that "fathers instructed their sons in the way of wisdom, specifically developing their characters and skills for life and vocation and teaching them to follow in their father's steps".

Fourthly, we have the employment of *mnemonic* devices. Murphy (2001:5) says that devices employed in this account aim at excellence by means of word play, *onomatopoeia*, *paronomasia* – the play on words and sounds, or the *aesthetic* of words. This we saw along with *repetitions*, *chiasm*, *assonance* and *juxtaposition* and numerical pattern. Of interest here are the various literary devices that assist with the recollection of the messages that are used. The use of the infinitive in the prologue, the repetition of key words in succeeding units, the correspondence of the lines in 2:1-22 to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet are just a few examples among many of the good use of this device. We also have the use of *parallelism*, a well

known occurrence of Hebrew poetry where half lines were grouped in such a way as to make the full thoughts of the writer vivid (Murphy 1998:6). These devices were further elucidated by the constant call on the part of the son to internalize the father's instructions. The Shona wisdom poems have similar devices hence the choice of poetry as opposed to prose as the instructional genre (see Kabweza 1979:17).

Fifthly, we have the use of personification. Murphy (2001:5) regards this personification as the most extensive in the entire Bible (1:20-33; 8:1-36; 9:1-6; 9:13-18). On the one hand, the personification presents, according to Kirk (2004:169) portraiture of female heroism in this patriarchally developed history, on the other hand it seems to be a literary device used in this account. The fact that she occupies so much space in this account is reason enough to justify this line of thinking. The important role of the woman motif in this account is used negatively as in the wayward woman whom the son must avoid at any cost and that figure stands in sharp contrast to Lady Wisdom who is, on the contrary, much desirable. According to Wee (1999:54) this theme occupies 55% of the space in chapters 1-9 of the book of Proverbs. We can only speak of a hint of personification, from Hamutyinei's (1992:7) adoption of the name "*Mudyamadzo*" as the closest possibility, with regards to the Shona context.

If sexuality is such an issue to the young man, one wonders whether the use of this personification is not intentional, particularly, as Wee (1999:54) points out, with the climax that the woman motif reaches in chapter 9 of the book of Proverbs. Young (2001:235) regards personification as a poetic metaphor particularly with the quasi-personification of certain divine attributes. This is not to suggest that she is divine but perhaps demonstrates her superior qualities that are celebrated in 3:13-20.

Sixthly, we have the use of reinforcement. For example, the wayward woman and the grave dangers she poses are first spoken of in 2:16-19. The message is repeated in 5:1-14; 6:20-35; 7:1-27 and 9:13-18. In similar vein, the wayward woman's opposite number, Lady Wisdom (1:20-33) also features in 3:13-18; 8:1-36; 9:1-6. The wicked men of 1:10-19 reappear in 2:12-15 and 4:14-17. Reinforcement is employed here because of the significance or the weight given to such matters. In so doing, various elucidatory material of the same concern is used to better highlight a matter of concern.

In addition, we have the use of illustrative material. In 1:8-19, for example, is an imagery scenario that the father creates to illustrate the danger that gangsters pose. His descriptions command a vivid image of the message he is trying to put across. A similar treatise occurs in 7:6-27 with the wayward woman being the subject of attention. Such concrete illustrations reignite the concrete situations in which the wisdom teachings originally took place. While Baumann (1998:49) puts forward the fact that written down situations seem to deprive us of the original context and application in which the wisdom teachings took place, these recreations by the father within his teachings in 1-9 bring us closer to that original setting. In this case, the meaning of these exchanges is not necessarily affected by our accessing them as written documents. The vivid illustrative material relives the original context for us.

Another illustrative aspect is the reference to nature for elaborative purposes. The reference to the bird in 1:17, for example, is helpful in making a well known and observable feature from nature depict a human trait. In similar style, the constant use

of the "path" metaphor (1:19; 2:8, 13, 19 etc) functions well to delineate the life one pursues. We are also reminded by the depiction of the storm and whirlwind in 1:26-27, of the severity of the impending danger ignited by ignoring Wisdom's appeal. These images originate from well known forces of nature that are recognizable to the original audience.

