

peace to do their own thing. The rather polemical tone of this chapter will be more comprehensible if it is seen as a response to a critical review of *Understanding* which appeared in the spring of 1993.⁸ Doubts were cast on my unquestioning acceptance of the assumptions of historical criticism; convinced that I had dismissed far too lightly the contributions of the more recent critical methods, 'from narratology to reader response to deconstruction', the reviewer charged me with a lack of theoretical acumen. It will be evident, I hope, that my previous neglect of the new methods was not unreflecting but deliberate.

The essays in this book represent only a few of the many possible approaches that might be fruitfully adopted in studying the Gospel. Others have been left aside because they seem to me to be dead-ends, and yet others (such as the attempt to trace direct links between this Gospel and the other three) largely because I have nothing new to contribute to them. As for what is here—'habent sua fata libelli': small books must fend for themselves.

⁸ *JBL* 112 (1993), 154–6.

I

The Transformation of Wisdom

There are two fundamental questions concerning the Prologue of John's Gospel, one literary, the other historical. The literary question was raised by Bultmann in his seminal article for the Gunkel Festschrift of 1923: 'Up to what point is the pre-existent Logos the subject of the passage, and at what point is he succeeded by the historical Jesus?'¹ The commentators, remarks Bultmann, disagree on the answer to this question, and this disagreement has persisted. For Bultmann the main difficulty arises from the fact that although v. 14 offers the first *explicit* statement of the Incarnation, the Christian reader cannot but take vv. 10f. as an allusion to the life of Jesus, and consequently also v. 5 (which is parallel to it) and probably v. 4 also. Bultmann's solution was to see the Prologue as a pre-Christian Gnostic hymn, stemming from Baptist circles and subsequently taken over by the evangelist and adapted to form the opening of the Gospel. There have been many different answers since.²

The second question belongs to the history of religions. Bultmann expressed it in terms of myth, specifically the origin and function of the myth of pre-existence. This formulation was consistent with his belief that the origin of the Prologue was pre-Christian. I prefer to ask directly what a study of the Jewish wisdom tradition can tell us about the meaning of the Prologue.

These two questions are interdependent, and it might be thought best to begin, as Bultmann did, by offering a tentative solution to the literary question. I adopt the alternative course, in the belief that there is still something fresh to be learned from the wisdom literature about the way the Prologue is to be read. First, though, I think it advisable to summarize my own methodological assumptions:

¹ 'Background', p. 19.

² Cf. R. A. Culpepper, 'Pivot', who remarks that 'recent commentators are fairly evenly divided on the question of whether the work of the Word in vv. 9–12 is *asarkos* or *ensarkos*' (p. 13). And he adds a long note summarizing the various positions.

1. Behind the Prologue there was a written text or *Vorlage*. This is commonly called a 'hymn', a term which I adopt without committing myself to any form-critical position it may suggest. This text was adapted to serve as the introduction of what we now know as the Fourth Gospel.

2. The adaptation was made by inserting vv. 6-8 and v. 15 into the text, and possibly making further additions and/or alterations as well. I make no assumptions about these; but I shall argue that v. 14 did belong to the *Vorlage*.

3. Any exegesis that depends upon a precisely accurate reconstruction of the *Vorlage* is open to suspicion. This is not because such a reconstruction would be unhelpful, but because it is virtually unattainable. Not one of the many different versions that have been proposed compels assent, and few are immune from the charge of special pleading.³ In general most of the purely stylistic arguments advanced in favour of one version or other of the hymn are too subjective to command a wide following.

4. The first place to look for the source of any particular element in the Fourth Gospel is in the Jewish Christianity where the Gospel took its rise. In this case the Jewish wisdom tradition that has long been acknowledged to have influenced, directly or indirectly, the author of the hymn, is still the best place to start.⁴

5. I do not assume that the hymn was composed before the body of the Gospel. Rather I think it likely that it was written at a time when the composition of the Gospel was well under way. But I shall not be arguing this point here.

