Reading Song of Songs as wisdom literature:

An interpretive approach integrating sexuality and spirituality

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements in respect of the Master's degree

Magister Theologiae

in the Department of Old Testament

in the Faculty of Theology

at the University of the Free State.

June 2014

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Dedication

To my fellow pilgrims travelling with me on the complicated road of life:

Thank you for guiding me, inspiring me, and encouraging me to live life with passion.

To my Beloved and my lover:

Thank you for helping me to become fully human.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AcT	*Acta Theologica*
AcTP&B	*Acta Patristica et Byzantina*
AcTSupp	*Acta Theologica Supplementum*
AJSL	*American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature*
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation*
BSac	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
BullETHS	*Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society*
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrft für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CC	*Christian Century*
CurTM	*Currents in Theology and Mission*
EvK	Evangelische Kommentare
EphMar	*Ephemerides Mariologicae*
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GTJ	*Grace Theological Journal*
HTS	*Harvard Theological Studies*
IDS	*In die Skriflig*
IJCS	*International Journal of Children's Spirituality*
Interp	*Interpretation*
JAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JfP	*Journal for Preachers*
JRAS	*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
JTSA	*Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*

ABBREVIATIONS (continued)

LBS	*The Library of Biblical Studies*
MB	*Modern Believing*
NGTT	*Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiesie Tydskrif*
PAPS	*Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*
RevExp	*Review and Expositor*
R&T	*Religion and Theology*
Semeia	*Semeia*
Sem	*Semitics*
SK	*Skrif en Kerk*
StudBib	*Studia Biblica*
T&S	*Theology & Sexuality*
V&E	*Verbum et Ecclesia*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
ZfE	*Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"The *Song* is the most obscure book of the Old Testament" (Delitzch, 1877: 1). Pope quotes the savant Saadia as saying, "you will find great differences in interpretations of the Song of Songs. In truth, they differ because Song of Songs resembles locks to which the keys have been lost" (1977: 89). The truth of these comments is clearly visible in the history of interpretation of this unique biblical book.

For centuries the Song was interpreted spiritually[1] as depicting the relationship between God and synagogue/church/soul or Mary. Ausloos refers to this line of interpretation as a *"theological-allegorical reading"* and he identifies the three main trends as "ecclesiological", "mystical", and "mariological" (2008: 32-37). The problem with these spiritual readings lies in the lack of consensus on the meaning. A hermeneutical key is constructed according to the context and ideologies of the interpreter while the literal text is ignored (Tanner, 1997: 27). Fields accurately remarks that according to the allegorical approach the Song can be interpreted to mean anything and that it can even be used in a wide variety of religions. "And here is the problem: if the Song can say anything, then it says nothing" (Fields, 1980: 231). These spiritual interpretations are dramatically counterproductive. "The erotic content of the Song which celebrates the body, sexual organs and even different sexual activities, gets diminished, or even humiliated in the light of the 'deeper' meaning of the words. Effectively, the Song's lyrics are muted" (Oosthuizen, 2011: 53).

With the onslaught of the Enlightenment the focus fell on the literal meaning of the text which seemed to be nothing more than "*profane love lyrics*" (Ausloos, 2008: 38). The focus on the literal meaning opened the door for various new interpretations like Jacobi's drama theory[2] (Murphy, 1990: 38), Wetzstein's wedding songs interpretation[3] (Murphy, 1990: 39), Meeks's

[1] In this research project I prefer the term "spiritual interpretation" for the allegorical reading that refers to the relationship between God and synagogue/church/soul. In the same way I prefer the term "sexual interpretation" for the literal reading that refers to the relationship between a woman and a man. These alternative terms better inform us on the research problem. Furthermore, Ausloos also identifies certain literal readings that refer to the sexual relationship between a woman and a man as allegorical. He refers to this literal reading as "*erotic allegoric*" where interpreters "*see human genitalia or sexual acts behind every word"* (Ausloos, 2008: 39).

[2] Jacobi, J. F. 1772. *Das durch eine leichte und ungekünstelte Erklärung von seinen Vorwürfen gerettete Hohe Lied; nebst einem Beweise, dass selbiges für die Zeiten Salomons und seiner Nachfolger sehr lehrreich und heilsam, und eines heiligen Dichters würdig gewesen:* Celle.

[3] Wetzstein, J. G. 1873. 'Die Syrische Dreshtafel', *ZfE,* no.5, pp. 270-302.

cultic rituals[4] (Murphy, 1990: 39-40), and women's liberation perspectives like that of Phyllis Trible[5] (Pope, 1977: 205).

The interpretation that has been gaining more subscribers is the focus on human love poems. In 1992 Murphy noted, "There is an almost unanimous consensus among modern scholars that the literal historical meaning of the Song has to do with secular love" (1992: 153). The fact that more scholars agree on the plain content of the Song, did not bring an end to the vexing interpretive questions. Scholarly opinion still pendulums between secular, even pornographic poems (Boer, 1998: 151-182), or erotic love within marriage (Tanner, 1997: 23-46), and even the celebration of chastity (Lotter and Steyn, 2006: 70-89). Sexual interpretations did not bridge the gap between sexuality and spirituality. It seems that interpreters still construct their own hermeneutical keys – this time to reflect their sexual ideologies. "Where spiritual interpretations muted the Song's music, sexual interpretations blasted the volume to maximum resulting in sound distortion that makes it impossible to hear the words or enjoy the music" (Oosthuizen, 2011: 88).

These polarised and mutually exclusive readings of Song of Songs are a symptom of a serious problem in society. According to Carr (2003: 5), "these opposing readings reflect a much deeper separation between sexuality and spirituality, mind and body, which runs through the heart of Western culture, particularly Western Christian Culture".

Nelson identifies two major dualisms that feed the sexual-spiritual alienation. Spiritual dualism rooted in the body-spirit dichotomy of the Hellenistic era, and sexual dualism was already present in the Old Testament subordination of women in public and private life (Nelson, 1978: 45-46). According to Morris (2001: 162), these dichotomies, which are a defining characteristic of our Western Culture, have been influencing philosophies and religions for the past three thousand years.

Our challenge is to bridge this sexual-spiritual divide. As Nelson states, "we need to move beyond the traditional confines of 'sexual ethics' into sexual theology which takes seriously the human sexual experience in our time and place as an arena for God's continuing self-disclosure at the same time that it takes seriously the implications of Christian faith for our sexual lives" (1978: 16).

An interpretive approach for reading Song of Songs that can possibly aid us in unlocking at least some of the Song's mysteries, is reading it as wisdom literature. Wisdom literature is the stepchild of the Old Testament canon and has been marginalised in academic research until 1970 (Perdue, 2007a: 1). While there has been a resurgence of interest in wisdom literature, most studies completely ignore Song of Songs[6]. This is not a strange phenomenon; the fact that

[4] Meek, T. J. 1922-23. 'Canticles and the Tammuz Parallels to the Song of Songs', *AJSL,* no. 39. pp.1-14.

[5] Trible, P. 1978. *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. Philadelphia: Fortress.

[6] Examples of prominent contemporary studies in wisdom literature that ignore Song of Songs are Perdue (2007a), Crenshaw (2010) and Bartholomew & O'Dowd (2011).

Song of Song is devoid of covenant and salvation content makes it difficult to classify, and the erotic tones make it easy to ignore as Biblical Wisdom, or easy to view as Murphy did - nothing more than "secular love" (1992: 153). Interestingly enough, scholars who do read Song of Songs as wisdom literature seem to bring more value to the table. Bergant notes that "in the wisdom tradition the experience of life is the great teacher. In the Song of Songs, fearless and undivided love is the greatest experience of life" (1997: 140). Dell also points out many interesting links between Song of Songs, wisdom motifs, and female configurations in Proverbs, and concludes that although she is hesitant to classify the Song as wisdom literature, she would like to suggest that the "link of Song of Songs with wisdom is somewhat closer than has generally been thought" (2005: 23).

Song of Songs with its obvious sexual, even erotic content in the midst of the Holy Scriptures – Scriptures that disclose a Holy God - offers us a unique opportunity to investigate sexuality from a different angle, somewhat untouched by the usual socialised rules and limitations. In the endeavour to bridge the sexual-spiritual gap, a wisdom-reading of Song of Songs could be a key that unlocks a God-conscious sexuality, as well as a deeply sensual spirituality.

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The traditional lines of interpretations of Song of Songs are at an impasse. The spiritual interpretations ignore the sexual content, and sexual interpretations struggle with the theological meaning. The question arises whether reading the Song of Songs as wisdom literature could bridge this impasse.

The problem question falls into two sections:

i) Is it justified to read Song of Songs as wisdom literature?

ii) How does reading the Song of Songs as wisdom literature contribute to the integration of sexuality and spirituality?

1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.2.1 Hypothesis

In this research project I focus on the polarity of the spiritual and sexual interpretations of Song of Songs, and explore a possible integration by reading Song of Songs as wisdom literature. In this quest I propose that the spirituality in Song of Songs manifest in the acknowledgement of God as Creator of sexuality and desire as part of a living, growing, and abundant creation. God as Creator is also the cornerstone of creation theology as found in wisdom literature.

1.2.2 Main themes

Song of Songs

Wisdom literature

Sexuality

Spirituality

Integrating sexuality and spirituality

1.2.2.1 Song of Songs

Song of Songs forms part of the holy books of both the Jewish and Christian tradition. In both canons it is classified among the *kᵉtûbîm* (writings/hagiographa). In the Hebrew Bible Song of Songs is placed after the Torah and prophetic books. Within the writings in the Hebrew Bible there is some variation to its placing, but it is usually numbered among the *mᵉgillôt* – the five scrolls (Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Qoheleth, and Esther) meant for liturgical reading at the feasts, with Song of Songs to be read at the first feast of the year - Passover. However, this is a later development (8th century C.E.) since the Talmud places it after Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, and Qoheleth and before Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra, and 1-2 Chronicles. The Christian tradition follows the Greek Bible in placing the *kᵉtûbîm* between the historical books and the prophets. In this group Song of Songs follows Psalms and the other two Solomonic books (Barbiero, 2011: 4).

When and why Song of Songs was accepted into the canon, remain obscure. Josephus (c. 100 C.E.) refers to the twenty-two "justly accredited" books of Jewish Scripture which include four books containing "hymns to God and precepts for the conduct of human life" (Josephus as cited by Murphy, 1990:6). These can reasonably be accepted as the Psalms and the three wisdom books attributed to Solomon – Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. In the Christian tradition the Bryennios list[7] of canonical books as well as the list of Melito[8] mentions the books attributed to Solomon in the order: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs (Murphy, 1990: 6-7).

Within the Hebrew Tradition the Song of Songs plays an important liturgical role during the Passover fest. Passover is the most celebrated Jewish festival celebrating the exodus of the Hebrew slaves from bondage. The feast is celebrated for seven days starting on the fourteenth of the first month (March-April) of the spring-to-spring calendar. Song of Songs is recited on the Sabbath that falls in the festival. The linking of the Song of Songs with the festival has developed gradually and is based on the themes of spring and God's divine love for his chosen

[7] Murphy (1990: 7n20) cites Audet, J. 1950. 'A Hebrew-Aramaic List of Books of the Old Testament in Greek Transcription', *JTS* N. S. 1, pp. 135-154, especially 149.

[8] The list of Melito, Bishop of Sardis, is dated late in the second century and preserved in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History,* 4.26.12-14 (Murphy, 1990: 7).

people. In the Song the passionate adventures of the young lovers are painted against the backdrop of spring. In the Passover feast the hope of new life that comes with spring, is celebrated (Gladson, 2009: 93-97). "The Song's stirring images of spring and love combine with an allegory of the love of God for Israel" (Gladson, 2009: 96).

In the Christian tradition there is no evidence in the New Testament, or in Christian writings dated before the third century, that bears evidence to the Church's exposition of the Song. The earliest extant exposition is that of Hippolytus of Rome (Murphy, 1990: 14) who identified the bride as the Church and Christ as her mystical lover (Lawson, 1957: 8). This set the trend for allegorical interpretation that reached a climax in the Middle Ages,[9] but could not sustain the development of the interpretive strategies in the post-Enlightenment period (Longman III, 2005: 759). In the Christian tradition there is no liturgical use of Song of Songs, and it is rarely preached. In the Revised Common Lectionary the same verses, namely Song of Songs 2:8-13, are read twice - only in Year A, on the Sunday between July, 3-9 and the Sunday between August, 28 and September, 3 (Gladson, 2009: 97).

For the purpose of this research project the important fact is that Song of Songs is part of the Holy Scriptures of both Jews and Christians, and therefore carries an important message for these readers. The fact that the Song's content is obviously sexual, but still part of Holy Scripture, immediately brings the domains of human sexuality and spirituality in dialogue with each other. Resorting to allegory for interpretation, however creative and precious in the interpretive tradition, may only be a subconscious strategy to avoid dealing honestly with the very human aspects of sex and sexuality in the presence of a Holy God.

1.2.2.2 Wisdom

Since Chapter Three of this research project contains a thorough investigation into canonical wisdom literature, it is only necessary to make some preliminary distinctions in order to clarify the terms:

a) Wisdom literature

According to Van Leeuwen (2005: 847) the term "wisdom literature" dates back to the nineteenth century when scholars focused on the intellectuality of Job and Ecclesiastes. The term came to designate Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes, as well as Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon in the Septuagint. Although the term is a modern classification, the designation to these specific books is partly grounded on the fact that some of them are attributed to Israel's wisest king – Solomon. Interestingly enough, Van Leeuwen also mentions Song of Songs as a book attributed to Solomon, but excludes it in his classification of canonical wisdom literature (2005: 847).

[9] According to Murphy, Christian interpreters in the later patristic era and the Middle Ages wrote more books on Song of Songs than on any other book of the Old Testament (1990: 21).

Boadt (2000: 1380) also refers to other parts of Scripture that scholars believe show similarities with the wisdom as found in Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes.[10] He includes Song of Songs in the list of secondary examples of wisdom literature, but classifies these texts as "merely part of the general intellectual culture", and excludes them when defining wisdom characteristics, concentrating only on the five "full wisdom books" Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon.

Without disqualifying the non-canonical or the so-called secondary wisdom literature, this research project will focus exclusively on the characteristics of the widely accepted canonical wisdom literature, namely Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, to build a model or frame of reference of the characteristics of wisdom literature against which Song of Songs can be measured.

b) Wisdom

Due to the complexity of the concept of wisdom as portrayed in the wisdom literature, scholars define wisdom at the hand of certain characteristics rather than with a single clear-cut definition. In this regard Crenshaw notes that "no single definition suffices because of the variety of phenomena that employ the Hebrew word *ḥokmah* and similar ideas in the Ancient Near East" (1981: 16-17). Van Leeuwen also mentions that "wisdom is difficult to define, because it is a *totality concept*. That is, the idea is as broad as reality, and constitutes a culturally articulated way of relating to the entire world" (Van Leeuwen, 2005: 848).

This totality concept includes a wide range of actions, thought, and speech (Van Leeuwen, 2005: 848), as well as desires, skills and beliefs "all of which, like the spokes of a wheel, find their hub in the order God has created into our world" (Bartholomew and O'Dowd, 2011: 24).

Human activities are wise or foolish – their wisdom is reflected inasmuch as they are in harmony with God's created order (Van Leeuwen, 2005: 848).

1.2.2.3 Sexuality

In the current research it is important to distinguish between the following terms:

a) Sex

"Sex is a biologically-based need which is oriented not only toward procreation but, indeed, toward pleasure and tension release. It aims at genital activity, culminating in orgasm" (Nelson, 1978: 17).