Moreover, we have the presentation of the pursuit of wisdom as an all encompassing quest. In the *sensory-aesthetic* arena we covered much scope in terms of the human body. Murphy (2001:6) agrees that "the pursuit of wisdom is underscored by the frequent mention of specific body parts, eyes, mouth, lips, ears, heart, hand and feet. All organs of the body are to be united in the pursuit of wisdom, nothing is to be left to chance".

Lastly, we have the drawing from legacy of the past tradition. The location of the wisdom sentiments within the covenantal prescriptions, proverbial statements and other Israelite traditions and experiences is an enriching experience. That situation creates the impression that the father does not speak purely on personal opinion but resonates from a reliable source. Estes (1997:92) comments:

The teacher, then, does not speak by personal authority alone, but he is also the voice of the received tradition that transcends him ... Over time, transmitted wisdom was verified, adjusted, augmented and supported by subsequent observation of life. The curriculum, therefore, was not static, but dynamic, as the insights of generations of sages progressively coalesced into more coherent philosophy ...

This process was done because of the Israelite worldview which was based on the premise of Yahweh their God. Even if there is the possibility of borrowing from other

traditions outside of Israel, it would be fair to imagine a process of reinterpretation in order to fall within the divine bias.

Having looked at these various aspects from our exegetical findings we can say that this study has so far reconstructed the purpose and process of the instructional exchanges that we find in Proverbs 1-9. The select passages are representative of the scope that we discover towards that cause. The question that we now have to ask is, to what degree this ideal can be realized in the contemporary?

The most explicit reference in this body of literature to such an encounter is 4:1-10 which describes how a father hands over to his son instructions he himself received from his own parents. By quoting this experience the father invariably commissions his son to a similar exchange with his own children. And Murphy (2001:5) says that "from this perspective, wisdom forum is a body of teaching that is communicable and is presented in the voice of experience from the past handed in the hope of forming future generations".

We have also stated that a similar transmission of information by one generation to the next is true of the Shona people in the traditional setup. Perhaps our next step should be to take a few moments to consider what to do with the information we now have.

3. Recommendations

The next question really is where do we go from here? A number of commendable suggestions could be helpful at this juncture. Firstly, the church represents perhaps the most formidable body that, above all interest groups, values the Word of God. For

the church, the Bible is not merely a literary composition for scholarly scrutiny. It represents the source of values to live by. Making available the findings of this study to the church is not only obligatory but urgent, especially in view of our argument on the critical nature of the subject matter towards societal stability. It would also castigate the church as having something valuable to offer in the ongoing debate towards a better life for all.

There is also the critical need for a formidable collaboration between the church and home in the nurturing of our children. To our mind, no one has better championed this call than Barna (2003:14) who writes:

In the course of reflecting on children and their spiritual growth, it is imperative that we understand God's expectations of how children should be nurtured. The local church is crucial in this process, but a child's family is central. Gaining a proper perspective on the partnership between parents and church in the mutual effort to raise God-loving and God-fearing children is paramount.

We agree with the fact that Barna specifies a child's family as a critical partner to the church in the nurturing endeavour. We also need to bear in mind what he views as the ultimate goal of this mutual exercise which is to raise God-loving and God-fearing children, which echoes the principle of the book of Proverbs 1:7.

Secondly, within Christendom are organisations that specifically exist to uphold family ideals. Undoubtedly the parental instructions of Proverbs 1-9 and insights from Shona wisdom poems would offer some helpful guidelines and discussion points. For example, an organisation in Zimbabwe, known as Family Impact declared 2006 as the year of the family. Among other areas of discussion in their program, the issue of parents' instructing their children was raised. Not only did their declaration

demonstrate the relevance of our study to the Zimbabwean context, but the high number of participants revealed the urgency with which this subject was received. At the same time, we need to acknowledge that the first human relationship that God ever created was between a man and woman. Soungalo (2006:12) is correct to state that at the core of family life is the union between a man and a woman, and that union is much stronger than that of parents and children. It is therefore logical to suggest that the family, as in husband/wife and parents/children relationships, are anticipated in the teachings of the book of Proverbs as well as in the Shona wisdom poems.