I. THE HISTORY-OF-RELIGIONS QUESTION

We do not need to ask from what source the author of the hymn derived his ideas, for both the general theme and the specific

³ See e.g. W. Schnithals, 'Prolog'. Of his own highly speculative and disputable reconstruction he makes the astonishing assertion: 'There can be no doubt about the correctness of the restored hymn and the reconstruction' (p. 33).

⁴ The publication of the so-called Trimorphic Protocnoia in 1974 has revived speculation about possible Gnostic sources of the Prologue. Like all the other suggested Gnostic sources it is too late to have been a direct influence, and in spite of certain verbal resemblances is too far away in spirit to be regarded as anything but a thin rivulet whose origins are perhaps to be sought in the same broad stream of wisdom speculation from which the Prologue also took its rise. Cf. C. Colpe, 'Überlieferung'.

details are abundantly illustrated in the wisdom tradition.⁵ Rather we have to ask what there was in the tradition which could have stimulated his own imaginative response: what precisely did he take from it? (There is a further question that may be asked, in the wake of Martyn⁶ and Meeks,⁷ concerning the relevance of the tradition to the life of the Johannine community: this may be deferred till later.)

For our purposes the most important general feature of the tradition is the combination of two initially distinct types of wisdom, which I shall call the accessible and the remote. Bultmann saw in the Prologue a contradiction between what he called 'the Logos as an immanent cognitive power and as the bearer of revelation',⁸ adding that so far from being confined to the Prologue, this contradiction is a presupposition of all Jewish wisdom literature. I am suspicious of the notion of wisdom as an immanent force, and feel that 'tension' is a more appropriate term than 'contradiction'. But that there is a constant tension or at least a contrast between the accessible and the remote seems beyond question.

It is unnecessary here to venture into the tangled thicket surrounding the question of the distant origins of Israel's wisdom tradition. Traces of the early association of $\pi\alpha\tau\epsilon\rho$ with skills and crafts persist as late as Ben Sira, who says of the farmer as well as of the engraver, the smith, and the potter: $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\alpha\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma \acute{\epsilon}\nu \tau\omicron\upsilon \acute{\epsilon}\rho\gamma\omicron\upsilon \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon \sigma\phi\acute{\iota}\zeta\epsilon\tau\alpha$: 'each of them is skilled in his own craft' (38: 31). If one were to take 1 *Enoch* seriously even the skills of the smith and the beautician (not just sorcery and astronomy) would have to be numbered among 'the eternal secrets which were made in heaven' (9: 6); but at least in the canonical books the contrast between the available and the remote forms of wisdom is quite

⁵ As far as I am aware this debt has not actually been questioned since Rendel Harris's series of articles in the *Expositor* of 1916. This began and ended with a version of the Prologue substituting the word *Sophia* for the word *Logos*, which was backed up with an array of texts from the Jewish wisdom literature that have been cited regularly ever since. In a book of the same title published the following year, Harris expanded his thesis, though he failed to add Baruch 3 to his list of references. Beside Bultmann's 'Background', Harris's treatment seems oddly superficial.

⁶ J. I. Martyn, *History and Theology: The Gospel of John*. Martyn has promised an extended study of the Prologue based on the literary seam Käsemann claimed to have discerned after v. 13; cf. 'Source Criticism'.

⁷ W. A. Meeks, 'Man from Heaven': 'Background', 30.

⁸ 'Background', 30.

plain. Typical of available wisdom are the sensible observations of Prov. 25-9, a collection which opens by making the very point I wish to establish here: 'It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out' (Prov. 25: 2). The maxims that follow are no doubt to be seen as typical examples of the results of the king's (in the case, Solomon's) researches, the first of which, piquantly, concerns his own inscrutability.