[10] The secondary wisdom texts as mentioned by Boadt (2000: 1380): Gen 2-3; Gen 37-46; Deut 1-4, 32; 2 Sam 9-20; 1 Kgs 3-11; Amos; Ezek 28; Canticles; Pss 1, 19, 49, 73, 111, 223, 119; Dan 1-6; Jer; and Isa 1-39.

b) Sexuality

"Sexuality is our self-understanding and way of being in the world as male and female. It includes our appropriation of attitudes and characteristics which have been culturally defined as masculine and feminine. … it includes sex and relates to biological organ systems. To be sure, sexuality is not the whole of our personhood, but it is a very basic dimension of our personhood" (Nelson, 1978: 17-18).

c) Eros

Eros is the Greek God of love who possesses life-giving powers, and is victorious over death. However, the term eros also expresses the tension between reality and possibility, and it always endeavours to reach the higher goals, never satisfied with the status quo. Eros is applicable to the sexual and non-sexual spheres of life, including intellect and art (Human, 2007: 17).

According to Carr (2003: 9), eros is often incorrectly interpreted as being synonym to sex. He points out that in Greek culture, where the word originated, it denotes a wide variety of core desires, for example: sexual, intellectual, artistic, and spiritual. "Such an eros would include the passion of lovers' desire, and also the sensual joy of a shared meal, or an abiding thirst for justice" (Carr, 2003: 9).

d) Sexuality in the Ancient Near East

Ancient myths and narratives reveal interesting aspects of ancient sexuality. Sexuality was part of both religious and profane human activities. The world of gods was reflected in the world of humans, and sexuality and eros were part of life like eating and drinking. The activities of gods were intricately interwoven with cycles of nature, death, life, fertility, beauty, and joy. In the Mesopotamian Gilgamesh epic the wild animal-human Enkidu becomes fully human after a week of sexual intercourse with the prostitute Shjamhat. In an Egyptian narrative Osiris, the god-king of the netherworld and god of life and fertility, is murdered by his brother Set. His body is cut into pieces and strewn over Egypt, his penis ending up in the Nile and eaten by a fish. His wife-sister Isis gathers all his body parts and forms a new penis from clay or wood. Osiris impregnates her and she gives birth to Horus. When the Nile yearly floods its banks, it is seen as Osiris's seed that brings life and fertility. He conquers death through a sexual act. In the Yahweh cult of Israel a female goddess is lacking, but there are sexual allusions in the depiction of the relationship between Yahweh and his chosen people[11] (Human, 2007: 18-29).

In the ancient orient, love was not necessary for sex or marriage. Marriages were entered into because of political or economic reasons. Procreation was not the only motive for sex. Men had more sexual freedom and could have intercourse with unmarried women or prostitutes.

[11] Although archaeologists discovered inscriptions of "Yahweh and his Asjerah" at *Kuntillet 'Ajrud* en *Kirbet 'el Qom* in the South of Israel, there is no proof of goddess worship as part of the official Yahwistic cult (Human, 2007: 29).

Important men usually had a female companion other than their wives. These companions were beautiful, educated ladies that knew music, politics, and philosophy. They had a financial claim on the man. Married women were excluded from the public domain and were chosen on virtuous grounds. Adultery happened when a married woman had sex with another man. In Egypt sex before marriage was acceptable, and even in Israel intercourse between a married or unmarried man with an unmarried woman posed no problems. Rape was viewed in a serious light, because it infringed the property rights of the father or husband (Human, 2007: 21-24).

1.2.2.4 Spirituality

According to Peterson the term "spirituality" is used today by various groups of people – not all religious - and in many different ways that is devoid of connection with God or God's Spirit (2005: 767). This confusion necessitates the formulating a working definition to claim this term for use in the current research project.

Waaijman (2006: 14-15) argues that spirituality is a multi-faceted phenomenon comprising complimentary and interrelated elements. In his view spirituality is a relational process in which God communicates himself. Humans utilise this communicated information in order to experience union with, and personal growth towards God. This relational process encompasses the whole human experience at different levels, and is mediated through forms such as Scripture, sacraments, the neighbour, etc.

Lombaard (2009: 99), in his search for a model for Biblical Spirituality, uses John Craghan's [12] reference to spirituality as a "response to the Word of God". This Word then refers to the oral word, "but also actions and occurrences through which God speaks" (Lombaard, 2009: 99).

For Snyman (1997: 376-377), working from an Old Testament perspective, spirituality starts with God revealing his name in Exodus 3:14-25 as the God who is always present. Right through the Old Testament God's essence is his presence. In the Old Testament spirituality means living life in the "continued presence of God" (Snyman, 1997: 378).

Smit (1989: 85) views spirituality as the intimate relationship between commitment to God and everyday life.

For the purposes of this study then, spirituality refers to the way in which a person lives all aspects of his/her life, including sex and sexuality, in a committed relationship with God, and in reaction to God's continued presence as He communicates and reveals himself in Scripture, creation, history, and experience.

1.2.2.5 Integrating sexuality and spirituality

There is an awareness of the intimate connection between sexuality and spirituality from different perspectives.

[12] Craghan, J. 1983. *Love and Thunder: A Spirituality of the Old Testament,* Collegeville: Liturgical Press.

This intimate relationship is especially visible in cases of sexual abuse. Crisp notes that "Sexual abuse profoundly affects survivors to the extent that they are unable to maintain previously held viewpoints or ways of being, including those relating to their spirituality" (2007: 301). Sexual abuse is a violation of trust and intimacy boundaries that can result in difficulty accepting the sacrament of the Eucharist, converting from one religious expression to another, or defecting completely from the religious tradition of their childhood (Crisp, 2007: 302-310).

Peterson notes the relationship between sexuality and prayer from a pastoral perspective as the capacity for intimacy (1992: 24). According to him pastoral work has to do with nurturing intimacy. There is little difference in the pastoral starting point – the physical as an analogy of the spiritual, or vice versa. In this he views all horizontal relationships, woman/man, husband/wife, parent/child, sister/brother, neighbours, acquaintances, employers/employees, friends/enemies, etc. which achieve any degree of intimacy, as aspects of sexuality. He uses prayer as a symbol of a relationship with God. "Because of the common origin of our creation and redemption, an examination of our sex life leads to an examination of our prayer life, and vice versa" (Peterson, 1992: 25).

Corresponding to the view of Peterson, Bechtel describes sexual intercourse as boundary crossing (2000: 1193). The ego builds up boundaries to define identity and to construct defence mechanisms. In sexual intercourse the boundaries are loosened and the identities and defence mechanisms are "penetrated" and "enveloped". "If people cannot loosen these barriers with one another, most probably they will not be able to loosen them in relationship with God" (Bechtel, 2000: 1193).

From a neurological perspective, research also proposes an intimate connection between the sexual and spiritual (Horn et al., 2005: 82). Similar changes that occur in the brain during spiritual exercise – like prayer – and sexual activities, point to shared connections in the human body. It is scientifically confirmed that the same part of the brain (Hypothalamus-amygdala-hippocampus complex) is responsible for the facilitation and control of sexual experiences, aggression, hunger, and thirst, as well as religious and mystical experiences (Van der Walt, 2010: 30). This could explain the medieval mystics' capacity to express spiritual experiences in sensual, erotic language, and it also challenges the traditional view of sexuality as the activity of genital sex (Horn et al., 2005: 82). Sexuality is the holistic experience of our body-selves, "the source of our capacity for relationship, for intimacy, for passion and for transcendence" (Horn et al., 2005: 81).

The history of interpretation of Song of Songs clearly indicates a struggle on the part of interpreters to integrate the blatant sexuality of the book into the realm of Judaic and Christian faith. It is the goal of this research project to bridge this gap by reading the book as part of the corpus of wisdom literature.

1.3 METHODOLOGY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The research methodology is configured in three sections:

1) In chapter two a descriptive overview of the history of interpretation brings the dualistic either/or approaches to reading Song of Songs into sharp focus further to enlighten the problem statement.

This research project does not give a detailed survey[13] of the exegetical history of Song of Songs – it rather focuses on major trends so that the reader can grasp the struggle as interpreters have to come to terms with the sexual content of this book.

As far as the spiritual and sexual interpretations are concerned, I relied on the comprehensive studies done by Rowley (1952), Pope (1977), and Murphy (1990). Since Murphy's commentary there has been no comprehensive work that kept up with new interpretation trends on Song of Songs. For information on interpretations after 1990, I worked through countless articles with a wide variety of opinions.

I focused at length on certain interpretations that were deemed significant, like that of Origen and Pope. Other times I chose to elaborate on interpretations that inform us on the sexual dualism, as well as on the body and woman animosity, like Bernard of Clairvaux and Theresa of Avila.

2) In chapter three the study again utilises a descriptive review of the characteristics of wisdom literature. The aim is to develop a model or frame of reference against which Song of Songs can be tested to determine if it is justified to read it as part of canonical wisdom literature.

To determine this frame of reference, the characteristics of wisdom literature are explored through the eyes of renowned scholars of wisdom literature namely: Whybray (1974), Perdue (1994), Murphy (2002), Crenshaw (2010), and Bartholomew and O'Dowd (2011). Only scholars who exclude the Song of Songs from their treatment of wisdom literature are selected.

Whybray indicates that Song of Songs is placed amongst the wisdom literature in the canon, because of its ascription to Solomon, but in his view this ascription does not stand in the tradition of Solomon's wisdom since there is no reference to his wisdom. Furthermore, the root

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[13] Excellent literature that gives detailed information on Song of Songs' history of interpretation :

Rowley, H.H. 1952. *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament,* London: Lutterworth Press.

Pope, M. H. 1977. *Song of Songs. The Anchor Bible,* New York: Doubleday & Co.

Murphy, R. E. 1990. *The Song of Songs,* Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

ḥkm is absent which, in his approach, clearly confirms that there is no connection between Song of Songs and the intellectual tradition (Whybray, 1974: 120). Perdue never treats Song of Songs as part of wisdom literature in his extensive writings. Although Murphy deals with Song of Songs he clearly states: "Needless to say, the Canticle is not a wisdom book; it is a collection of love poems" (2002: 106). Curiously, he later notes that Song of Songs shows the possible influence of a wisdom editor (Murphy, 2002: 106). Crenshaw, with his narrow perspective of wisdom's boundaries, excludes Song of Songs in his treatment of wisdom literature, and in Bartholomew and O'Dowd's contemporary and comprehensive work there is no treatment of Song of Songs.

Crenshaw's work is used as a convenient starting point. With the third edition of his book *Old Testament Wisdom. An Introduction* in 2010, he celebrates a lifetime of study and insight into the canonical and non-canonical wisdom literature since the first edition in 1981, and his Prolegomenon in 1977. Dell describes him as a "purist" when it comes to defining wisdom literature, and he regularly appeals to scholars to keep the boundaries narrow, including only the five true wisdom texts (2012: 213). In Crenshaw's book he deals with four markers of identifying wisdom literature, three elements forming the premise of ancient wisdom, and a broad definition. Other themes he deals with that are important for understanding wisdom literature are the sages, the Solomonic tradition, scepticism, and revelation. From the many varying insights gained from Crenshaw's work a table is created where the characteristics are clustered and labelled under the following common identifiers:

i) General characteristics

ii) Literary characteristics

iii) Characteristics of content

With this table as a conversation starter, the other scholars are brought into the discussion on each of the topics, to challenge or expand Crenshaw's views. In this discussion Whybray brings new focus on vocabulary, and Perdue on metaphors, Bartholomew and O'Dowd on poetical language, the differences between Israel and her ancient neighbours, as well as the immense difference between ancient world views and modern minds. We end chapter three with a table containing the above-mentioned common identifiers, as well as subcategories and questions that can be put to the text and interpretations of Song of Songs.

3) In chapter four the table of common identifiers and questions are used as a starting point to explore the text of Song of Songs. For these purposes I relied on the insights of the commentaries of Fox (1985), Murphy (1990), Keel (1994), Exum (2005a), Assis (2009), and Barbiero (2011). None of these scholars approaches Song of Songs specifically as wisdom literature, although Barbiero may see no problem in relating these two (2011: 4). In this section, the only scholars consulted who approach Song of Songs as wisdom literature, are Sadgrove (1978: 245-248) and Reese (1983). Dell also tentatively explores the connections between Song of Songs and wisdom (2005: 8-26).

1.4 VALUE OF THE RESEARCH

This research delivers valuable insights into the following areas:

a) Wisdom literature

The list of characteristics compiled in chapter three provides a valuable frame of reference for better understanding wisdom literature. It is a coherent representation of the insights of various wisdom scholars.

b) Interpretation of Song of Songs

The research emphasises the problems configured by interpreters' dualistic thinking. Being conscious of his/her own perspective on sexuality may help the interpreter to gain fresh insights from a better informed exegetical adventure with Song of Songs.

The major contribution of this research project is the fact that it may be entirely justified to read Song of Songs as part of the body of canonical wisdom literature. Accepting wisdom literature as a frame of reference with which to approach Song of Songs, may provide a centre of focus to the widely divergent trends, and also create an opportunity for many more insights from the perspective of wisdom.

c) The integration of sexuality and spirituality

Reading Song of Songs as wisdom literature is an approach that integrates sexuality and spirituality. This integrated reading creates the opportunity for believers to bring restoration to a world that is still besieged with the monumental division between the sacred and profane.

Teaching Song of Songs to faith communities from this perspective can relieve human's guilt over "lawless" desires, and help them to rediscover the power and beauty of their sexuality. Both men and women can celebrate their *Imago Dei* as the capacity for intimacy and erotic connections. Song of Songs can be used to teach young people about the agony and ecstasy of sexual relationships without condemnation, as well as the importance of commitment without resorting to "rules".

1.5 OUTLINE OF THIS RESEARCH

Chapter 2	Loving God or making love?	Description of the dualistic either/or approach to interpreting Song of Songs resulting in divergent spiritual and sexual interpretations.
Chapter 3	The way of wisdom	Exploring the characteristics of wisdom literature with the goal of building a model that can be used to test the text and interpretations of Song of Songs.
Chapter 4	The way of a man with a maiden	Exploring Song of Songs at the hand of the model built in chapter three. The goal is to determine if it is justified to read Song of Songs as wisdom literature.
Chapter 5	Loving God by making love	Answering the problem questions and discussing the implications of this research project.

CHAPTER TWO

LOVING GOD OR MAKING LOVE?

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Dualistic mind-body and reason-emotion perspectives are deeply rooted in the interpretations of biblical texts. (Carr, 2003: 5-8). These dualistic glasses through which we read and interpret the Song of Songs are clearly reflected in this enigmatic book's history of interpretation as observed by McClanahan:

> *As part of the 'Good Book' we are forced to see it [Song of Songs] as holy. Yet Song of Songs is so obviously 'unholy' within the sacred/profane dichotomy, which we unconsciously use to measure these things (spiritual-disembodied love yes/carnal-embodied love no) that we haven't the faintest idea of how to preach it, let alone figure out why we should even try. In a sacred/profane dichotomy Song of Songs seems like an 'unholy' book sitting in the middle of Scripture like a 'sexy evening dress at an afternoon tea party' and also as a 'holy riddle disguised as a pair of lace panties' (McClanahan[14] as cited by Carr 2003:147).*

For centuries the Song of Songs was understood spiritually by both the Jewish and Christian communities. The Jewish community interpreted it as the love between God and his chosen people, Israel (Murphy, 1992: 154). In the Christian communities it was understood as the love between Christ and the church, or the soul. Only from the seventeenth century, at the dawn of the historical-critical exegetical movement, has the plain meaning of human sexual love been acknowledged, but unfortunately still plagued by dualistic views.

