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Katherine Dell. *Get Wisdom, Get Insight: An Introduction to Israel's Wisdom Literature*. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000. Pp. ix + 203. \$16.00 (Paper).

[1] Katherine Dell, a lecturer in Divinity at the University of Cambridge and author of *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature* (1991) and *Shaking a Fist at God: Struggling with the Mystery of Undeserved Suffering* (1997), has produced yet another text in her study of the "wisdom tradition" of ancient Israel. *Get Wisdom, Get Insight* is taken from the oft-repeated phrase in Proverbs admonishing readers to continue in their pursuit of this supreme goal: "Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost you all you have, get understanding" (4:7; NIV). Dell's selection of topics in this text includes:

- The major wisdom books of the Old Testament and Apocrypha
- Wisdom in the prophets and the psalms
- Wisdom in later Jewish, Greek, and Christian literature
- Wisdom in the Dead Sea scrolls library
- Similarities and differences between biblical and ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature
- The influence of wisdom thought on the sayings of Jesus

[2] This book is an attempt to focus on what Dell calls the "mainstream wisdom literature" of the Old Testament and the Apocrypha and to demonstrate how widespread the influence of wisdom thought has been both within the Old Testament and outside it. In the course of her work she is constantly in dialogue with previous scholarship, both agreeing and at times disagreeing with it. While the book offers an extensive bibliography of current Wisdom Literature writing and has ample indices of biblical (including apocryphal) references as well as author and subject indices, an index of extra-biblical references (e.g. Pirke Aboth, the Sentences of Phocylides, the Teachings of Silvanus, the Dead Sea Scroll library, *et al.*) would have been helpful. The frequent chapter summaries help the reader to focus on the main points and would be especially helpful in the classroom.

[3] Dell makes a clear distinction between "wisdom literature" and "wisdom influence." The distinction is necessary because the boundaries that define what should and should not be

considered wisdom literature are problematic. For example, previous scholars have attempted to include the Joseph story in Genesis (9) or the Succession Narrative in 2 Samuel and 1 Kings (9) within Old Testament wisdom literature. Dell maintains that these biblical passages and others like them should not be referred to as "wisdom literature," but rather as passages that have come under the influence of wisdom thought (thus her category "wisdom influence").

[4] The problem then arises, how does one determine what is to be considered genuine "wisdom literature" and what is simply wisdom-like? Dell's solution is two-fold. First, she suggests that the book of Proverbs should serve as the standard expression of wisdom literature against which all other candidates should be evaluated. She bases this on the universal recognition that Proverbs contains some of the oldest wisdom maxims collected by ancient Israel, and according to Dell, is a "good point to start when trying to define wisdom" (14). Second, she argues that any possible wisdom literature passage should be subjected to a test of "form, content, and context" (12-13). She then performs this test on each of her selected topics (Job, Ecclesiastes, Wisdom of Solomon, etc.) with varied results. "Form" is certainly the most easily recognizable criteria, since proverbs have a distinctive look about them. Dell's criterion, "context," is perhaps the most difficult to sustain because of the dearth of context in most wisdom-type literature. However, the criterion, "content," receives most of Dell's attention. She elaborates on content and offers six themes that characterize the essence of biblical wisdom: order in the world, ambiguity of events, punishment and reward, life as the supreme good, confidence in wisdom, and the personification of wisdom.

[5] Although she draws these themes from Proverbs, her starting point, she excludes other themes that might also have a legitimate claim to inclusion in her list. For example, should not the principle of "retribution for actions" or "the doctrine of two paths" (wisdom or folly) be included in a list of themes derived from Proverbs? What about the "fear of the Lord" as a major foundational theme of the book? Even though the "fear of the Lord" is given primacy of position in the prologue to Proverbs (1:1-7), Dell mentions it only in passing, never attempts an explanation, and ignores it entirely in the index (with the exception of an entry from Ben Sira). Thus her list of the themes of Proverbs seems arbitrary at best.

[6] There is an additional problem with Dell's themes. Since they are based solely on Proverbs, they exclude any possible additional themes or sub/counter themes that might be garnered from other biblical books. For example, Dell ultimately maintains that Job should not be considered as part of the wisdom corpus of the Old Testament. Ecclesiastes, on the other hand, should be included in that corpus according to Dell. Why exclude the "wisdom in revolt" or "wisdom plus critique" themes of Job (as Dell describes them) from what should be considered wisdom literature proper while including the "peaceful despair" or "anti-wisdom" themes of Ecclesiastes? It seems that Dell is using one segment of the wisdom corpus to exclude other portions that have traditionally been considered parts of the larger whole. Moreover, later in her book she observes that Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon stretch the limits of wisdom literature (limits which she established) yet still remain a part of that literature. Why should Job not be allowed to "stretch" those same limits? Sincere questioning and honest doubt are as much a part of the Old Testament wisdom literature tradition and the Old Testament as a whole (cf. the psalms of lament) as Dell's theme, "confidence in wisdom."

[7] *Get Wisdom, Get Insight* is particularly strong in its analysis of wisdom's roots in the ancient Near Eastern world and in the section devoted to wisdom in the sayings of Jesus. With regard to the ancient Near East, Dell observes that the book of Proverbs has affinities with Egyptian (and some Semitic) wisdom writings but that Job and Qohelet have similarities to Mesopotamian literature. Students would particularly benefit from her discussion of these topics and her ample bibliography for further review.

[8] Despite Dell's problematic exclusion of Job from Old Testament wisdom literature, her book is a welcome addition to our study of the phenomenon of ancient Israelite wisdom. Her dialogue with other scholars is engaging and her frequent quotation of relevant passages (not just textual citations) makes for great reading. It will certainly prove to be an exceptional classroom text and scholarly reference work.

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