The most outstanding account of remote wisdom comes in Job 28, a profound poem on the essential mysteriousness and inaccessibility of חכמה conceived somehow as immanent in creation. Its conclusion is surprising: 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding' (v. 28). Commentators are surely right to see this final verse as a later addition: what was utterly beyond man's reach is suddenly transformed into something not just available but commendable, not just possible but necessary. There is, however, no real attempt here to reconcile the two conceptions: the poem is left untouched, with its mystery undiminished by the rather crude counter-assertion added at the end.

This assertion is certainly the orthodox answer to the question how to set about acquiring wisdom. This may be why an alternative (and no doubt earlier) answer is omitted by the LXX translator: 'The beginning of wisdom is this: Get (קח) wisdom; and whatever you get, get understanding' (Prov. 4: 7).⁹ But in both cases wisdom/understanding is portrayed as accessible, directly available to anyone who sets about obtaining it in the right way.

In one respect Job 28, with its unexpected ending, is typical of much of the literature as it has been transmitted; for the contrast between the accessible and the remote appears quite frequently, occasionally underlined, yet usually presented in such a way as to leave the resolution open. It occurs for instance even more startlingly in a passage in Proverbs where the same pair of terms, חכמה and בין is used on the one hand to proclaim, 'Happy the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gets understanding' (3: 13),

⁹ I do not agree with W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 305, that this is 'a weaker sense' than the alternative: 'Wisdom comes first, [therefore] get wisdom.' On the contrary, it suggests to me a profound understanding of the hermeneutical circle, not too far from Horace's dictum (part of which Kant adopted as his motto), 'nimidium facti qui coepit habet: sapere aude: incipe.' McKane now thinks, he informs me, that in the second half of Prov. 4: 7 קח בין is best seen as a *beth pretili*: 'sell all your possessions to get בין '.

and on the other to assert that 'the Lord by wisdom founded the earth, by understanding he established the heavens' (3: 19).¹⁰

In the last two chapters of the same collection (Prov. 8-9), wisdom/understanding is personified in two strangely contrasting ways. First, we recognize the brash, importunate teacher, first met in Prov. 1: 29ff., who takes her stand on the heights beside the way and at the entrance of the gates (Prov. 8: 1-21), and then, without warning, as if the two figures were identical, we are confronted with the favourite of Yahweh, whom he acquired or engendered¹² at the beginning of his dominion. The LXX translator shows his awareness of the abrupt switch by inserting a transitional verse of his own at this point: $\epsilon\alpha\nu\ \delta\alpha\gamma\gamma\epsilon\lambda\omega\ \epsilon\gamma\omega\nu\ \tau\alpha\ \kappa\alpha\theta'\ \eta\mu\acute{\epsilon}\rho\alpha\nu\ \gamma\upsilon\omega\gamma\epsilon\tau\alpha, \mu\eta\gamma\eta\mu\omicron\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\ \tau\alpha\ \xi\epsilon\ \alpha\iota\omega\nu\oslash\ \alpha\pi\alpha\gamma\gamma\epsilon\lambda\omega\ \epsilon\gamma\omega\nu\ \tau\alpha\ \kappa\alpha\theta'\ \epsilon\pi\epsilon\sigma\eta\tau\alpha\ \tau\alpha\ \nu\upsilon\tau\iota\alpha$. 'If I explain everyday things to you, I will (also) remind you to reckon the things of eternity' (8: 21a). The contrast between the quotidian and the eternal is equally a contrast between the accessible and the remote. One might observe that there is an eternal or at least a timeless quality about the quotidian as well: 'there is nothing new under the sun' (Qoh. 1: 9). Wisdom literature delves into the inexhaustible fund of human experience.