Murphy notes in 1992 that "there is an almost unanimous consensus among modern scholars that the literal historical meaning of the Song has to do with *secular*[15] love" (1992: 153). Even in positive contemporary perspectives on Song of Songs looms this dualistic secular/sacred tone. Copenhaver focuses on the positive aspects of romance and desire in Song of Songs and comments, "The presence of the Song of Solomon in the Bible reminds us that we can have God, fidelity, all the higher expressions of love, and still have our romance too" (2011: 37). Like Murphy who sees human love as "secular", Copenhaver sees fidelity to God as a higher expression of love than romance.

Although there has been a shift to acknowledge the plain meaning of the Song, interpreters clearly still struggle with the theological meaning. In this chapter an overview of the history of interpretation of Song of Songs will demonstrate the deep historical rift between spiritual and sexual interpretations.

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[14] Linda McClanahan, a student of Carr in an unpublished seminar paper "Song of Songs 2:8-14".

[15] Added italics to show the dualistic perspective of sexual/human love as "secular".

2.2 THE DUALISTIC SACRED/SECULAR ROOTS OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Nelson distinguishes between spiritual dualism and sexual dualism (1978: 54).

Spiritual dualism is rooted in Late Greek philosophy and culture. This is especially clear in the writings of Plato. This dualism was characterised by a body pessimism that focused on rejecting the body in order to prevent infection by the nature of the body. By ignoring the body and its needs, humans could purify themselves until God gave them deliverance (Nelson, 1978: 54).

Dualisms were present both in the community of Israel and in the early Christian church. These dualisms, embedded in the mind-body and reason-emotion dichotomy, found systematic expression in the subordination of women in interpersonal relations, as well as in communal and religious bodies. Men assumed the superior role on the basis of reason, and took up the leadership in civil and religious communities. Women were associated with emotions, body, and sensuality that were thought to render them unclean and unstable (Nelson, 1978: 54-64).

Dualistic perspectives had a clear influence on the New Testament. Sex was depicted as dangerous and anti-spiritual. In the Kingdom of God, as proclaimed by the Gospel of Mark, people are not married or given in marriage[16]. The apostle Paul, anticipating the speedy return of Jesus, urged unmarried believers to stay unmarried and taught that married life is for those who have no self-control when it comes to sex[17].

Paul's hostility towards the body/flesh and sex is especially clear in Gal 5:16-25:

> *So I say, live by the spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. … The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; … Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*

In the Gospel of Thomas the wedding between a husband and wife was made the occasion for renunciation of human sexuality in favour of a mystical marriage with the divine. Jesus is said to appear to the newlyweds declaring, "If you abandon this filthy intercourse you become holy temples, pure and free from afflictions and pains both manifest and hidden, and you will not be girt about with cares for life and for children, the end of which is destruction". The bewildered couple refrained form sexual intimacy and the bride later declared, "I have set at naught this man and this marriage which passes away before my eyes, because I am bound in another marriage. I have no intercourse with a short-lived husband... because I am yoked with the true man" (The Acts of Thomas 12-14 as quoted by Pope, 1977:115). The auther of the Acts of

[16] "When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven" (Mark 12:25).

[17] "Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Cor 7:8-9).

Thomas also urged another wife to "forsake horrid intercourse, because it leads to eternal damnations" (Pope, 1977: 115)

Early Christian leaders built on this dichotomy. Gregory Nazianzus used the Garden of Eden narrative to blame Eve for seducing Adam by means of pleasure. Disruptive sexual desire, according to Augustine, was God's penalty for Adam and Eve's disobedience. Sex was seen as a necessary evil for procreation and should not be enjoyed. Celibacy was encouraged, and priests and persons in authority were to refrain from sex to be spiritually superior. Even in marriage the early Christian writers banned sex in certain church seasons and on fasting days (Carr, 2003: 5-8).

Protestant reformers introduced a more positive perspective on sex. Martin Luther reasoned that "sex is medicine for the soul, as important to life as eating and drinking" (Luther as cited by Carr, 2003:7). Unfortunately this endorsement did not explore any spiritual meaning of sexuality – it was only endorsed as an antidote for sex outside marriage. Celibacy was still believed to be superior. From this point onwards family was reinforced as the protective boundaries for sexual relations. Men were still seen as "sexual animals" who had to "tame their lawless desires" while women were now depicted as "naturally passionless" (Carr, 2003: 7-8).

According to Carr (2003: 7-8) the sexual revolution of the 1960's did not bridge this sexual/spiritual divide, but rather deepened the rift. Sex became a commodity that could be freely given between consenting adults, without any thoughts of love, marriage, or God. Industrial capitalism also utilised sex as a means of selling products. Moreover, the Protestant and Roman Catholic Church's current battle against homosexuality and non-marital sex actively broadened the perceived irreconcilable dualism between spirituality and sex. This dualism resulted in a profound alienation between sexuality and spirituality and it is clear that "both are harmed" (Carr, 2003: 7-8).

This dualism between sexuality and spirituality also influences our view of God. McFague, in her search for new environmentally friendly models to define the relationship between God and the world, experiments with the metaphor of God as lover and the world as the beloved. According to her, the Christian tradition sees God as love – unreserved. However, they find it hard to relate to God as lover. God's love is perceived as completely giving, with no regard to any value in the object of his love, neither is there any anticipation of a response, "for the slightest suggestion of passion in God's love is thought to contaminate it. Not only should God's love contain no need, it should also contain no desire. It should, in other words, be totally gratuitous, disinterested, and passionless" (McFague, 1987: 126).

Blevins (2007: 289) postulates in this regard that talking about eros and God is dangerous, because our perspective on eros is severely restricted and dogmatized, and it tends to break down into thinking about sex. Eros is seen as messy, ambiguous, and corruptible. The dialogue is also hindered by theological language that lacks the capacity to speak about the erotic in our lives, due to the unbalanced focus on God's flawless, uncluttered and sufficient agape love.

Important insights are offered when Lorde (1994: 75-76) defines the erotic as "a resource within each of us", "a well of replenishing and provocative force", "a life-force", "a creative energy", "a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self, and the chaos of our strongest feelings", and also as a measure of "how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing". As such it is the opposite of pornography that rejects true feeling and focuses on sensation. Lorde then mentions how this eros has been distorted in the life of women (1994: 75-76). Women have come to distrust this erotic power, and "have been taught to suspect this resource, vilified, abused, and devalued" as a sign of "female inferiority" (Lorde, 1994: 75).

2.3 SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATIONS

2.3.1 The basis for spiritual interpretations

Allegorical readings are the basis for spiritual interpretations. Allegory refers to a method of interpreting a text that assumes that there is a deeper veiled meaning. The literal meaning is ignored. The hidden meaning is deciphered by a particular hermeneutical key constructed by the interpreter. Origen taught that just as the body comprises flesh, soul, and spirit, so Scripture comprises a literal, moral, and spiritual sense. Allegory was a method to discover the moral and spiritual senses based on clues found in the literal sense. For example, Origen found Jesus' behaviour unacceptable in the episode where Jesus cleansed the temple, and by applying allegory he interprets it as the purification of the soul from evil desires and thoughts (Bray, 2005: 34-35).

Allegory as a method of interpretation began in the Hellenistic era, and was used by philosophers like Plato and Pythagoras (Pope, 1977: 112). The Song was allegorised the same way Homer and Hesiod spiritualised the immoral Greek gods as role models:

> *Thus from the early day of the Church, Solomon's salacious Song, which at first blush tended to appeal to the pernicious pruriency of men, women and children, had to be interpreted in a way that would eliminate the evil impulse, and transform and spiritualize carnal desire into praise of virginity and celibacy and sexless passion of the human soul and/or the Church for God, and God's response in kind* (Pope, 1977: 114).

The view that allegory was exclusively used to "unsex the Sublime Song" is forcefully opposed by Murphy (1990: 16). He argues that allegorical interpretation is much more than "an exercise in pathological rejections of human sexuality" (Murphy, 1990: 16). To reduce the allegorical interpretation to "a sort of exegetical alchemy for transmutation or spiritualization of the Song's ostensibly objectionable sexual themes" is "one-dimensional" and a "preoccupation with eroticism" that is "projected onto the ancient church" (Murphy, 1990: 16). Murphy postulates that allegory was utilised for a functional purpose: it provided a means to build a Christian world view and at the same time it provides a link to integrate the Old and New Testament. This is evident in Hippolytus's focus on soteriology in his reading of Canticles (Murphy, 1990: 16).

Murphy's argument is convincing. The rich history of interpretation of Song of Songs, including contemporary readings, clearly demonstrates how interpreters are bound by their own circumstances and ideologies. However, it is also clear that the early context of interpreters was exceptionally hostile towards sex, the body, and women. Whatever the motivation for applying the allegorical interpretation to the Song, even Murphy acknowledges that it considerably strengthened the beliefs of ascetics (1990: 16).

2.3.2 Jewish spiritual interpretations

Early traces of alleged allegorical interpretation of Canticles in Jesus Ben Sira, the LXX and in 4 Ezra, provoke different perspectives from exegetes.[18] In Jesus Ben Sira's reference to Solomon, the phrase "enigmatic parables" was thought to characterise the Song of Songs as allegory (Pope, 1977: 91).[19] However, Pope sees "enigmatic parables" as an echo of I Kings 10:23-24.[20] Fields also mentions that since songs were referred to separately, there is no evidence that Ben Sira is referring to inherent allegories in Song of Songs (1980: 224).

The LXX seems to reflect the allegorical view of the Jewish translators in Cant 4:8, where the phrase "from the top of Armana" in the Hebrew is rendered "from the beginning of faith" in the Greek (Pope, 1977: 90). However, Pope (1977: 90), Fields (1980: 223), as well as Murphy (1990: 10) note that translators of LXX, in quite a few instances, confused nouns for proper nouns and vice versa. Keel adds that the translator of the LXX produced a version as literal as possible, and in some cases even more bluntly erotic than the original Hebrew (1994: 5-6).

With reference to 4 Ezra, Pope is of the opinion that the use of the term "lily", as a referent for Israel, reflects an early trace of allegorical interpretation (1977: 90).[21] However, Murphy argues

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[18] According to Fields (1980: 223-226), Ben Sira is dated at about the end of the fourth to the first half of the third century B.C.; the LXX is dated between the middle of the third century and not later than 170 B.C.; and 4 Ezra dates from about the middle of the second century B.C.

[19] "How wise you were in your youth,
Like a flood filled with understanding.
Your mind covered the earth,
And you filled it with enigmatic parables.
Your fame reached to distant isles,
And you were beloved for your peace.
Countries admired you for songs,
Proverbs, parables, and interpretations" (Sir 47:14-17).

[20] "King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart" (1 Kgs 10:23-24).

[21] "And I said: O Lord my Lord, out of all the woods of the earth and all the trees thereof thou hast chosen thee one vine; out of all the lands of the world thou hast chosen thee one planting ground; out of all the flowers of the world thou hast chosen thee one lily; out of all the depths of the sea thou hast sanctified one river; out of all the cities that have been built thou hast sanctified Zion unto thyself" (4 Ezra 5:23-26a).

that these metaphorical references may reflect the language of Song of Songs, but it is not enough proof "to establish a first-century exegetical tradition among the Jews …." (1992: 13-14).

According to Pope (1977: 92), the period between the destruction of the Temple (70 A.D.) and the revolt of Bar Kokhba (132 A.D.) saw the leading development of Jewish allegorical interpretation of Canticles as the relationship between Shekinah, the Divine Presence of God, and Israel.[22] Rabbi Aqiba was a enthusiastic spokesman for the sanctity of the Song, as reflected in his famous words in the Mishnah:

> *God forbid that any man in Israel ever disputed concerning the Song of Songs, saying that it does not make the hands unclean, for the whole world is not worth the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel, for all the scriptures [or, all the Writings] are holy, but the Song of Songs is the holiest of the holy* (Barton, 2005: 3).[23]

The Talmud,[24] the Targum,[25] and the Midrashim,[26] embody the classical Jewish interpretation of the Song in the first few centuries of the Common Era (Baildam, 1999: 143). By the time the Talmud had been completed, the allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs was already firmly established. This is evident in Rabbi Aqiba's famous quote in the Mishnah (Yadaim 3:5) about the Song's ability to defile the hands (Fields, 1980: 227). Rowley (1952: 191) also refers to the Mishnah's comment to Cant 3:11, where the phrase "the day of his wedding" was interpreted as the giving of the Law, and "the day his heart rejoiced" was associated with building of the temple.[27]

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[22] The revolt of Bar Kokhba (A.D. 132-136) was the third major rebellion by the Jews against the Roman Empire. The commander, Simeon Bar Kokhba, was acclaimed the Messiah who could restore Israel. The revolt was eventually crushed by the Roman army (Mindel, N. No date. 'Don Isaac Abravanel - "The Abarbanel" (1437-1508)', http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/111855/jewish/Isaac-Abravanel.htm. Date of access: 6 June 2014).

[23] Rabbi Aqiba, alias Akiva ben Yosef (50-135 CE), was a founder of rabbinic Judaism and one of the main contributors to the Mishnah (Katz, L. No date. 'Akiba Ben Joseph (Rabbi Akiva)', http://judaism.about.com/od /jewishbiographies/a/akiva.htm. Date of access: 6 June 2014).

[24] The Talmud consists of two parts: the Mishna is the text and the Gemara is commentary on the text in the form of public lectures. This work is dated at the 5th-6th centuries A.D. (Fields, 1980: 226).

[25] The word 'Targum' is Aramaic and means 'translation'. It is used to refer to the Aramaic versions of biblical books that were translated early in the Christian era (Baildam, 1999: 143).

[26] The Midrash is a biblical exposition that originated in the Talmudic and Mishnaic periods. It consists of the *Halakah* and *Haggada*. *Halakah* deals with law, and *Haggada* is devotional in character and focuses on the spiritual expression that transcends the first impression of text meaning (Fields, 1980: 228).

[27] "Come out, you daughters of Zion, and look at King Solomon wearing the crown, the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, the day his heart rejoiced" (Cant 3:11).

In the Targum of the Song of Songs, the allegory is worked out in detail. Each verse is methodically applied to Israel's history, beginning with the Exodus from Egypt through to the different biblical periods, and finally looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, and the rebuilding of the temple (Schneekloth, 1977: 371). For example, the "sachet of myrrh" which rests between the beloved's "breasts" in Cant 1:13,[28] refers to the anger and forgiveness of God after Israel has sinned:

> *At that time, the Lord said to Moses: Go down, for your people have corrupted themselves. Leave me alone and I will destroy them. Then Moses pleaded for compassion from the Lord. And the Lord remembered for them the binding of Isaac, whom his father bound on Mount Moriah, on the altar. And the Lord turned from his anger, and caused his Shekinah to dwell among them as* before (Schneekloth, 1977: 371).[29]

In the same line of interpretation the refrain, "Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires" (Cant 2:7), is a warning not to enter the Promised Land before the time is right:

> *Moses opened his mouth, and thus said: I adjure you, assembly of Israel, by the Lord of Hosts and by the strength of the land of Israel, not to plan to go up the land of Canaan until it is the will of the Lord, and [until] all that generation, the men of war, completely perish from the camp; …. But wait out the period of forty years, and after that your children will go up and take possession of the land* (Schneekloth, 1977: 46).

The Midrash approaches the interpretation of Song of Songs decisively different from the approach to reading the Torah. The principle for interpreting the Torah is that no verse may be separated from its plain meaning. The Song, however, may *not* be read according to the plain meaning (Fields, 1980: 229). This sexually antagonistic approach of the Midrash to understanding the Song is reflected in Sanhedrin 101a:

> *Those who recite a verse of שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים as they would a common song, or who read its verses in inappropriate circumstances, bring evil to the world, because the Torah wraps itself in sackcloth, and standing before the Holy One, blessed be He, complains: 'Master of the World, Your children have made me a harp on which mockers play ….' (Fields, 1980: 229).*

The Midrash interprets Cant 1:2 "…your love is more delightful than wine", as the words of the Torah that are better than wine. Just as wine makes the heart of a person rejoice, so does the Torah. Just like older wine gets better, so does the words of the Torah - the longer they are rooted in a person, the more effective they become (Fields, 1980: 229). By the eighth century the spiritual interpretation of Canticles was so decisively established that it was linked with the Passover festival (Brenner, 1989: 20).