Thirdly, from without Christian circles, are interested parties such as Non Governmental organisations who have a peculiar passion for our young people. Within the African context, children in particular, are considered to be the most vulnerable. For that reason there is a soft spot reserved by many for any work among the young. Through UNICEF and related organisations we have a vested interest in working with children towards societal stability. These organisations are also driven by the recognition that children are our most treasured heritage. Barna (2003:18) captures the essence of these sentiments when he comments:

Our children will define the future, which makes them the most significant and enduring legacy. After all, God never told His followers to take over the world through force or intelligence. He simply told us to have children and then raise them to honour God in all that they do. Therefore, you might logically conclude that bearing and raising children is not only our most enduring legacy but also one of our greatest personal responsibilities.

Barna's comments compel us to prioritise caring for and nurturing our children. He is right in pointing out that they are our most enduring legacy and as such, their well-being present and future ought to take the centre stage of our preoccupation.

Not only are these thoughts important to Non Governmental Organisations, we note with interest that the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights drawn up in 1948, (see Edwards 2002:158), stated that the "family is the natural and fundamental group of society". This declaration which is subscribed universally, places the issues of this study at the heart of the policies of any government in this world. McIntosh (2006:83) reflects on this statement by surmising that "the backbone of a strong nation is the family unit. If this is torn apart, the government of such a nation becomes impossible, both legally and economically". We need to take note of the magnitude of the problem that McIntosh brings into perspective. For this reason, Edwards (2002:160 cf. Barna 2003:18) is correct in seeing the centrality of family to any governing policies as he writes:

Most governments acknowledge that the family is the foundational unit in society and many therefore make encouraging sounds about the importance of the family. Sadly, however, many are actively supporting the very measures that are rapidly eroding the fabric that should protect the family unit. Divorce is made faster and easier, disciplining children is likely to be taken out of the hands of parents ... mothers are enticed and intimidated back to work by generous provision of nursery care, little is done to stem the tide of violence, filth and blasphemy that pours into our homes through television.

What we perceive from Edwards' sentiments here are the double standards with which most government policies are introduced into society, perhaps without realising the implications of such actions. His perspective is further endorsed by the statement that "after three decades of a philosophy that drove women out of the home into the office and factory, it is slowly dawning upon politicians, sociologists and journalists that we have made a terrible mistake; unfortunately young people and parents have not yet come to the same conclusion" (2002:175). It is therefore imperative to reveal the

findings of this study in arguing not only for the primacy of the home as a centre of nurturing, but of the children themselves. Edwards (2002:160) summarises our concern aptly when he says that the parent-child relationship is the only factor common to everyone in society and every society in human history, as he writes that “a marriage can exist without children, and children can exist without a marriage, but we all have to have a mother and father to exist at all”.

Fourthly, we have indicated earlier on in the introductory stages of this study, the educational sector and the despondency expressed therein concerning the lack of moral instruction. Again the book of Proverbs provides some guidelines that could be utilised within the educational system to compliment home based nurturing. The same is true about traditional values reflected in Shona wisdom poems. Even in cases where parents have opted for home-schooling, educationists can therefore design their curriculum with the obligation of parental responsibility well espoused. For example, where parents are expected to assist with home work, part of that assignment deliberately encourage character development during those encounters. Many other considerations could be entertained as part of the ongoing discussion towards the realisation of this ideal.

Fifthly, central to our study obviously are the parents themselves, who ought to shoulder the responsibility of home based nurturing. In saying this, we have to take into account the contemporary realities of single parent homes, dysfunctional marriages and so on. Be that as it may, parents are not exempt from parenting despite their situation. Writing from his observations of developments in England, Edwards (2002:158) makes these startling revelations:

Something has gone wrong in our homes. In 1994 ten thousand schoolgirls became pregnant, thirty thousand children were added to the child protection register in England alone, and one hundred thousand ran away from home or from care. Perhaps none of this is surprising when we consider that one hundred and fifty thousand children and young people were affected by their parents' divorce in that year.