Prov. 8: 22-31 is the earliest passage in the Bible to show a real affinity with the Johannine Prologue. But apart from the shared reference to 'the beginning' of Genesis, the affinity is easier to spot than to define. The poem is put in the mouth of Wisdom, a feminine presence never actually named. She begins by asserting, ambiguously, her close relationship with Yahweh, who has made her peculiarly his own. She has come into existence (begotten, not made?) before the world, witnesses its ordered making, and then, chosen by Yahweh as his regular companion (even playmate), concludes by expressing her delight in the human race. She resembles Puck, ready to 'put a girdle round about the earth', or Ariel, dancing attendance upon Prospero, and the commentators rarely do justice to her elusive gaiety. Does she actually descend to

¹⁰ Cf. G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 151 n. 4.

¹¹ The interpretation favoured by the Rabbis, 'master-workman' (foreperson?), reading קח , does not really fit the context.

¹² The LXX rendering ($\epsilon\kappa\tau\iota\gamma\epsilon\tau\alpha$), which caused such trouble to subsequent Christian commentators, may simply be wrong. Bruce Vawter has argued that 'in no single instance in the OT or in relevant cognate literature are we compelled by the evidence to ascribe to the verb קח in any of its forms the sense "create"'. *JBL* 99 (1980), 205-16.

earth, to play in God's world? Or does v. 31 refer, as McKane thinks, to 'the delightful confidences and reminiscences which Wisdom can share with Yahweh, just because she saw the world coming into existence'?¹³ It is hard to be sure. Certainly the עַל־הָאָרֶץ of v. 30 forbid us to pinpoint her activity. There is something quotidian as well as eternal about her. Her role is to illuminate the creative work of Yahweh, to tell the men to whom she speaks, subtly and indirectly, of his attitudes; she reveals a mystery, but says no more *about* it than what is known already. To borrow a phrase of Bultmann, she reveals no more than that she is the revealer.

What is missing from all early personifications of wisdom is any sense of history. Neither the quotidian nor the eternal has a *career*, which is why it is probably a mistake to speak of the personified wisdom of Proverbs 8 in terms of myth. And as long as the two kinds of wisdom, accessible and remote, remain simply contiguous, the contrast between them felt but not discussed and not resolved, there will be no history. History belongs, though in different ways, not to wisdom but to the law and the prophets. How is the remote made accessible, and what happens when it is?

To answer this question it is helpful to put the contrast in a different way. Available wisdom, while it may be taught, is essentially a matter of *experience*. Remote wisdom, if it is to be brought within man's grasp, has to be *revealed*.

In post-exilic Judah the prevailing orthodoxy, that of the deuteronomists, which was to persist into Judaism, insisted that the object of revelation was the law, the Torah. Alternative revelations, like the one reprimanded (but none the less described) in the first section of 1 *Enoch*, were unacceptable to this school, which may be why there is so little reference to them in the canonical books. A practical wisdom is of course admissible. Solomon prays for a receptive mind (עַל־לִבִּי) 'to discern between good and evil' (a tiny essay in demythologization); and his prayer is granted by the bestowal of a wise and understanding mind (לֵב־חָכָם) (1 Kings 3: 9, 12). But there is no mystery here.

The threat to orthodoxy, as one may fairly put it, was felt to come from a remote wisdom irreducible to the kind of practical $\phi\acute{\rho}\omicron\nu\gamma\omicron\iota\varsigma$ exhibited by Solomon. It is illustrated in a passage from Proverbs which opens with a verse of such obscurity that it has

¹³ Proverbs, 358.

left the commentators baffled ('hardly a glimmer of light', says McKane).¹⁴ There has clearly been some tinkering with the text here, which continues, 'I have not learned wisdom, nor have I knowledge of the Holy Ones.'¹⁵ There follows a sardonic riddle:

Who has ascended to heaven and come down?

Who has gathered the wind in his fists?

Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment?

Who has established all the ends of the earth?

What is his name, and what is his son's name?

Surely you know!