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[28] "My lover is to me a sachet of myrrh resting between my breasts" (Cant 1:13).

[29] Translations of the Targum used in this research are part of Schneekloth's study (The Targum of The Song of Songs: A Study in Rabbinic Biblical Interpretation, 1977).

There is a gap in information on Jewish exegesis of the Song till the time of Saadia (892-942 C.E.). As in the Targum, he also used allegory to apply the verses of Canticles to the history of Israel, but the resemblance ends there. The Targum starts with the Exodus (Schneekloth, 1977: 33-34), and Saadia's commentary starts with Israel's servitude in Egypt (Pope, 1977: 102).

According to Rashi (1040-1105), Solomon produced the Song through divine inspiration, reflecting that Israel would suffer exile and would lament their former glory and long for the former love God had shown them among all the other nations. Interestingly, Rashi recognises that the Song was written in "the language of a woman" (Pope, 1977: 102). Rashi's grandson, Rashbam (1085-1158), followed similar lines of allegorical interpretation, seeing Israel as a "virgin sighing and mourning for her love" (Pope, 1977: 103). These interpretations were highly valued, bringing hope to the disheartened Jewish communities in France and Germany.

Ibn Ezra (1089-1164), clarified his threefold approach in the beginning of his commentary:

> *The first time I will disclose every hidden word. The second time I will declare it explicitly in accordance with its simplicity. In the third time it will be interpreted along the lines of the Midrash* (Pope, 1977: 103).

Ibn Ezra was aware that Canticles was a love song, but he was not brave enough to proclaim his view, afraid of being accused of heresy. In the final phase of his interpretation he fell back on the allegorical lines of the synagogue (Pope, 1977: 103-104; Baildam 1999: 145).

Early in the thirteenth century, there was a remarkable development away from historical allegory. Moses ben Maimon, also known as Maimonides (1135-1204), wrote an influential philosophical treatise which portrays Solomon's poetry as the yearning of the soul/passive intellect to unite with God, who manifested in the active intellect to govern the created order (Murphy, 1990: 32). Following this dualistic thinking that equates God with reason and intellect, Joseph Ibn Caspi (1279-1340) composed a brief commentary on Canticles, reading it as the union between the active intellect and the receptive intellect (Pope, 1977: 105). This philosophical allegorical approach was elaborated on by Gersonides (1288-1344) and Moses Ibn Tibbon (died 1283). The latter also intensely disagreed that the Song was about human love (Baildam, 1999: 145; Murphy, 1990: 32).

Rabbi Immanuel ben Solomon (1261-1328), Jewish leader in Rome, applied this approach in greater detail (Pope, 1977: 105-108). He referred to historical interpretations as short-sighted and a waste of time. According to him, only sages that desire wisdom and despise temporal things, can bring to light the actual meaning of the Song. The female lover is the corporeal intellect that desires unification with the active intellect, and desires to be like the active intellect as much as possible – that is the ultimate goal. Immanuel used the Garden of Eden theme as a bridge to a philosophical search for wisdom. Cant 1:2-2:17 represents, for example, man before he sinned and while he still searched for wisdom. "… I delight to sit in his shade and his fruit is sweet to my taste" (Cant 2:3) refers to the woman's longing for wisdom and training. Immanuel applied this entire unit to the mind of man while young with the powers of the body still in control. The second section (Cant 3:1-5:1), according to Immanuel, mirrors a mind which

has developed its potential to reality – like a hand that took the fruit from the tree of life, ate and lived forever. This is a man with an honorable wife who is trustworthy. The third section (Cant 5:2 – 8:14), represents a man who has a wicked wife who entices him to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. In this section, true to the hostile view of women, it is the woman who pursues pleasure and sensual lust. Man can only eat the fruit through her (Pope, 1977: 105-108).

From the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries, the historical and philosophical allegorical approaches were applied and elaborated on in new commentaries (Pope, 1977: 110). The only fresh development was in the late sixteenth century, offered by Don Isaac Abravanel (1437-1508). In the tradition of Solomon's wisdom, he saw the historical Solomon and Proverbs' Lady Wisdom as the main figures of Canticles (Pope, 1977: 110). This line of interpretation was further developed by researchers, like Leon Hebraeus (1465-1523), and in recent years also by . Kuhn. Kuhn identifies the Bride with Wisdom, and the bridegroom as a seeker after wisdom (Rowley, 1952: 199).

In 1992 Stadelmann used the historical allegorical approach to interpret the Song. In his interpretation Solomon represents the Davidic monarchy, and the Song calls for the restoration of this monarchy in the Persian period.[30] Like other allegorical interpretations, it is uncertain how he arrived at this key (Biddle, 2008: 489).

2.3.3 Christian spiritual interpretations

Pope (1977: 113-114) contextualises the Christian allegorising of the Song along the same lines as the extremely dualistic sacred/profane Hellenistic-Roman cults that associated holiness with sexual renunciation. In the earliest existent commentary by Hippolytus of Rome, the bride was identified as the Church and her mystical union with Christ reflected a saving function (Murphy, 1990: 14). In this interpretation we find the first manifestation of a Christian allegorical approach that can be broadly defined as salvation-historical. It is interesting to note how Hippolytus used allegory as an apologetic mechanism to focus on soteriology, and to effect a synthesis between the Old Testament and the New Testament (Murphy, 1990: 14-16).

The benchmark exegetical effort on Song of Songs in the early Church is Origen's commentary.[31] Origen (185-254) used both allegory and typology to apply the text far beyond its literal meaning (Young, 1990: 649).

The basis of his work was a literal analysis of the text. Origen acknowledged the plain meaning when he classified the Song as an *epithalamium* – a prototype of pagan wedding songs (Keel, 1994: 8), which Solomon wrote in the form of a drama (Murphy, 1990: 17-18). Origen found the literal understanding offensive, calling it "mere superficial babble, unworthy of God" (Origen as cited by Lawson, 1957: 268; 270). According to Origen, Sacred Scripture has a visible element –

[30] Stadelmann, L.I.J. 1992. *Love and Politics: A New Commentary on the Song of Songs,* New York: Paulist Press.

[31] Origen wrote a ten volume commentary during 240-245 C.E. Unfortunately only portions of his work (up to Cant 2:15) were preserved in a Latin translation (Murphy, 1990: 18).

the letter (body) – as well as an invisible element – the hidden meaning (soul) (Lawson, 1957: 9). This approach is based on a cosmological-theological perspective. The image of the Logos permeates both creation and Scripture, and it cannot be read from the surface. The image of the Logos "must be discovered by an act of knowledge", by "penetrating" into the hidden nature of creation and Scripture (Torjesen, 1986: 109). For Origen, the goal of reading and interpreting the Scriptures is "an ever deeper encounter and union with the Logos, in whom is found ultimate meaning" (Decock, 2010: 16). This deeper encounter is the journey of the soul towards union with God. Interestingly, Origen placed the Song against the context of the other wisdom books ascribed to Solomon. The three books of Solomon – Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs – symbolise the three stages of the soul's journey. The first stage, as taught in Proverbs, is moral correction. The second stage, as represented in Ecclesiastes, is genuine knowledge of visible things, continuation of the moral correctional process, and renunciation of the world. The third stage, Song of Songs, is focused on perfect knowledge and perfected union with God (Torjesen, 1986: 72-73). Reading the Song in the context of the wisdom corpus gave Origen the mandate for reading it as an "advanced course in spirituality" (Murphy, 1990: 19).

Origen's exegetical process followed a set pattern of quoting the verse, reconstructing the drama, reinterpreting the drama in the ecclesiastical context, directly after that reinterpretation of the drama in the context of the soul's journey, and finally drawing the reader into the text by an application to life (Torjesen, 1986: 54-56). According to Murphy, this commentary is "an intellectual achievement of monumental proportions, a grand synthesis of exegetical reasoning, philosophical reflection, and theological vision" (1990: 21). In spite of this praise for a work well done, it is important to note the depth of Origen's dualistic thinking and hostility towards the body. According to Pope, Origen took Jesus' saying about the removal of offending bodily members so seriously that he castrated himself. In the same manner he tried to eliminate the literal sense of the Song (1977: 115). Matter (1990: 23) cites Peter Brown[32] who argues that this action was driven more by a desire to shift sexual boundaries than hatred of the body. This, however, is doubtful. Origen advised anyone "who is not yet rid of the vexations of flesh and blood and has not ceased to feel the passion of his bodily nature, to refrain completely from reading this little book" because it may seem that this Divine Scripture is "thus urging and egging him on to fleshly lust!" (Lawson, 1957: 22-23).

Origen's exposition of the Song by means of historical allegory (Christ/Church) and mystical allegory (Christ/soul) had a limiting impact. Subsequent medieval interpretations yielded only slight deviations on Origen's themes (Murphy, 1990: 21).

In the fifth century, Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus, was extremely distraught by the distrust with regard to the traditional allegorical interpretation of Christ as the bridegroom and the Church as the bride. He fervently criticised the other "false and mischievous theories" and "fables unworthy of crazy old women" (Pope, 1977: 120).

[32] Brown, P. 1988. *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity,* New York: Columbia University Press.

Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669) explored a variation on the Christ/Church theme. He interpreted the Song as the history of the Church with an anti-papal emphasis (Rowley, 1952: 200). He correlates the division of the book with the periods of history, and with the seven trumpets and seals of the Apocalypse of John, all of which will climax in the future triumph of Protestantism (Tanner, 1997: 27).

There was extensive development in the mystical allegory with reference to the union between the soul and Christ. According to Parente as cited by Pope (1977: 183):

> *… this supreme mystical union … is like marriage, it is the fusion of two lives in one… the ardent love of God … confers upon the soul a certain liberty of expression, a freedom in using a love-language which reminds one of the Canticle of Canticles…. Man's spirit in an animal body is capable, with the help of divine grace, of emancipating itself from sensual love and affection to such an extent that it can love God with a purity and ardour that resembles the love of the heavenly spirits.*[33]

In a fascinating development within the monastic movement, mystics utilised sensual and even erotic love-language to describe the soul's interaction with Christ. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) and Theresa of Avila (1515-1582) became well-known for the passionate way in which they experienced union with Christ.

Bernard of Clairvaux preached 86 sermons on the Song during 18 years of ministry, but never progressed further than the second chapter (Landman, 2005: 235). He did not give mindful attention to method or to the literal text, but only desired to encourage the emotions of those who sought spiritual bonding with God (Murphy, 1990: 25-26). Lloyd Allen points out that the difference of interpretation between Origen and Clairvaux is the aspect of passion:

> *Whereas Origen… had felt a necessity to divorce the Song from its sensuality and put in its place an allegory of passionless, mystical, inner gnosis, Bernard touched the passion – 'I ask, I crave, I implore; let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth" – while attempting to lift it beyond itself to its spiritual source* (Loyd Allen, 2008: 409).

Bernard utilised three "partners" – his personal experience of God's love, the text of Solomon's Song, and an appeal to the experience of his readers. These three partners "weave in and out of these sermons, creating a dance meant to inspire desire *for* God more than intellectual understanding *of* God" (Loyd Allen, 2008: 408). Landman claims that Bernard depicted the body as the site of experiencing relationships with God, each other and with nature (Landman, 2005: 241). According to Oosthuizen (2011: 48) this use of body language is probably more evidence of a medieval mystic's language struggle to separate body and soul, than it is a conscious effort of Clairvaux to deconstruct binaries like body/soul and spiritual/physical.

Bernard was a child of his times, extremely antagonistic towards the body (Pope, 1977: 123-124). A childhood incident where he experienced an erection when he exchanged glances with a girl traumatised him to such an extent that he decided to become a monk. This explains his

[33] Parente, P. P. 1944. 'The Canticle of Canticles in Mystical Theology', *CBQ 6,* pp. 142-158.

contempt for flesh, especially female flesh, as well as his zeal for asceticism. In his career he passionately persecuted God's enemies - the heretics and Muslims - seeing them as the "little foxes that ruin the vineyards" (Cant 2:15). This even earned him a rebuke from the Venerable Peter: "You perform all the difficult religious duties; you fast, you watch, you suffer; but you will not endure the easy ones – you do not love" (Pope, 1977: 123).

Theresa of Avila focused forcefully on the soul's union with Christ. She refers to "Prayer of Union" that takes place in the seventh and most intimate inner room of the soul, where Christ consummates his marriage to the soul (Viviers, 2002: 1542). She describes in sensual terms what happens when she is in this spiritual trance of intimate prayer (Peers cited by Viviers):

> *He draws her so closely to Him that she is like one who swoons of pleasure and joy and seems suspended in those Divine arms and drawn near to that sacred side and those Divine breasts* (Viviers, 2002: 1543).[34]

St. Theresa was intensely hostile towards the body. The body was a source of disease and sin. Sex was one of the most offensive sins. The body must be controlled and mastered, because it was an obstacle to sanctification (Viviers, 2002: 1545). Theresa thoroughly internalised the view of woman as inferior and sometimes referred to herself in belittling language: "… the very thought that I am a woman is enough to make my wings droop…" (Peers as cited by Viviers, 2002:1541).

Theresa recounts that she lived in fear for many years, but that she found solace in the words from Canticles. She was also distraught when she once heard a sermon on the Song about the caresses of the spouse with God, but parishioners joked and laughed about it. "I see clearly that it is owing to our having too little practice in the love of God, which makes us think a soul cannot speak with God in such expressions" (Pope, 1977: 187).

The Mariology movement developed within the mystical tradition. Though this line of interpretation was first noted by Ambrose, it was comprehensively developed in the twelfth century by Rupert of Deutz. He understood the entire Song in connection with Mary, the mother of Christ (Matters, 1990: 159). An example of this interpretation of Cant 4:7 is the words of Richard of St. Victor: "The Blessed Virgin Mary was wholly fair, because she was sanctified in the womb and also after she was born she committed no sin, either mortal or venial" (Rowley, 1952: 196).

Unfortunately, the reformation did not yield an immediate effect on the exegesis of the Song (Murphy, 1990: 33). The first generations of Protestant interpreters, including Calvin, strictly opposed the Mariological or tropological interpretations in reaction against the Catholic Church, but only to emphasise the ecclesial-historical readings. Luther severely criticised previous allegorical interpretations, and asked for a new approach, but he merely developed a historical-political allegory in which Solomon "celebrates his own government as responsive to the love that God has bestowed upon it…" (Murphy, 1990: 34).

[34] Peers, E. A. 1972. *The Complete works of St Teresa of Jesus,* London: Sheed & Ward.

2.4 SEXUAL INTERPRETATIONS

Indications are that there were readers and interpreters of Song of Songs that were aware of the literal meaning of the text and the sexual message it carries right through this book's rich history of interpretation.

People sang or chanted the sexual choruses or phrases from the Song in the relaxed atmosphere of banquet houses. In the Babylonian Talmud dated about 90 A.D. it is taught that "he who recites a verse of the Song of Songs and turns it into a kind of love-song, and he who recites a verse in the banquet hall not at the proper time [but in a time of carousal] brings evil into the world" (Keel, 1994: 6).[35] On the question of what people should be doing while eating and drinking, the rabbis taught that they had to be occupied by "the appropriate teaching of the law"! (Keel, 1994: 6). It is impossible to ascertain how widespread this literal use of Song of Songs by ordinary kinfolk was, but it was "so widespread that the rabbis felt bound to contest it sharply" (Keel, 1994: 6). In the Tosefta[36] Rabbi Aqiba (died 135 A.D.) echoes this hostility towards a sexual reading of Song of Songs, "He who warbles the Song of Songs in a banquet-hall has no portion in the world to come" (Barbiero, 2011: 2)[37].