Edwards is right in attributing these startling revelations to the exposure of children to the breakdown of their parents' marriage. His precise deduction is echoed by McIntosh (2006:83) who suggests that "one of the greatest dangers in modern family life is that the home itself becomes more important than the family". He explains, "often the reason why the wife works full-time as well as the husband is not out of necessity, but to have the extra luxuries in the home. It may even be that having children is delayed for this selfish reason" (2006:83). To that we add the view that the selfish reason does not always disappear with the addition of children to the couple concerned.

What needs to be said here, in the first place, is that marriage matters. In making this statement we are endorsing the primacy of marriage above all other human relationships as Edwards (2002:200) puts it, "The first human relationship that God created was between a man and a woman in marriage, and when he looked for a human relationship that would best mirror the relationship between himself and his chosen people, God used the picture of marriage". He continues to make the following remark which is highly significant:

When a husband or wife is unfaithful to the marriage bond, they shatter a child's respect and honour for its parents ... Unfaithful parents set an example to their children, and children from a broken home are at a higher risk of their own marriage ending in divorce (2002:200).

In the second place, we are repeating what we have already said, but for emphasis, we need to hear it again, perhaps in different words, that in the home children experience their first introduction to authority which they will continue to experience in different aspects of life. Parental nurturing that begins with a solid husband-wife modelling through their parents and learning to honour parents is critical to their negotiation of life and all its challenges. The full implications of this nurturing are captured in Edwards (2002:166) when he writes:

The home where parents are dishonoured without discipline, and where ageing grandparents are ridiculed by two generations, is hardly likely to correct disparaging remarks about someone's colour, race, religion, occupation, or on their mental or physical disability. Long before a child thinks about murder, contemplates the passing pleasure of adultery, understands the apparent advantage of stealing, learns to lie or yearns for the possessions of others, it struggles to break free from parental discipline. That is always the first relationship to be trampled upon and therefore the first one that a child must learn to value.

Omartian (1995:62) regards failure to honour parents as rebellion, and thus honour is something children must be taught as it does not come naturally. Invariably, the messages of the book of Proverbs and Shona wisdom poems serve to underscore the important role of both parents as equal participants in the instructional exercise. In so doing, the account implicitly projects the role of a good marriage as the most crucial factor in parenting. Sadly, a sign of our time is the unwillingness by couples to admit problems within their marriages in order to get help even where such help is available. One of the purposes of marriage, according to Malachi 2:15, is to bring up godly offspring. By implication, the same cause is castigated in the book of Proverbs, hence the necessity of strict instructions that the children are subject to. This in our view represents one of the most needed interventions in Zimbabwe today and undoubtedly in Africa and the rest of the world.

Lastly, in limiting our study to wisdom poems found in the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs, we realise the need to explore the home based nurturing motif, in the rest of the account. It is not possible within the scope of this study to undertake this mammoth task but to present this as an area for future investigation. In saying so, we also particularize the necessity of such an investigation with reference to the use of the proverb as the means of instruction which is predominantly found in chapters 10 onwards. We would also have wanted to link findings from that exploration to Shona proverbial wisdom to see if there are any clues as to what such an exercise would yield towards an Afrocentric study of the Old Testament. Is the home still projected as the centre of nurturing in these chapters?¹⁶⁴

4. Conclusion

In the opening chapter we registered the issues in the present day Zimbabwe that remain a challenge for any serious students of the Bible and of other fields. As in many other contexts, societal breakdown is a matter that demands a multi-faceted approach as well as interdisciplinary expertise if at all any stability is to be realised. For this reason, we selected Robbins' socio-rhetorical criticism for our exegetical analysis as an approach to literature that incorporates expert knowledge from various fields, (literary, scientific, rhetorical, postmodern and theological), under a single rubric. In our exploration of possible causes to societal breakdown, we came to the realisation of what seemed to be a coincidence with disturbance of home based nurturing which played an established to prepare young people for life.