(Prov. 30: 1-4)

'Surely you know' implies 'of course you don't know', for here are mysteries beyond human ken, mysteries which exert a fascination that Deuteronomy, in what appears to be a subsequent insertion into an already late text, is anxious to dispel: 'For this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" But the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it' (Deut. 30: 11-14).

The remote and inaccessible wisdom (though not named as such) is thus swallowed up by the law, rendered harmless by proximity, a procedure which nicely coheres with the direct identification (in Deut. 4: 6, another late passage) of 'your' wisdom with the law, and clearly foreshadows Baruch and Ben Sira.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid. 644.

¹⁵ Margaret Barker, in an unpublished paper to which I am greatly indebted, challenges the widespread assumption that עַל־הָאָרֶץ is to be read as a *pluralis maiestatis*. Why should it not have a plural reference (as it must in Job 5: 23; Zech. 14: 5; Ps. 89: 6, 8)? Barker believes that there was a 'deliberate process of mystification here', and compares the textual confusion surrounding Deut. 32: 8. (Perhaps עַל־הָאָרֶץ was allowed to stand because it can have a singular reference, as in Hos. 12: 1, if the text is right). Prov. 9: 10 is more doubtful.

¹⁶ 'Keep them and do them [statutes and ordinances]; for that will be your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the peoples,' Barker sees in this passage an acknowledgement on the writer's part that wisdom is too important and traditional a category for him to exclude altogether (though no doubt he would dearly have liked to have done so). In subsuming wisdom under the law he was adopting the next best solution by harnessing this wayward and unpredictable animal to his own wagon. See also Deut. 29: 28, where 'the secret things' (סֵתֵּרֵי דָבָר) are declared

Baruch, in a profound poem (3: 9-4: 4) with an obvious indebtedness to Job 28, goes a long way towards restoring the sense of mystery banished in Deuteronomy. He is deeply aware of the elusiveness of wisdom (*φρόνησις*), used in synonymous parallelism with *σοφία*, *σύνεσις*, and *ἐπιστήμη*: 'Who has gone up to heaven, and taken her, and brought her down from the clouds? Who has gone over the sea, and found her, and will buy her for pure gold? No one knows the way to her or has given thought to her path' (3: 29-31). Only God, who knows the entire universe (*τὰ πάντα*), is said to have found her by his understanding (*τῇ συνέσει αὐτοῦ*, v. 32) and again: *ἐξέυρεν πάντα ὁδὸν ἐπιστήμης* (v. 36). Yet Israel at least had no need to set out on this search, having already been reproached for deserting 'the fountain of wisdom' (3: 12). Had she only walked in the way of God she could have dwelt in peace for ever (3: 13). Thus wisdom is at once mysterious and ready to hand. The author appears to chide Israel for failing to recognize the gift that was hers alone: for God 'gave her to Jacob his servant and to Israel whom he loved—afterward she appeared upon earth and lived among men' (3: 36f.). Then comes the explicit identification: *αὕτη ἡ βιβλος τῶν προσταγμάτων τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ὁ νόμος ὁ ὑπάρχων εἰς αἰῶνα*: 'she is the book of the commandments of God, and the law that endures for ever' (4: 1). Wisdom now has a history, but she has also invested the law with her own eternity.

At the beginning of the poem wisdom (*φρόνησις*) is identified with the *ἐντολαὶ ζωνῆς*; and this theme now reappears: all those who hold fast to her will live (4: 1), and Jacob is urged to 'walk towards the shining of the light' (4: 2).

Ben Sira opens his work with a phrase that strikingly anticipates the Prologue: 'All wisdom comes from Yahweh, and has been with him from all eternity' (1: 1).¹⁷ But in spite of his recognition that there are still unanswerable mysteries in the universe his book is full of a sense of the *availability* of wisdom. The mystery has been drained of all its challenge: man's inability to plumb the depths of wisdom no longer matters, since somehow or other wisdom, through the munificence of the creator, pervades the created be God's exclusive preserve: 'the revealed things' (*τὰ ῥητά*), which belong to Israel, consist simply of 'all the words of this law'. Also *Exra* 7: 11-26 (the letter of commission), where the law (v. 14), whatever its precise content, is clearly the same as wisdom (v. 25).