It is also clear from the Mishnah that ordinary young men and women met romantically in a relaxed atmosphere at harvest festivals, where portions of the Song were sung:[38]

> *There were no days better for Israelites than the fifteenth of Ab [in August] and the day of Atonement [in October]. For on those days Jerusalemite girls go out in borrowed white dresses - so as not to shame those who owned none. All the dresses had to be immersed. And the Jerusalemite girls go out and dance in the vineyards. What did they say? 'Fellow, look around and see – choose what you want! Don't look for beauty, look for family.' … And so it says, 'Go forth you daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him in the day of his espousal and in the day of the gladness of his heart' (Cant. 3:11)* (Keel, 1994: 6).

In the Christian tradition Marcion (85-160) rejected not only the literal meaning of Song of Songs, but all the Hebrew Scriptures as unworthy of the canon, because they teach that a wrathful God created nature and natural impulses. Of these Scriptures, Song of Songs was

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[35] Babylonian Talmud, *Sanh.* 101a; 1985. *The Talmud of Babylon: An American Translation,* vol.23c, *Tractate Sanhedrin, Chapters 9-11,* Trans. by J. Neusner, Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, p. 152.

[36] Tosefta *Sanh.* 12:10; 1981. *The Tosefta: Fourth Division: Nezikin: The Order of Damages*, Trans. by J. Neusner, New York: Krav, p. 237.

[37] The Tosefta is a supplementary compilation of Jewish oral laws in the halakhic or aggadic tradition from the period of the Mishna. (Wald, S. G. 2008. 'Tosefta' in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0020_0_19970.html. Date of access: 6 June 2014).

[38] Mishnah *Ta'an.* 4:8; 1988. *The Mishnah: A New Translation,* Trans. by J. Neusner, New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, pp. 315-316.

particularly problematic, because of its sensual content. The Church prohibited Marcion's theories and reaffirmed the entire Hebrew canon (Pope, 1977: 119).

In the fourth century, opposition to the allegorical interpretation of the Song came from Theodore, bishop of Mopsuestia (350-428). Although he rejected the spiritual meaning, he argued that the Song had limited educational and apologetic significance. He contended that the Song was Solomon's response to criticism of his marriage to the pharaoh's daughter. In Theodore's posthumous censure for Nestorianism, at the second Council of Constantinople in 553, his literal exegesis of the Song was one of the peripheral charges, but it had a constrictive effect on the subsequent interpretations of Canticles (Murphy, 1990: 22).

While Theodore unsettled the Eastern Church, the Western Church was shaken by the bold literal interpretation of Jovinian (died 405), a Roman monk. He was poor and lived celibate, but maintained that "there was no moral difference between fasting or eating, virginity, widowhood, or marriage" and "marriage was in no way inferior to virginity and celibacy" (Pope, 1977: 120). In his arguments he read the Song of Songs literally, but applied it to the sanctity of marital sex. Jovinian's view horrified the church leadership, and he was condemned at a synod in Rome in 390. Especially Jerome (347-420) found the idea that sex could be as holy as celibacy shameful (Pope, 1977: 120).

As mentioned earlier, in the eleventh century, Ibn Ezra in the first phases of interpretation, gave detailed attention to the grammatical and lexical aspects of the text, as well as the plain meaning, before resorting to allegory. In a library at Oxford an anonymous commentary on the Song of Songs was found that was written by a French Jew, possibly in the twelfth or thirteenth century. The writer of this work is clearly familiar with the work of Ibn Ezra, but boldly treats the Song as an erotic poem only, without any hint of an allegorical interpretation (Pope, 1977: 108-109).

One of the Reformers, Sebastian Castellio (1515-1563), regarded the Song as an offensive poem which reflected Solomon's shameless love affairs. He was of the opinion that the Song should be excluded from the canon. This view brought him in conflict with Calvin, and ultimately led to his departure from Geneva (Rowley, 1952: 207). Whiston (1667-1752) also contended that the Song was immoral and should not be in the canon. He argued that Solomon wrote this text in the year he became idolatrous (Rowley, 1952: 207-208).

In the seventeenth century Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) also broke away from the allegorical approach, and voiced a new tone in setting the Song against the backdrop of Solomon's love for the Egyptian princess, to be appropriated by readers as marital secrets that are cloaked in honorable words. He acknowledges the possibility of an allegorical reading by stating that "Solomon composed this writing with such artistry that without great distortion one could find

in it allegories expressing the love of God for his people Israel" (Grotius[39] as cited by Keel, 1994:10).

It was only in the eighteenth century, with the onset of the enlightenment, that a serious new trend started in the study of Hebrew literature. In Christian circles Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) took the lead in 1778. He appropriated the literal meaning seriously and classified the Song as a collection of love songs (Ausloos, 2008: 38). Herder appreciated the poetic beauty of the Song and valued the theme of true love in various stages as worthy of a place in the Bible (Pope, 1977: 132). In 1788 the Jewish scholar, Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), published a translation of the Song of Songs with an introduction and commentary by Löwe and Wolfssohn. This work questions previous contradictory explanations, and considers only the literal sense. Song of Songs is treated as a series of separate songs celebrating the love between a shepherd and shepherdess, or between a king and a princess (Pope, 1977: 111).

The enlightenment opened the door for Jews, Christians and academics to explore new sexual interpretations from a literal perspective.

2.4.1 New possibilities

a) Drama

Although Origen used the word drama, it was Jacobi that first developed the interpretation of Song of Songs into a full-scale drama. The plot centered on a three character love triangle with a tyrannical King Solomon competing for the hand of a shepherdess, who stays true to her humble shepherd lover (Murphy, 1990: 38). According to Jacobi, the Song is not the celebration of passionate love, but rather the celebration of fidelity (Pope, 1977: 136). This view was seen by Ginsberg as the "key to the long lost treasure" (Pope, 1977: 136). The fact that the faithful one in the drama was a woman, inspired Ginsberg to take up the case for the emancipation of women ardently:

> *Now, if one sex of the human family has been so degraded by the other; if she whom God created to be a help-mate and counterpart has been reduced by man to the slave of his carnal lusts; if such slavish and inhuman treatment has been justified on the false plea of the natural unfaithfulness and incontinency of the sex; if exclusion from society and imprisonment have been deemed necessary for the preservation of her morals, how greatly has woman been alienated from the original design of her creation; how unjustly has her character been aspersed; how inhumanly has she been treated and how great is the importance of a book which celebrates the virtuous example of a woman, and thus strikes at the root of all her reproaches and her wrongs! (Ginsberg[40] as quoted by Pope, 1977:140).*

[39] Grotius, H. 1679. *Opera Omnia Theologica* Vol.1, Amsterdam; (reprint, Stuttgart and Bad Cannstatt: Frommann, 1972) p. 267a.

[40] Ginsberg, C.D. 1857. *Song of Songs: Translated from the Original Hebrew, with Commentary, Historical and Critical,* London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Roberts.

Delitzsch (1830-1890) on the other hand, proposed a two-character drama (Tanner, 1997: 34-35). Solomon fell in love with a humble shepherdess. He took her to his harem in Jerusalem and was so affected by her beauty and virtue that he was moved from sexual lust to pure love (Tanner, 1997: 34-35).

The problem with the drama theory is that it produces just as much variation as the allegorical approach (Rowley, 1952: 205). "So much has to be read between the lines, and such complicated stage directions have to be supplied, that its critics feel almost as much has to be brought to the book on this interpretation as on the allegorical" (Rowley, 1952: 205). Tanner also points out the total absence of a story line, plot, and character development as well as the doubtful motive of depicting the wise King Solomon as a villain in the three-character theory (1997: 34).

b) Wedding Songs

In the seventeenth century French theologian, Bossuet (1627-1704), developed a wedding song theory in the context of Solomon's marriage to the Egyptian princess. He divided the Song into seven distinct songs to correspond with the seven day Hebrew marriage festival (Rowley, 1952: 208-209).

A new twist developed when Renan (1823-1892) in 1860 noticed the resemblances between the Song and modern Syrian wedding poetry (Rowley, 1952: 209). In 1973 an article on modern Syrian wedding customs was published.[41] These customs included a seven day feast where the couple was crowned as king and queen. *Wasfs* were also sung, as well as war songs, while the bride performed a sword dance (Rowley, 1952: 209).[42] On grounds of this study, Karl Budde (1850-1939) twenty years later developed a hypothesis of the Song as secular wedding poetry (Murphy, 1990: 39).

Though the wedding week theory gained support, there was also much criticism (Murphy, 1990: 39). It was difficult to explain how modern day Syrian wedding customs had an influence on ancient Hebrew poetry (Rowley, 1952: 211). It was also noted that the bride was never called "queen" in the Song (Pope, 1977: 144). In Rowley's own opinion, the Song has nothing to do with a wedding occasion, but it is merely a series of love poems (1952: 212).

c) Dream theory

In 1816 Johann Leonhard von Hug (1765-1846) suggested a dream interpretation based on Cant 5:2[43] (Pope, 1977: 132). On the basis of the literal text, he found thirty-eight disordered sections which were best explained as chaotic dream sequences. Although this was a new perspective on the literary genre of the text, he still interpreted it as historical allegory where

[41] Wetztein, J. G. 1873. 'Die Syrische Dreschrafel', *ZfE,* pp. 270-232.

[42] A *wasf* is a lyrical poem that describes the physical beauty of a person (Rowley, 1952: 209).

[43] "I slept but my heart was awake" (Cant 5:2).

the ten Northern tribes are the dreaming shepherdess that longs to be reunited with Judah to form a new Solomonic state (Pope, 1977: 132).

Freehof (1892-1990) also argued for a series of dreams and since dreams are illogical, the disorder in Canticles made sense (Pope, 1977: 133). The dream perspective also legitimises the symbolical readings of the rabbis since dreams were often communication between God and humans (Pope, 1977: 133). Though the specific interpretation may vary, the approach itself is found "essentially sound" (Pope, 1977: 133).

An American psychiatrist, Pusin, in 1971 took up the dream angle on grounds of similarities between the Song's dreams and the dreams of some of his female patients (Pope, 1977: 134). The dream is about the girl's anxious search for her lover and could be the context for the dramatic theory wherein the girl is kept from her true love (Pope, 1977: 133-134).

It is indeed possible that Cant 3:1-5 and Cant 5:2-8 could be dream sequences, but there is no conclusive proof that this is applicable to the whole text (Tanner, 1997: 39).

d) Mythological-Cultic theory

According to this theory, the Song of Songs originated from pagan fertility worship. In 1906 Wilhelm Erbt contextualised the Song in cult rituals of the sun-god Tammuz and the moon-goddess Ishtar, from Israel's Canaanite kinfolk (Tanner, 1997: 36). In 1914 Oswald Neuschotz de Jassy followed this line of interpretation, but in connection with the Isis/Osiris litanies (Rowley, 1952: 145). According to this theory, the kisses of Cant 1:2 refer not to lovers, but to the resurrection kiss of Osiris.[44] A catalogue of Akkadian hymn titles was published by Ebeling in 1917 (Pope, 1977: 145-146). He identified it as hymns to Ishtar, but it was Meek who saw a significant number of similarities between the hymn list and Canticles. He found many parallels of the alleged union of Tammuz and Ishtar to the revival of life in Canticles, for example:

Line twenty-two of the hymn list and Cant 2:4:

"To the door of the lord she did come"

(Meek's translation of the hymn list as cited by Pope, 1977: 146).

"He has taken me to the banquet hall…" (Cant 2:4).

Meek associated the house of Tammuz with the netherworld where Isis went in search for Tammuz (Pope, 1977: 148). He suggested that the Song was a religious composition, but not in the cult of Yahweh. He argued that the original form had been reinterpreted and changed to harmonise with the worship of the God of Israel. In time the original character was forgotten, the name of Solomon attached for authority and the allegorical method of interpretation applied for acceptance (Pope, 1977: 148).

[44] "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth – for your love is more delightful than wine" (Cant 1:2).

Pope is responsible for another influential version of the mythological-cultic interpretation (1977: 210-299). According to him there is proof that funeral feasts in the Ancient Near East were banquet feasts, where life was celebrated with a sacred meal, music, drinking of intoxicating beverage, dancing, and sexual intercourse. It was a celebration of life and love in confrontation with death. Pope utilises archaeology, Ugaritic texts, as well as biblical texts to associate the banquet houses with funeral rites. Pope uses Jer 16:5-9 as biblical attestation to such a rite:

Thus says YHWH:

Do not enter the marzēaḥ-house,

Do not go to mourn,

Do not lament for them.

For I have removed my peace from this people.

Great and small will die in this land

And they will not be buried.

None shall mourn or lament;

None shall gash himself,

None be made bald for them.

None shall provide a mourning meal

To comfort him for the dead

Nor make him drink the cup of consolation

For his father and his mother.

You shall not enter the drinking-house

To sit with them,

To eat and to drink.

For this says YHWH of Hosts

The God of Israel:

Behold, I am banishing from this place

Before your eyes, and in your days,

The sound of exultation,

The sound of joy,

The sound of the groom,

And the sound of the bride.

(Jer 16:5-9 as quoted by Pope, 1977: 220).

Consequently Pope correlates El's drinking orgies[45] and Anat's cannibalistic meal[46] with these funeral rituals. With the associations of dogs that were depicted in funeral reliefs, as well as banquet reliefs, he also brings the alleged festivities of early Christians into the picture:

> *On the appointed day, they assemble for their banquets with all their children, sisters and mothers – people of both sexes and every age. After many sumptuous dishes, when the company at the table has grown warm and the passion of incestuous lust has been fired by drunkenness, a dog which has been tied to a lampstand is tempted by throwing a morsel beyond length of the leash by which it is bound. It makes a dash, and jumps for the catch. Thus when the witnessing light has been overturned and extinguished, in the ensuing darkness which favors shamelessness, they unite in whatever revolting lustful embrace the hazard of chance will permit. Thus, they are all equally guilty of incest, if not indeed, yet by privity, since whatever can happen in the actions of individuals are sought*

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[45] "El offered game in his house

Venison in the midst of his palace.

He invited the gods to mess.

The gods ate and drank,

Drank wine till sated,

Must till inebriated.

… El sat in his *mrzḥ*.

He drank wine till sated,

Must till inebriated.

… An apparition accosted him,

With horns and a tail.

He floundered in his excrement and urine.

El collapsed, El like those who descend into Earth"

… (The Ugaritic text 5.1 as quoted by Pope, 1977: 211).

[46] "Anat went and waxed mad (?)

At the beauty of her brother,

And at the handsomeness of her brother,

For he was fair.

She ate his flesh without a knife,

She drank his blood without a cup" (Quoted by Pope, 1977:220).

for by the general desire of all (Minucius Felix as quoted by Pope, 1977: 213 from the translation of Octavius by Rudolph Arbesmann[47]).

Felix also brings up the alleged Christian initiation rites where an infant is killed by the novice, with its limbs torn to pieces and its blood sipped (Pope, 1977: 213). Pope links all these feasts to the Christian Eucharist and the Jewish Qiddush "as radical reformations of the ancient funeral feasts with elimination of such gross features as cannibalism, drunkenness, and sexual license" (Pope, 1977: 220) .

Pope associates Cant 2:4: "He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love", as well as Cant 5:1: "…Eat, O friends, and drink; drink your fill, O lovers" with these funeral rituals. The climax of Cant 8:6: "… love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame", reveals the core reason for these funeral activities, "Love is the only power that can cope with Death" (Pope, 1977: 210).