¹⁶⁴ The present writer is aware of Dell's account, *The book of Proverbs in social and theological context* (2006), cited in this study, which considers the family setting in the analysis of chapters 10 onwards of the book of Proverbs. Our decision to zero in on the first nine chapters, as well as our awareness of Dell's study has not allowed us space to consider these chapters.

In the second chapter of this study, it became apparent, under the guidance of Gerstenberger's views on the family social strata, that in both the Israelite and Shona contexts the family played a critical role in preparing its younger ones for life. In biblical literature, we have divinely issued injunctions for parents to instruct their children. In the book of Proverbs we saw that most consistent and focused coverage of these injunctions through the parent-child encounters that are recorded particularly within in the first nine chapters.

Our analysis of the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs in the third and fourth chapter of this study was based on an attempt to argue for home based nurturing as reflected in these texts as well as reflecting the subject matter covered in these exchanges. At the same time, we discovered that the parent speaker employed wisdom poem as the literary approach to the instructions that are given. At the same time, we revealed a similar approach assumed by Hamutyinei (1992) in a similar exercise within the Shona context. From this common strategy, we could derive some implications both for the purposes of this study as well as of the OT which we reflected in the fifth chapter.

In the final chapter, our intention was to vindicate the emerging voice among concerned parties that is beginning to command attention. Beyond the trauma of terrorist attacks, the nervy engagement of uranium enrichment programmes by suspect nations, the heated debates on global warming, and the perennial instability in most regions of the world, the family takes the centre stage. According to Gary Inrig

(2002:12), the family structure has a lot to do with the way things are going in the world today as he writes:

I am personally convinced that the slow but sure collapse of the family is having even greater long term effects on our lives and culture than Osama bin Laden's terrorist attacks. Coupled with that collapse is a massive shift toward a pluralism and relativism that undermines our understanding of truth, spiritual reality and moral values.

The question we ought to ask about the present, in comparison to the past proudly depicted by the notion "the good old days", is - what did we do right then, which we are doing wrong now? This study has, in dialogue with biblical wisdom as well as Shona wisdom poems and traditional culture represented therein, argued for the primacy of home based nurturing as key to societal stability. At the same time, biblical wisdom represents a comprehensive way in which reflections of human experiences and divine encounters are expressed in these poetic compositions. In reading the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs, we have presented the primacy of the home as the natural environment in which parents passed on these lessons to their children as preparation for life.

Similarly, the Shona family, through its extended members, also engaged in an exercise which brought about the elders within that setting as guardians of the highly valued traditional practices and the young as the intended recipients. The end result remains a marvel to many scholars, of a concept of brotherhood, love of a good family with the close support of its members, and good neighbourliness, as pillars of that society (see Gelfand 1973:5). Within the family structures, however, the foundations of these pillars were established. This instructional exercise of an imperative engagement of all members of the family is what in this study we are referring to as home based

nurturing. We have argued that this forum, which is true in the Shona traditional setting is equally so within the biblical culture as reflected in the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs.

We now bring the following telling analogy into perspective:

In the summer of 1996 a group of young elephants was taken from the Kruger National Park in South Africa to the reserve at Pilanesberg just twenty kilometres from Sun City. Before long the small herd had become delinquents – ripping trees, attacking tourist cars and even threatening the rangers. The reason for this aggressive behaviour; which led to at least one animal having to be shot, was the fact that they had been taken too early from their parents (Edwards 2002:162).

This analogy depicts that the disturbance of the natural nurturing process was detrimental to the future these young elephants. Elephants are known to be highly powerful and yet extremely tender towards the young in their natural habitat. As such they have a socialisation process that that prepares the young for survival in the wild. This is applicable to humanity. The truth of the matter is that societal breakdown can be attributed to the situation where parents lose control of their children on the one hand, and, on the other, when children do not honour their parents. The disturbance of this grooming and socialisation process has serious implications for our future.

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