¹⁷ R. Smend is surely right to prefer the Syriac ܡܠܟܐ to the Greek at this point: *Weisheit*, 6.

universe and in some unspecified way is made available to 'all flesh' (1: 10), but particularly to those who show due reverence and respect for their (and her) creator. The author asks, in the riddling manner of earlier sages, 'the root of wisdom, to whom has it been revealed?' (1: 6), but his own answer is all too easy: 'The root of wisdom is to fear the Lord' (1: 20). Indeed the fear of the Lord is not just the beginning of wisdom (1: 14) as it used to be, but its full measure (1: 16) and its crown (1: 18). If you want wisdom you must keep the commandments, 'and the Lord will supply it to you' (1: 26). From being a spontaneous outpouring (1: 9), the gift of wisdom comes to be seen as conditional upon right behaviour. There is nothing here a deuteronomist could quarrel with: 'For the fear of the Lord is wisdom and instruction, and he delights in fidelity and meekness' (1: 27). Furthermore, the unsearchable Wisdom of the opening paragraph is now pictured as owing (or perhaps simply identified with) a store of wise sayings (*παραβολαὶ ἐπιστήμης*; 1: 25), presumably of a kind familiar to any student of the law (cf. 39: 3). As Sira remarks later, 'Hidden wisdom and unseen treasure, what advantage is there in either of them?' (20: 30).

Of the two figures of wisdom, the mysterious and the available, it is then the latter who dominates this work (cf. 4: 11-19; 6: 18-31; 14: 20-15: 8).¹⁸ The former, the companion of God, vanishes after the first few verses, not to reappear until the great hymn of ch. 24, undoubtedly the high point of the book. Even so, the central figure of this grand poem, which owes much to Proverbs 8, is only a distant relative of Yahweh's playful darling. She speaks of her search for a resting-place on earth, wondering 'in whose territory (*κληρονομία*) I might lodge' (v. 7). (Smend thinks that *αὐτὴ ἔσθαι* possibly reflects an original Hebrew *יָצַע*.) Then 'my creator assigned a place for my tent (*σκηπήν*) and said, "Make your dwelling (*κατασκήνωσον*) in Jacob"' (v. 8). The next stanza opens with a reference to the portion (*μέρος*) and inheritance (*κληρονομία*) of God,¹⁹ which is when wisdom 'took root' (v. 12); and the fifth stanza, which is parallel to the third,²⁰ establishes the identity of 'all

¹⁸ I cannot agree with von Rad, who discusses such texts as these under the general rubric 'Die Selbstoffenbarung der Schöpfung', *Weisheit*, 189-228. It is doubtful if this expression is strictly applicable even to such passages as Job 28 and Sirach 24.

¹⁹ Alluding to LXX Deut. 32: 9, where both terms occur.

²⁰ Following Smend's division of the poem into 6 stanzas, beginning respectively vv. 1, 7, 12, 16, 23, 30.

these things' (i.e. the fruits of the tree of wisdom) with 'the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law which Moses commanded us as an inheritance (*κληρονομία*) for the congregations of Jacob' (v. 23). The author is speaking in his own voice here, but though he reaffirms the unsearchability of wisdom, he is really talking about the law.²¹ For all the profundity of the thought and the beauty of the imagery it is hard to rid oneself of the impression that wisdom has been domesticated in this poem.

The Book of Wisdom, in which all the main themes of the tradition coalesce in a remarkable way, falls into two parts, I: 1-11: 1 and II: 2-19: 22, of which the second takes up and extends the midrashic section with which the first part closes (10: 1-11: 1).