Although this line of interpretation is persuasively presented, it is not without obstacles. Reference to mythological cults is seen in almost every passage, and words such as *shepherd, vine, vineyard, dove, gazelle, apple, flock, blossoms, honey, dew,* and *king* are connected to cultic rituals as if they have no ordinary meaning (Yamauchi, 1961: 84). Yamauchi cites Rowley[48] in aptly asking, "For how could one write a love lyric in any language if such terms must be excluded from his vocabulary?"

The main problem is still the question surrounding the harmonisation of the "cultic liturgy" with the religion of Yahweh, as well as the acceptance of the text into the canon. Rowley appropriately notes the "strange procedure" that "left traces of the rejected cult everywhere in the book, but which left the new cult into which it was absorbed unmentioned" (1952: 223). It is rational to expect a redactor revising the text to make sure that Yahwism would be presented clearly (Rowley, 1952: 223). As far as canonisation is concerned the question remains, why would a text that was inextricably connected with the immoral fertility rites, which were passionately rejected and denounced by the prophets, be accepted as Holy Scripture?

2.4.2 Human love poems

Since Grotius set a new trend, the tide slowly turned away from allegory. New methods of interpretation slowly uncovered the music of the love song that had been stifled under church and synagogue choirs (Oosthuizen, 2011: 78).

Not everybody accepted this new trend without a fight. In 1838 Bennett revealed the deep-seated dualistic perspective when he argued passionately that Song of Songs could not possibly be interpreted literally, because it is against the nature of women (Pope, 1977: 135).

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[47] Quain, E. A. & Daly, E. J. 1950. *Apologetical Works and Minucius Felix: Octavius,* Trans. by Rudolph Arbesmann, Publishers: Fathers of the Church.

[48] Rowley, H. H. 1938. 'The Song of Songs: An Examination of Recent Theory', *JRAS,* pp. 265-266.

Never would human love speak thus. Though men like to court, they do not like to be courted; and while they think it is cruel to be rejected while they court, they without mercy reject her that courts them; as the forward female has usually found, from the days of Sappho to this hour…. No man, therefore, in his senses, would think to compliment his fair one by writing of her, to her, as if she had lost her retiring modesty, her female dignity, and degraded herself by doing that for which every man would despise her (Bennett as quoted in Pope, 1977:135).

In spite of resistance, there was a growing appreciation for the literal meaning of the Song. In 1952 Rowley remarked, "It appears to be lovers' songs, expressing their delight in one another and the warm emotion of their hearts. All the other views find in the Song what they bring to it" (Rowley, 1952: 233). Ausloos remarks that "in current research into Canticles, more Bible scholars accept that Canticles is, first and foremost, a poetic description of the experience of human love, in which an erotic use of language is not avoided" (2010: 8).

Unfortunately, the fact that more scholars agree on the plain content of the Song, did not bring an end to the extreme variations in interpretation.

a) Song for marriage and chastity

When the literal text was acknowledged by interpreters, the perspective changed to the goodness of sex within a marital relationship, which also seemed to be the dominant reason for inclusion in the canon. Young even argues for the purity and nobility of true love in marriage, as well as a reminder of a love purer than human love (Young as cited by Pope, 1977:193).[49] Rowley finishes his essay on the Song with this assertion:

The Church has always consecrated the union of man and woman in matrimony and taught that marriage is a divine ordinance, and it is not unfitting that a book which expresses the spiritual and physical emotion on which matrimony rests should be given a place in the Canon of Scripture (1952: 234).

Lotter and Steyn understand Song of Songs as a contemporary paradigm for romantic relationships (2006: 70). Curiously, they list chastity in relationships as one of the implications of the Song. Though they recognise the sexual undertones, they argue for a physical attraction and love before marriage. Images of the sex act are only the lovers' longing for consummation (Lotter and Steyn, 2006: 80).

b) A love song with many gods

An important reason many interpreters doubt any spiritual intent in the Song, is the absence of any reference to God. Though in Cant 8:6 the jāh ending שַׁלְהֶבֶתְיָה was previously translated as "the flame of Yahweh", but is now accepted as the intensive form, a blazing fire, according to Viviers (2008: 448). He goes even further and postulates that though the patriarchal God of Israel is absent, the Song reflects humankind's keen ability to construct their own gods. He

[49] Young, E. J. 1949. *An Introduction to the Old Testament,* Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

explains that in Song of Songs the traditional gods' roles are replaced by animals, the lovers themselves, and that the text is permeated by Eros, the god that reigns sovereign in the Song (Viviers, 2008: 457). It was customary to take an oath in the name of God, but in the Song the promise is made in the name of animals, because animals are a suitable manifestation of Eros. Even the lovers take on the identity of Eros when the male is described as a godlike statue[50] and the female appears like a goddess.[51] Viviers postulates that Yahweh is thus replaced by Eros, an omnipresent and irresistible power (2008: 449, 456-7). Carr (2003: 113, 127) also reflects on the goddess innuendos included in references to the gazelles, wild does, as well as the sensual Lotus-flower – all images connected with the goddess cults of Asherah and Ishtar that were prominent in Israel. In contrast with Viviers, however, Carr does not accept that the book's audience worshipped these goddesses, but merely that they probably understood the connotations between these animals and the goddess cults (2003: 114). It seems then that these can be seen as clues to the original context of the Song, but it is important to realise that just as the name of Yahweh seems to be carefully avoided, so are the names of ancient gods and goddesses avoided.

c) Carnal and sexual allegory

At the other extreme of the interpretations, Boer understands the Song of Songs as what he calls, carnal allegory. He found allusions to intergenerational sex, incest, paedophilia, and the animals bringing association with bestiality. The Song consists of a series of "sexual episodes, a poetic porn text" (Boer, 2000: 291-292). The repetitions in the Song serve as perpetuations of desire and fantasy (Boer, 2000: 297-298).

Ausloos (2010: 8) seriously questions the erotic readings of Canticles where allusions to human genitalia and sexual behavior are the focus of interpretation. Utilising Cant 2:16b בַּשּׁוֹשַׁנִּים הָרֹעֶה (he browses among the lilies), he shows how allegorical readings changed from theology to anthropology. He quotes Joüon interpreting the Israelites as the lilies among which the shepherd pastures his flock.[52] Bernard of Clairvaux considered the lilies as the "pure souls who retain the whiteness of chastity and impart a fragrance to all who are near" (Clairvaux cited by Pope, 1977:407 and here quoted by Ausloos, 2010:11). As far as the anthropological reading is concerned, the lilies are identified as the Lotus flower that has an intoxicating effect. Ausloos refers to Budde (1898:12) who draws on Cant 5:13, where the male's lips are compared to

[50] "My lover is radiant and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand. His head is purest gold; his hair is wavy and black as a raven. His eyes are like doves by the water streams, washed in milk, mounted like jewels. His cheeks are like beds of spice yielding perfume. His lips are like lilies dripping with myrrh. His arms are rods of gold set with chrysolite. His body is like polished ivory decorated with sapphires. His legs are pillars of marble set on bases of pure gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as its cedars. His mouth is sweetness itself; he is altogether lovely. This is my lover, this my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem" (Cant 5:10-16).

[51] "Who is this that appears like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, majestic as the stars in procession?" (Cant 6:10).

[52] Joüon, P. 1909. *Le Cantique des Cantiques. Commentaire Philologique Etexégétique,* Paris: Beauchesne.

Lotus flowers (שְׂפָתוֹתָיו שׁוֹשַׁנִּים), and then applies it to Cant 2:16, with the result that the lover grazes on the lips of his beloved.[53] Haupt takes the erotic reading of this verse further. He translates it as "who feeds on the (dark purple) lilies" and interprets it as the hair on the *mons Veneris,* while he understands this section as pertaining to the uncovering of nakedness.[54] As Ausloos then points out, if the lily is a symbol of female genitalia, there is difficulty in comparing the male-lover lips in Cant 5:13 to lilies (Ausloos and Lemmelijn, 2010: 14).

The problem of retrieving the literal meaning is also further illustrated by Ausloos and Lemmelijn (2010: 9). The phrase הָרֹעֶה בַּשּׁוֹשַׁנִּים can grammatically be translated in four ways (2010: 9):

[he, who is] feeding [his flock] [on something] among the lilies;

[he, who is] feeding [his flock] on the flowers

[he, who is] feeding [on something] among the flowers;

[he, who is] feeding on the flowers

The implication thus, is that it is completely possible that this phrase has no erotic-sexual allusion at all (Ausloos and Lemmelijn, 2010: 13). The conclusion is then that the distinction between a literal and allegorical reading is dubious. Literal meaning is difficult to establish, because the metaphorical language is difficult to understand. Exegesis must try to understand the meaning of this text without resorting to theological or anthropological allegory (Ausloos and Lemmelijn, 2010: 14).

d) Feminist and gay liberation readings

Song of Songs is one of the most appealing Bible texts for feminist interpreters (McCall, 2008: 418). There are numerous reasons for this. The main character is a beautiful, headstrong woman who speaks for herself, who passionately embraces her own sexual desires, and is not afraid to take a risk for her own happiness. The cast of characters is also dominated by women, the Shulamite, her mother, and her friends (McCall, 2008: 418-419). Above all, this girl is not afraid to challenge existing power structures. She disobeys her brothers and defies societal boundaries by searching for her lover in the night. McCall notes on the inspiration of the Shulamite's behaviour, "If the power structures of the world will not be moved, then at least we must not allow them to remain unchallenged" (2008: 428).

For the cause of feminism the text is also remarkable in its indifference to sexual, social, and class boundaries (McCall, 2008: 420). Between the lovers there is an intimate mutuality, praising each other's bodies and urgently seeking each other. Though they are equals, they are not duplicates. They speak differently, they act differently, and they both have power. He has

[53] Budde, K. 1898. *Die fünf Megillot. Das Hohelied,* (Kurzer Hand-Commentarzum Alten Testament 17.) Freiburg i.B.: Mohr.

[54] Haupt, P. 1902. *The Book of Canticles. A New Rhythmical Translation,* Chicago, ILL.: University of Chicago Press.

the power to revive her, because she is sick with love and desire (Cant 2:5; 5:8). She has power over him – she conquers him by her presence and by looking at him (Cant 4:9, 6:5, 7:5) (McCall, 2008: 426-427).

The problem is that female interpreters tend to overlook certain misogynistic elements of the Song. In this regard Exum warns that this text is hazardous to the critical faculties of female interpreters. "Something in the Song turns even the most hardened of feminist critics into a bubbling romantic" (Exum, 2000: 25). The domination of her brothers and the violence of the city guards are painful reminders that "*bad things happen to sexually active, forward women"* (Exum, 2000: 30). According to Exum there is no gender equality. The man is always off somewhere with freedom of movement, as well as sexual freedom since "his chastity, unlike hers, is not an issue" (Exum, 2000: 30). Furthermore, the difference between bodily descriptions, where she is addressed personally as "you" while she describes him in the third person, suggests that the "male lover of the Song never offers himself to the woman's gaze in the same way that she offers herself to his …" (Exum, 2000: 33). Another theme that points to "shadows in the garden" is that of absence (McCall, 2008: 427). The man's elusive behaviour leads to intense anxiety for the woman, which compels her to search for him, even in dangerous situations (Harding, 2008: 51). There is also the question about the Shulamite's self-image: by referring to herself as a vineyard-keeper and a lily, but to her lover as a king, she elevates him to a superior position (Harding, 2008: 54-55).

There is also stinging critique against feminist readings of the Song as "yet another vehicle for male pornographic fantasy and sexual aggression" (Burrus and Moore, 2003: 52). Burrus and Moore criticise the heterosexual readings of the Song of feminists like Kristeva and Trible, because the "Song is here assumed to be a consummate expression of heterosexual love and desire", and that heterosexuality itself is correspondingly assumed to be a trans-historical constant rather than a historical construct (Burrus and Moore, 2003: 29). They suggest that feminist and queer politics must join forces to read Song of Songs in a ways that deconstruct heterosexual ideologies (Burrus and Moore, 2003: 29-52).

e) Innerbiblical reading

With reference to human sexuality, as explicitly reflected in the Song, we immediately arrive at the theological perspective of humans as *Imago Dei,* which offers valuable opportunity for innerbiblical reading. Carr argues that, in the light of Genesis 1:27, male and female bodies are both godlike and sexual (2003: 24). Scheffler refers to the terms used in this verse, where זָכָר refers to "that which stands upright", and נְקֵבָה refers to "hollow", and argues that man and woman together, making love, reflect the likeness of God (2008: 1265). This is a powerful image, but implies that people not in a sexual relationship, are not able to reflect God's image. It is probably more to the point that male and female sexuality reflects God's capacity for intimate communion.

Innerbiblical reading, more than allegory, validates the possibility of comparing the love relationship in the Song with the relationship between God and Israel/Church. According to

Lotter and Steyn, there is a consistent tendency in the Hebrew Bible to describe God's love with sexual metaphors (2006: 82). The relationship in the Song can illuminate the divine/human relationship. In the prophets, the marriage metaphor is used negatively, but in the Song comes the possibility that it can be positive. "Reading the Song as an image of human passion leads us to the possibility of a mutually delighting love relationship with God, which is not contingent on obedience or subordination" (Ostriker, 2000: 37). Even the cyclic ebb and flow of longing, searching, and fulfilment in the Song resonates in the divine/human relationship. Carr refers to this correspondence:

> *Both require openness to being deeply affected by someone outside oneself, whether one's lover or God. Both involve the whole self. Finally, at their most intense, both spirituality and sexuality involve an interplay between closeness and distance. Neither sexuality nor spirituality works if one is seeking a constant 'high'* (2003: 10).

Brenner also refers to the Song's innerbiblical connections (1989: 19). She used three approaches to exhibit the Song's affinities with other texts of Scripture. On grounds of the Song's theme, a love relationship, she relates the Song to the marriage metaphor in Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Second Isaiah. On grounds of poetry the Song can be connected to Psalms, Proverbs and Qoheleth. And finally, on grounds of certain images or metaphors like the garden, the Song can be compared to other gardens like the Genesis narrative (Brenner, 1989: 19-20).

Phyllis Trible made a valued contribution with her innerbiblical reading of the Song. She was the first to bring the Song in dialogue with Gen 2-3 (McCall, 2008: 428). The common themes between these texts, like gardens and the relationship between a man and a wife, makes this conversation possible. The Genesis narrative, however, is about a love story that went wrong, while the Song is about the redemption of these distortions (McCall, 2008: 428). Genesis is about Paradise lost, and the Song of Songs is about Paradise regained (Dobbs-Allsopp as cited by McCall, 2008: 429).[55] However, Deckers-Dijs refers to Sadgrove (1978), Landy (1983), and Reese (1983) who read Song of Songs innerbiblically, in relation to the Genesis creation narratives and remarks that it actually deflects the attention away from the true wisdom nature of Song of Songs. In Deckers-Dijs's perspective Song of Songs is pure wisdom literature that deals with the mighty, inspiring, and disintegrating experience of human love (2006: 173).

2.5 CONCLUSION

The Song's history of interpretation clearly shows the deep rift between sexuality and spirituality, as well as interpreters' subjective connection to their own time and context.

Though both the spiritual interpretation and sexual interpretation tend to construct their own hermeneutical key that completely ignores a wisdom setting, much can be learned from interpreters' struggle with this difficult text.

[55] Dobbs-Allsopp, F. W. 2006. 'I am Black *and* Beautiful: the Song, Cixous, and *Écriture Féminine',* in *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World*, ed. Day, L. & Pressler, C. Louisville, KY: Westminister John Knox Press.

Origen's insight that the image of God (Logos) pervades both creation and Scripture, is also true about the sex act. Being part of created reality so vibrantly described in the Song's context of sights, sounds, and smells of nature and creation, this profound intimacy in a relationship of desire surely convey something of the God of creation. Similarly, Origen's setting of the Song in the wisdom corpus as an "advanced course in spirituality" (Murphy, 1990: 19), leaves us with much to think about.

> *Dealing frankly with sex and sexuality in the realm of both humanity and spirituality probably does need an open-minded wisdom as well as maturity – however, not to fear the urging and emotions that this Song awaken, but to acknowledge, welcome, and indeed desire the experience of passionate love – like the lovers of the Song (Oosthuizen, 2011: 53)*.

Mystics like St. Theresa and St. Bernard and their passionate relationship with God are inspiring in an age dominated by reason and intellect. Clairvaux may have had a slanted view of sex, but he was instinctively drawn to the passion of Canticles. He recognised that the experience of human touch, taste, and affection, even erotically so, is experiential knowledge that better explains the divine/human relationship than intellectual knowledge (Loyd Allen, 2008: 413). Even the body hostile St. Theresa could not ignore the role of her body in intense spiritual experiences. Viviers argues that in a holy spiritual trance, St. Theresa's body was always there. In the most powerful moments of spiritual rapture, the "voice" of her body could be heard (2002: 1549-1551). These observations emphasise the reality of acknowledging both body (sexual element) and soul (spiritual element) as an integrated, inseparable whole (Oosthuizen, 2011: 55).

Just like the spiritual interpretations, the sexual interpretations did contribute to the understanding of the Song. The drama theory brought the consistency of characters clearly into focus. The wedding song theory actually brought the absence of marriage under the spotlight. The dream theory concentrated the attention on Cant 3:1-5 and Cant 5:2-8 that might reasonably be understood as dreams. The mythological-cultic theory focused the attention of the possible originating environments of the Song. Understanding the cultic undertones and metaphors may produce more insight into the meaning of the Song. Reading the feminist interpretations might actually help to reconcile women with their sexuality and inspire them to defy unjust power structures.

Though we can find much value in the different approaches, it is clear that interpreters need a common frame of reference to stabilise the bewildering variety of interpretations. Reading Song of Songs as part of the canonical wisdom literature may provide such a frame, and afford exegetes the opportunity finally to find a way to read the text both sexually and spiritually.

CHAPTER THREE

THE WAY OF WISDOM

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter we saw how dualisticly and diversely Song of Songs has been interpreted in its long reception history. It was also made clear that interpreters need a frame of reference from which to read Song of Songs if there is any hope of allocating biblical meaning to this unique book. It is the suggestion of this research project that reading Song of Songs as wisdom literature supplies us with a stable methodology to explore its meaning.

In this chapter we will work towards a model for defining wisdom. In section 3.2.1 we focus on the work of Crenshaw as a convenient starting point. From the information gathered we cluster similar characteristics under suitable headings as common identifiers, and also in applicable subcategories. At the end of this section we present a table for easy reference to the information. In segment 3.2.2, we mine for more information using the work of other scholars (Whybray, Murphy, Perdue, and Bartholomew and O'Dowd) on the common identifiers and subcategories. In section 3.3 we put forward a table of wisdom characteristics that can be utilised to explore Song of Songs, in an approach of cumulative proof.

3.2 TOWARDS BUILDING A MODEL FOR DEFINING WISDOM

3.2.1. The perspectives of James Crenshaw

In his introductory chapter Crenshaw moves from four initial wisdom markers, to three fundamental elements underlying wisdom, and ends with a broad definition (2010: 1-17).

3.2.1.1 Four markers identifying wisdom literature

Crenshaw (2010: 10-13) formulates four markers with which he approaches the identification of wisdom literature:

a) A literary corpus

In scholarly convention, wisdom is a literary corpus bound by a mysterious ingredient, which is so powerful that interpreters use these works as the norm by which other possible wisdom texts are measured (Crenshaw, 2010: 10). Crenshaw identifies the four Hebrew books, Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and Sirach, as well as the one Greek book, The Wisdom of Solomon, as Israel's body of wisdom literature (2010: 5). He is a purist when it comes to the boundaries that delineate wisdom literature. Relaxing the margins to see wisdom's influence in other texts leads to the danger of wisdom literature "being swallowed" by the Hebrew canon (Crenshaw, 2010: 34).

He also applies this phenomenon of a literary corpus to Mesopotamia and Egypt, where specified bodies of literature justifies the name "wisdom" even though certain features differ significantly (Crenshaw, 2010: 10-11).

Since the quest of this research project challenges the boundaries of wisdom literature as defined by scholarly convention, the marker of "literary corpus" cannot be utilised towards building a model for defining wisdom. Crenshaw acknowledges that the limited choice of these five wisdom books as wisdom corpus is subjective and that using it to define wisdom, leads to circular reasoning – nothing outside of wisdom can be proven as wisdom other than in a technical sense. The approach validates the exclusivity of the currently identified body of wisdom literature (Crenshaw, 1976: 9), and automatically excludes Song of Songs.

b) Similar Texts in Egypt and Mesopotamia

According to Crenshaw, comparative literature in the Ancient Near East can yield important clues to defining wisdom. Although he acknowledges the importance of honouring the cultural distinctions, he is certain that "something unites these widely divergent texts" (2010: 11). The texts are sufficiently uniform that Egyptian Instructions are integrated in Proverbs, and certain Mesopotamian texts are branded "Sumerian Job" and "Babylonian Ecclesiastes" (Crenshaw, 2010: 51).

Crenshaw finds it strange that Solomon's wisdom is compared to that of non-Israelite sages in the Bible, and postulates that it is a clue to the international spirit of wisdom literature.[56] This international character manifests in knowable truths, orderly creation, indulgent self-interest, and no special revelation other than the order implanted in creation (Crenshaw, 2010: 50-51). He also mentions that world view, literary form and subject matter may be the common grounds between Israelite and other Ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature (Crenshaw, 2010: 51), but elsewhere he disqualifies these three elements for defining wisdom literature.[57]

The contexts of wisdom differ sharply in the Ancient Near East. In Egypt the locus was in the pharaoh's court with the focus on instruction for successful life at the royal court, and literature tends to be propagandistic. In Mesopotamia it was located in schools in or near temples with the goal of assuring a good life by means of cultic practices, of which the interpreting of omens was especially lucrative for the sages. The context of Israelite wisdom developed from ordinary people in tribal communities, to wisdom at the royal court, and eventually also in houses of learning (Crenshaw, 2010: 50-52).

In Israel family wisdom is disseminated by the patriarch or father, sometimes assisted by the mother. It aims at the formation of character and the mastering of life. It formulates principles for successful behaviour in different situations, and is packed in brief paradigmatic, proverbial forms. Court wisdom is limited to a select group of rulers, advisors, and powerful persons. It is more secular than religious, and the writers utilise a pedagogical technique that includes motive clauses, rhetorical questions, and exhortations freely. Court wisdom focuses on themes like table manners, eloquence, order, and the rulers' responsibility for justice. Theological wisdom provides education for all social classes with a strict system of reward and retribution.

[56] "He was wiser that any other man, including Ethan the Ezrahite – wiser than Herman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol. And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations" (1 Kgs 4:31).

[57] See the discussion on thematic coherence in 3.2.1.1 d.

Dialogue, admonition, arguments, and exhortations are widely used, and themes can also be dealt with in brief poems (Crenshaw, 2010: 84-85).

c) Attitude

Crenshaw notes that wisdom features a certain attitude towards reality. On the one hand this world view has humans as its basic point of departure. What is good for men and women can be learned from experience. On the other hand it accepts a creation where God entrenched truth within all of reality. "the human responsibility is to search for that insight and thus to learn to live in harmony with the cosmos" (Crenshaw, 2010: 11).

In my view two important themes coincide in Crenshaw's perspective of attitude. First of all is the focus on humanistic experience and the search for success or meaning. In the context of wisdom literature, Crenshaw does not see this as humanism, but terms it theological humanism (1976: 5). This is also dealt with in the discussion on the "Search" (3.2.1.3 a), and "Well-being" (3.2.1.3 c), as features of Crenshaw's definition.

Secondly there is the theme of creation, and embedded in this theme is the element of order. These two – creation and order - are interrelated and intertwined. Order is dealt with in the discussion of propriety/order as a basic premise of wisdom literature (3.2.1.2 a), and creation under the rubric of revelation in "Other important themes" (3.2.1.4 d), as Crenshaw does not address this as part of his introduction to wisdom literature.

d) Thematic coherence

Crenshaw observes that a thematic coherence (content), as well as an identifiable style (form) is characteristic of wisdom literature. Sages address the mastering of human life with regard to common problems, like "the dangers of adultery, the perils of the tongue, the hazards of strong drink, the enigma of underserved suffering, the inequities of life, or the finality of death" (Crenshaw, 2010: 12). He correctly notes that these themes are also addressed in non-sapiential contexts, which makes the unique style (proverbs, sentence, debate, etc.) used by sages all the more important. These two elements - form and content - are important when defining wisdom.

> *When marriage between form and content exists, there is Wisdom literature. Lacking such oneness, a given text participates in biblical wisdom to a greater or lesser extent* (Crenshaw, 2010: 12).

Though Crenshaw mentions the marriage of form and content as a marker for wisdom literature, he does not discuss it when he deals with the individual Wisdom texts in his book.

In an earlier article Crenshaw refers to constants and variables, or in the words of Bultmann, the constitutive and ornamental features of various forms.[58] The constitutive feature gives the

[58] Bultmann, R. 1957. *Die Geschichte der Synoptische Tradition*, FRLANT 12, pp. 73-74.

literary piece its wisdom character, and the ornamental features, like rhetorical devices, personification, antitheses, etc. function as the convincing element. “The more pleasing to eye or ear, the more persuasive the content” (Crenshaw, 1976: 15).

As far as form is concerned, Crenshaw identifies certain literary wisdom forms (2010: 31-33). Interestingly enough, he does not acknowledge a certain wisdom vocabulary, because favourite expressions in wisdom literature also functioned as normal language in Israelite communities. He discounts vocabulary, subject matter, and world view as elements that discern the influence of wisdom in the rest of the canonical texts on grounds of 1) circular reasoning and 2) common Israelite stock. It seems to me the same argument should apply to choice of literary form.

3.2.1.2 The premise of ancient wisdom

On the underlying premise of ancient wisdom, Crenshaw identifies three elements (2010: 12-14):

a) Propriety/order

The sages search for the preservation of a stable society and just order. Crenshaw indicates this quest for order as the “fundamental assumption” in biblical wisdom (2010: 12). Human conduct has cosmic implication, and an untimely word or inappropriate deed “threatened the harmony of nature” and “strengthened the forces of chaos” (Crenshaw, 2010: 12). God created the world orderly and left clues for human survival. Those who found these secrets and lived accordingly did well, and those who were ignorant suffered the consequence. Humans were equipped to reach success and grace played no role. Living according to this world view invariably leads to pragmatism, with the quest for personal happiness and achievement as driving force. According to Crenshaw, this egocentricity was a “genuine spiritual devotion” that “transcended self-centredness” (2010: 12-13).

With pragmatism comes a focus on moderation and restraint. Since the sages lacked political power, they refused to work for social reform. Crenshaw notes that the wise warned against the destructive dangers of excess (drink, food, talk), because “good things carried to excess become evil in their consequence” (2010: 13). Interestingly enough, he also notes how Job and Qoheleth question extreme piety.

While order is acknowledged as one of the basic elements underlying wisdom literature, it is also true that the dogma of retribution is severely questioned by both Job and Qoheleth. In a later chapter Crenshaw states that “This assumption of order precipitates crises in Mesopotamia, Egypt and Israel” (2010: 232). The growing scepticism with regard to order is a significant feature in Ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature. In an interesting chapter on Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom literature Crenshaw, states that *Ma`at* (justice, order, truth) underlies the literature called Egyptian Instruction but that

> *Radical social changes within the structure of Egyptian life gave birth to a significant protest against earlier expression of confidence in the way things were. Ranging from*

pessimistic utterances, complaints, and protests against dominant social forces to hedonistic grasping after life's pleasures at any cost (Crenshaw, 2010: 262).

Order may be an identifying element of earlier wisdom, but later wisdom can more appropriately be described as a quest to re-establish order (Job) or the critique of reality without divine order (Qoheleth).

b) The fear of the Lord

According to Crenshaw the term "fear of the Lord" developed over time, and has different meanings in the different texts of wisdom literature (2010: 85).

In the older collection of Proverbs, the Solomonic collections, the term narrowly refers to religious duty. In Proverbs 1-9 the term refers to every human's vital relationship with God and implies knowledge of the covenantal obligations of sacred history (Crenshaw, 2010: 85). In Job the fear of the Lord features as the unattainable prize in human search for wisdom. In the end "God alone has access to it, but He distils wisdom on humans in religion and piety" (Crenshaw, 2010: 110).

Unfortunately Crenshaw does not deal with this element, namely fear of the Lord, on a consistent basis. He refers to further development in Ben Sira where fear of the Lord is associated with the fulfilling of law (Crenshaw, 2010: 160), but it is unclear how the fear of the Lord functions as a basic premise of wisdom literature in the individual texts he deals with.

c) Authority

Crenshaw indicates that wise counsel lacked divine backing (2010: 14). Sages never appealed to the God as an external reason for obedience – for example: "'Do this because God created you and certain actions naturally follow'" (Crenshaw, 2010: 14). Sages drew on the capacity to reason, and on a sense of self-interest. They used stylistic devices, like admonition, warning, dialogue, etc. to convince their audience and heighten their authority (Crenshaw, 2010: 14).

3.2.1.3 Definition

Though Crenshaw admits that no single definition serves because of the great variety of ideas that employ the concept of wisdom in Israel and the Ancient Near East (2010: 10), he formulates the following broad definition of wisdom:

> *…wisdom is the reasoned search for specific ways to assure well-being and the implementation of those discoveries in daily existence. Wisdom addresses natural, human, and theological dimensions of reality, and constitutes an attitude toward life, a living tradition, and a literary corpus* (Crenshaw, 2010: 16).

In his conclusion Crenshaw refers to only three elements for defining wisdom: a literary corpus, a way of thinking, and a tradition, leaving the impression that he deems these the more important elements. The elements of "a literary corpus" as well as "a way of thinking" (attitude) are treated earlier as two of the four markers of wisdom literature. The element of "a

living tradition" is never elaborated on separately and cannot be utilised for this research. Other important themes in his definition are reason, search, well-being, and reality, though these are not discussed as specific themes either in his introductory chapter.

a) Search

In a later chapter on the sapiential tradition Crenshaw expands on the "*pursuit* of insight" (2010: 52). Those who find wisdom find a "good life in all its manifestations: health, wealth, honour, progeny, longevity, remembrance" (Crenshaw, 2010: 56). Proverbs searched for the knowledge embedded in reality to understand how to live well. Job searched for God's presence in undeserved trials, and eventually found God to be the pinnacle of life. Qoheleth searched in vain for the sense of living, and found the shadow of death always hovering nearby. Ben Sira searched for the continuity of Jewish teachings within a sophisticated Hellenistic audience (2010: 56-57).

Wisdom is elusive and uses rich imagery like a wild animal, a tree, a house and finally also a woman. Wisdom actively invites people to search for her and also meets them halfway, but sometimes she tends to be out of reach, even hidden. Seekers find themselves in extreme tension that oscillates between two poles: "trust in one's ability to secure existence, and dependence upon God's mercy" (2010: 57).