In the first half of ch. 6 the author is clearly appealing to the old tradition of Proverbs 1-9 whereby Wisdom goes out of her way to make herself accessible: 'She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her. He who rises early to seek her will have no difficulty, for he will find her sitting at his gates (*πρόεδρον τῶν πυλῶν αὐτοῦ*) . . . because she goes about seeking those who are worthy of her and she graciously appears to them in their paths, and meets them in every thought' (6: 13-16).

With another conscious reference to an old tradition, the author continues by speaking of the beginning of wisdom: 'For the beginning of wisdom (*ἀρχὴ γὰρ αὐτῆς*) is the most genuine desire for instruction, and concern for instruction is love of her' (6: 17; cf. Prov. 4: 7).

But then comes the strange promise: 'I will tell you what wisdom is and how she came to be (*πὺς ἐγένετο*), and I will hide no secrets (*μυστήρια*) from you, but will trace her course from the beginning of creation (*ἀπ' ἀρχῆς γενέσεως*). Here we have to do with a very different beginning and, one might think, with a very different kind of wisdom. [The author plays upon the term *ἀρχὴ γενέσεως* a little further on to refer to human conception and birth: 'no king has had a different *ἀρχὴ γενέσεως*' (from that of the rest of mankind): 7: 5.]

Having thus announced his intention to recount the genesis of wisdom, Greek Solomon tells instead how understanding and the

spirit of wisdom were bestowed upon him personally in answer to a prayer—but his version of the prayer (cf. 1 Kings 3: 6-9) is held over until ch. 9. Throughout these chapters, in fact, supplication alternates with description. No biblical writer comes as close as this author to seeing wisdom as divine: 'she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the almighty' (7: 25). Yet we are never allowed to forget that she is in God's gift: 'give me the wisdom that sits by thy throne (*τῶν σὺν θρόνῳ πρόεδρον*)' (9: 4). Nor can we any longer distinguish the intimate of God from the teacher of men. Seated by the throne of God or by the city gates (*πρόεδρος* is used in both cases) she is equally at home. The two figures of Proverbs 8 at last merge into one: 'With thee is wisdom, who knows thy works and was present when thou didst make the world . . . Send her forth from the holy heavens . . . that she may be with me and toil, and that I may learn what is pleasing to thee' (9: 9-10).

Nevertheless Greek Solomon's most significant and original contribution to the concept of wisdom, from our point of view, lies in the succinct comment with which he concludes his prayer: 'men were taught what pleases thee, and were saved by wisdom' (9: 18). The following chapter is a series of brilliant vignettes wherein wisdom is shown to have watched over the great men of Genesis, from Adam to Joseph, and to have planned and executed the crossing of the Red Sea.

With this portrayal of wisdom as the active agent in salvation history (here if anywhere that overworked term receives a proper application), the stage is finally set for her transformation into the Johanne Logos.

There is, however, one more passage demanding consideration, one which seems to mirror the career of the Logos particularly closely: 'Wisdom went out in order to dwell among the sons of men, but did not find a dwelling; wisdom returned to her place and took her seat in the midst of the angels' (1 *Enoch* 42: 1-2).

Coming as it does bereft of any contextual clues in a part of the book (the Parables) that has been suspected of Christian interference, this passage is not easy to handle. It looks like a deliberate contradiction of Baruch and Sirach: it was not wisdom but inquiry, so the passage continues, who on leaving her chambers 'found those whom she did not seek . . . and dwell among them . . . like dew on parched ground' (42: 3). In the preceding section

²¹ Cf. 4 *Ezra* 13: 54f., which adapts a phrase from Prov. 7: 4 alluding to wisdom and understanding, and applies it to the study of the law.

Enoch has offered a view of wisdom as a revelation of mysteries *outside the law*, indeed a revelation in which wisdom herself could be virtually identified with iniquity, since in so far as they were transmitted by heavenly beings in revolt against God, these secrets were themselves the cause of human corruption: 'See then what Azazel has done, how he has taught all iniquity on the earth and revealed the eternal secrets which were made in heaven' (9: 6). The true, pure wisdom, contrary to the official teaching of orthodox writers like Ben Sira, did *not* find a home among men, and remained in heaven 'in the midst of the angels': wisdom 'does not turn away *from your throne*, nor from your presence' (84: 3).

This fact is not without significance, for it indicates that the milieu in which the Prologue took its rise cannot be identified *tout court* with the scribal school of thought represented most ably by Ben Sira but foreshadowed as early as Deuteronomy and the spurious conclusion to Job's great hymn. There were alternative (and opposing) views about wisdom held by at least some Jewish thinkers, and these are closer in certain respects to the spirit of the Prologue which, while using terminology highly reminiscent of Ben Sira, resists any suggestion that the wisdom who finally found a home on earth was to be identified with the Torah. Even if 1 *Enoch* 42 were to prove to be a late reflection upon the Enochic tradition, it is the same *kind* of summary development that we find in the Prologue, where the Logos is not just a masculine surrogate of the feminine Wisdom but a conscious rival of the Law in his claim to be the unique vehicle of revelation and salvation. The writer of the Prologue, to be sure, unlike Enoch, takes a positive view of this alternative revelation: to disclose 'the eternal secrets which were made in heaven', far from being the work of a malign demon, was the proper function of Jesus Christ. What he disclosed or rather expounded (ἐξήγγειλατο) was God himself, something which he could not have done unless he had been not just πρὸς τὸν θεόν but actually identified with God in a way left undefined.

This means that although in some respects, as Rendel Harris argued, the Prologue is the natural successor of the wisdom tradition, it stems from a part of that tradition which exhibits no tendency to domesticate Wisdom and attenuate her mystery. Moreover, if the Logos *did* find a home among men, it was not where he might naturally have been expected to settle ('his own received him not'), and his eventual tabernacling is recorded by

the writer with some amazement. How the expression of this amazement is prepared and articulated will be discussed in the second part of this chapter.

This conclusion well accords with the dissociation between Christ and Torah at the end of the Prologue.²² Whether or not v. 17 was part of the original *Vorlage*, it seems likely that this dissociation marks a polemical attitude on the writer's part (though of course the Torah continues to be seen itself a χάρις, a gift of God, and there is no hint of the kind of aggressiveness prominent in the third chapter of Galatians). If John has any real connection with *Enoch* (and how could this be shown?), he takes a stand against the pessimistic view of 1 *Enoch* 42 that it was only iniquity who found a dwelling-place on earth. Paradoxically, in spite of his opposition to deuteronomistic orthodoxy, the author of the Prologue is confident that the mysterious wisdom of the old tradition *did* become accessible to men, and that the mystery was revealed—but not encapsulated in a written law, and not remaining on earth for ever in a directly tangible form.

2. THE LITERARY QUESTION

Turning back to the literary problem, the *meaning* of the text, we find that once again, as so often, Bultmann has put his finger on the key question. At what point does the hymn begin to refer to Jesus? The striking differences of opinion among the commentators²³ reflect, I suggest, a fundamental ambiguity in the *text itself*, and I therefore propose to approach Bultmann's question by testing two hypotheses:

- (a) In the Prologue, at least as far as v. 14 we are faced with nothing more or less than a late example, almost certainly Christian, of the traditional Jewish speculation on the theme of Wisdom. The Prologue originated, in other words, as a hymn in praise of Wisdom.
- (b) The theme as well as the treatment is specifically Christian. From start to finish the Prologue is a hymn to the Incarnate

²² Whether the expression ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια is a deliberate allusion to Exod. 34: 6 is another matter, and need not be settled here. Many commentators (e.g. Brown, Lindars) simply assume that it is. They may well be right, but it is hard to be sure because τὸν is regularly translated by εἰς in the LXX.

²³ Cf. n. 2.