The element of human's search is prominent in Crenshaw's book. It seems that the humans' quest for meaning - something that makes sense of their lives - whether it is knowledge, justice, restoration, etc. could be a powerful indicator of wisdom literature. Obviously the object of the quest can differ significantly in different contexts and time frames.

b) Reason

In discussing the sages' lack of divine authority, Crenshaw mentions that they rely on humans' ability to reason and to make informed choices to live life successfully (2010: 14). "Even during a perceived crisis of spirit, wisdom's representatives demonstrated remarkable resiliency and confidence in the power of the intellect, however restricted in scope" (Crenshaw, 2010: 275).

c) Well-being

It is clear that the reasoned search focuses on the well-being of the pursuant who wishes to live well (Proverbs), or to restore life's equilibrium after trauma (Job), or to accept the challenges of reality in the face of death (Qoheleth). This search for well-being can also be openly egocentric and self-indulgent without being irreligious (Crenshaw, 2010: 12-13).

d) Reality

Crenshaw's definition includes a natural dimension (creation), as well as a human and a theological (religious) dimension of reality faced by people trying to live life well. As discussed in thematic coherence as a wisdom marker, no theme can reasonably be excluded as possible subject matter for the sages' enterprise.

3.2.1.4 Other important themes

a) The sages

In his discussion of the sages Crenshaw indicates that the scale of proof is tipping in the direction of the existence of a separate class of professional sages in Israel (2010: 24-26). According to him the wisdom literature reflects interests that are at variance with Yahwism, leading to harsh criticism from the prophets against the sages and against wisdom's influence. The high degree of artistic skill in composition and arrangement demand "a unified world view and ample leisure to master sapiential traditions" (Crenshaw, 2010: 25). The sages did not possess political power and their concern for justice voiced a protest to God or observed the harsh facts of life. At the very least, Crenshaw concedes, sages saw themselves as a separate "wise" group in contrast with another group labelled as "fools". The wise/foolish division replicates the Egyptian moral contrast of the silent one and the passionate one (Crenshaw, 2010: 26).

b) The Solomonic Tradition

The central figure of King Solomon as the canonical sage *par excellence,* and the Solomonic age as the age of enlightenment are thoroughly questioned by Crenshaw (2010: 41-50). He deals with the Ethiopian legends depicting a lustful and deceitful Solomon in the thought provocative meeting between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. He also discounts every instance of the depiction of Solomonic wisdom[59] in Deuteronomistic history, pointing to the late language and vocabulary, as well as the typical stylistic traits of popular legends and folklore.[60] In building his case against Solomonic wisdom, Crenshaw also enlists the negative depiction of wisdom narratives that date early in the Hebrew Bible[61]. These narratives depict that "humans who acquired *ḥokmā* did not always use it to accomplish noble goals" and he states that "wisdom was not viewed as an attribute of God until quite late in the Hebrew Bible" (Crenshaw, 2010: 46). His own explanation for the mountain of fantasy that surrounds Solomon is quite simple. It is the fundamental premise of the wise that folly leads to death, and wisdom leads to life, wealth, and happiness. Since Solomon was the wealthiest man in Israel, it naturally follows that he must have been wise. The development of the legend grows from the ancient claim of royal wisdom and grows into a full blown legend, where wisdom and wealth consummated their marriage in the incident between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. "Over time the canonical principle latches onto this glorification of Solomon, attaching to his name the third division of the Hebrew Bible" (Crenshaw, 2010: 50).

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[59] "Solomon's dream at Gibeon (1 Kgs 3:4-15), the royal judgement in the case of the disputed parentage (3:16-28), and the king's literary activity (4:29-34)" (Crenshaw, 2010: 44).

[60] See also Scott, R. B. Y. 1976. 'Solomon and the Beginning of Wisdom', in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom,* LBS, Ed. Orlinsky, H. M. New York: KTAV Publishing House, pp. 84-101.

[61] Crenshaw provides the following examples of a negative perspective on wisdom: the crafty serpent seducing the first woman, Jonadab devising a plan that Amnom could have his way with Tamar, as well as the wise woman of Teqoa, and the mother in Abel who used certain craftiness (wisdom) to achieve questionable goals (2010: 46).

As far as the Solomonic enlightenment era is concerned, Crenshaw acknowledges the possibility of Solomon actively promoting intellectual activity, which could have led to extended knowledge, a humanistic spirit, and a new understanding of God's activities, all of which possibly carry the seed that could develop into scepticism. However, according to him there is little evidence for this hypothesis. He postulates that sacred and secular thinking co-existed from very early on, and the harsh reality of Solomon's ruthless quest for wealth, his tyrannical oppression of subjects, and exorbitant taxes do not create a favourable setting for humanism (Crenshaw, 2010: 48-49).

Crenshaw builds a convincing case against Solomon as sage *par excellence,* thoroughly discounting the fantasy weaved around him. However, it is still important to realise that the legend of Solomon's wisdom was powerful enough to entice sages to use him as reference in their literature.

c) Scepticism

In a chapter called "Wisdom's Legacy", Crenshaw deals with the birth of scepticism as well as important deposits of the sages' literary activities, namely: creation theology provides humans with the ability to cope, and wisdom poses a viable alternative to Yahwism (2010: 229-247). These themes are not dealt with in Crenshaw's initial premises, markers, or definition of wisdom but, in my opinion, gives valuable information on how to discern and understand wisdom literature.

Crenshaw distinguishes between scepticism, which is both critical and affirming, pessimism, which is totally indifferent to cherished beliefs and traditions, and cynicism, which shows a deeply rooted contempt for life. In the Hebrew Scriptures there is no sign of cynicism, while Qoheleth and the teachings of Agur belong to the category of pessimism (Crenshaw, 2010: 231).

Both scepticism and religious fervour are forged in the "matrix formed by the disparity between the actual state of affairs and a vision of what should be in a perfect universe" (Crenshaw, 2010: 230). Consequently both scepticism and doubt are grounded in faith. Crenshaw quotes Priest saying "scepticism without religion is impossible but also that religion without scepticism is intolerable" (2010: 231).[62]

In his argument Crenshaw questions the dominant hypothesis that scepticism rose from a historical crisis, signifies a worn-out culture and is exclusive to an elitist community. He postulates very convincingly that scepticism features very early in Hebrew Scriptures and that it was a popular and pervasive phenomenon in Israelite society (Crenshaw, 2010: 232-242).

The scepticism grew from the incongruence between confessions of God's salvific engagement with his special people in the past, and present reality, striking at the heart of Jewish religion – "God's goodness if not the very existence of the Divine" (Crenshaw, 2010: 242).

[62] Priest, J. 1968. 'Humanism, Scepticism, and Pessimism in Israel', *JAAR* 36, pp. 323-324.

The defenders of God, taking the form of the Deuteronomy scroll, emphasised the depravity of humankind, the mercy of God, and the choice between life and death for each individual. The stark dogma of exact retribution increased the power of God and decreased human potential, ultimately limiting human knowledge to earthly concerns (Crenshaw, 2010: 238-239).

Even in early wisdom literature this seed of scepticism is rooted in convictions about God. God's freedom to do as He pleases is the unknown factor that "hovered over every attempt to control fate" (Crenshaw, 2010: 239). At first this element of surprise was accepted along with the belief in God's goodness. In Job grew the awareness that God can be the enemy of believers, and in Qoheleth "God is wholly indifferent to human beings" (Crenshaw, 2010: 240) and humans are morally depleted and incapable of understanding the mystery of God and creation.

In the wake of growing scepticism, wisdom offers a viable alternative to Yahwism for those who fail to see God's hand in history, and to those who are more religiously tolerant. Wisdom discredited prophesies as God's voice and pushed revelation back to the moment of creation. Where humans fail to understand creation's hidden mysteries, Woman Wisdom stepped onto the scene to fill the gap. "*Ḥokmâ* is born from God's passivity" (Crenshaw, 2010: 209). She represents "an eternal principle of rationality that exists in an undefinable relationship with the Creator" (Crenshaw, 2010: 245).

The impact of this sapiential view is a focus not on past glory or future hope, but on the present encounter where the total human experience is stacked with revelatory capacity, and where "God's truth coincided with human insight" (Crenshaw, 2010: 245). In the present encounter the sages are primed with centuries of experience, which prepares them to live meaningfully, even in the face of enigmas like suffering and death (Crenshaw, 2010: 246-247).

The juxtaposition of Yahwism and wisdom is an interesting but contested hypothesis, that has yet to be proven. What is of more value for our current endeavour in Crenshaw's treatment of scepticism, is the sages' acute ability to perceive the gap between reality and the ideal, and to reflect thereon with flair and insight, using form and content to criticise formerly held world views, as well as proposing new ways of engaging reality. The sages' attitude of scepticism and honest engagement with reality could be a valuable indicator of the wisdom enterprise.

d) Revelation

In an earlier work Crenshaw discusses the notion that the theology of wisdom literature is a theology of creation (1976: 26-35). He makes three important observations: 1) Creation theology supplies the concept of established order (by the Creator at the time of creation) that binds the cosmic, political, and social fabric together, but is always threatened by chaos. Chaos is a fundamental threat in human perversion, in human ignorance, and in the tension between God's presence and the silence of a distant ruler. 2) Creation theology is used to defend God's justice – this defence is compelled by the threat of chaos. 3) Creation theology is not on the periphery, but at the heart of the theological enterprise when it functions to cement belief in divine justice. "In a word, the question of divine justice cannot be separated from that of

creation, both in the sense of an initial ordering and continual creation in the face of defiant chaos within man and external to him" (Crenshaw, 1976: 34).

In the third edition to his benchmark publication Crenshaw also deals with creation theology at a different level, as revelation, in a new chapter called "The Reciprocating Touch: Knowledge of God" (2010: 207-225). He notes that the sages differ among themselves on the matter of knowledge of God, and points us to revelation in wisdom. Revelation in wisdom is found in traditional revelation forms, Woman Wisdom, conscience and natural law.

In Job 38-42 Yahweh appears in a dark scene, riding of the wings on a tempest in a typical self-disclosure that spills over into wisdom literature from a prevailing understanding of revelation, although the content of his speech has little in common with other revelations – the idea of a Creator being the only mutuality (Crenshaw, 2010: 210-211). In Job 4, Yahweh appears in the stillness of a whispered word in Eliphaz's deep sleep that brings to mind the prophetic oracle, as well as Adam's, Abraham's, and Jonah's drowsiness in moments of Yahweh's activity (Gen 3:21, 15:12, Jonah 1:5) (Crenshaw, 2010: 211-214).

Woman Wisdom is a unique feature of wisdom literature and for Crenshaw a form of mediated revelation. Probably preceded in ancient Egypt by *Ma'at*, she evolved from a metaphor to divine emanation, and functions as a comfort in theodicy, in the absence of Yahweh. In Wisdom's initial portrayal (Prov 8:22-31), she is intimately associated with cosmogony. No matter how the controversial '*āmôm* of Prov 8:30 is translated (master craftsman or darling child), she observes Yahweh's creative work and desire to bring joy to humans. Sometimes she is hidden like Yahweh (Job 28). In Sirach she is the mist that engulfs the earth, the pillar of cloud in the temple, a majestic tree, a fruitful vine and eventually she is the Law of Moses. In Wisdom of Solomon the metaphor of intimacy between lovers is used for the relationship between Pseudo-Solomon and Wisdom. She becomes an emanation of the Creator, the guiding spirit who protects Israel from harm, and she develops into the prime mover of sacred history (Crenshaw, 2010: 215-218).

As far as conscience is concerned, Crenshaw recounts different wisdom texts that may or may not refer to an innate human quality installed at birth, but this quality is useless for human appropriation (2010: 220-221). This unknown quality does not accord with traditional views of revelation, but is a definite though limited and obscure discussion between the sages.

As far as natural law is concerned, it is clear that Crenshaw avoids using the term creation or creation theology. He refers to Psalm 19, where nature declares divine glory without words. The sages believe that nature holds the clues for successful living. They studied natural phenomena and deduced lessons through analogical reasoning. They move from creation to the fear of Yahweh as both the beginning and pinnacle of knowledge. The fear sometimes culminates in religious duty, or dread, but always with an element of awe (Crenshaw, 2010: 222).

3.2.1.5 Common identifiers in Crenshaw's approach

Crenshaw is one of the top scholars in the field of canonical, deutero-canonical, and extra-biblical wisdom literature, and boasts a lifetime of study and reflection. He does not only know the field but also the development of academic thinking on the subject. What I find extremely difficult in Crenshaw's approach to wisdom literature, is the absence of a coherent methodology in his introduction and the consistent application thereof on the various texts. There is overlapping of themes in his definition, markers, and premises of wisdom literature. There are also themes lacking, for example, some important leitmotifs of his earlier thoughts, like chaos and creation. His fresh new approach to revelation is powerful but is not taken up in his definition, markers, or premises of wisdom literature. For the purpose of the current research project – to build some kind of model for identifying wisdom thought and literature – at this stage it is necessary to cluster his thoughts on common identifiers. For the sake of consistency I will approach his themes in terms of: 1) General characteristics 2) Literary characteristics, and 3) Characteristics of content. These characteristics will be brought into dialogue with the other wisdom scholars identified in chapter one. Under the rubric of "Sages" I have not found any characteristics that can be used yet, but I keep this element for the time being in case there is more to learn from the other scholars.

General Characteristics		
Comparable international works	Comparable international works	3.2.1.1 b)
Sages	General notes on sages	3.2.1.4 a)
Literary Characteristics		
Form	Typical wisdom forms	3.2.1.1 d)
Rhetoric	Skillful argumentation	3.2.1.2 c)
Characteristics of content		
Solomonic Tradition	References to Solomon	3.2.1.4 b)
Subject Matter	Living in reality	3.2.1.1 d), 3.2.1.3 d)
Cosmology	Creation Order Threat of chaos Fear of the Lord	3.2.1.1 c), 3.2.1.2 a), 3.2.1.4 d) 3.2.1.1 c), 3.2.1.2 a), 3.2.1.4 d) 3.2.1.2 a), 3.2.1.4 d) 3.2.1.2 b), 3.2.1.4 d)
Anthropology	Human's search for meaning/ success Egocentric and self-indulgent goals Intellectual capacity for good choices Focus on pragmatism, moderation, and restraint	3.2.1.1 c), 3.2.1.2 a), 3.2.1.3 a) 3.2.1.1 c), 3.2.1.2 a), 3.2.1.3 c) 3.2.1.2 a), 3.2.1.2 c), 3.2.1.3 b) 3.2.1.2 a)
Scepticism and critique	Critique against traditional norms and accepted beliefs	3.2.1.2 a), 3.2.1.4 c)

3.2.2 Mining for more: input of other wisdom scholars on the identified wisdom characteristics

In this segment the characteristics of wisdom literature as clustered and identified from the work of Crenshaw in section 3.2.1, will be submitted to the scrutiny of other scholars for deeper thinking and clearer formulation.

3.2.2.1 General characteristics

a) Similar texts in the Ancient Near East

Other scholars do not identify the existence of comparable Ancient Near Eastern texts as a characteristic of wisdom literature, though they do use these texts for comparison. I find it doubtful that the existence of comparable Egyptian and/or Mesopotamian literature could be accepted as a good indicator that a text can be identified as wisdom literature. Such reasoning can unnecessarily exclude texts that show Wisdom traits, but are exclusive to a certain context. For example: the omen texts of Mesopotamia are deemed part of the Mesopotamian body of wisdom literature, but have no Israelite and Egyptian counterparts. For the purposes of consistency we retain this characteristic as part of our model.

b) Sages

Perdue notes the differences between sages in power, wealth, status, and theology. Some sages were ambitious and wanted to become political advisors. Others were already rich aristocrats motivated to maintain the status quo. Some focused on law and traditions in the quest for knowledge, honour, and piety, but all of them were driven to leave a legacy in corporate memory, and sought to gain influence (Perdue, 2007b: 326-327).

Whybray extensively questions the existence of a class of professional sages. He reviews all the passages cited as proof of *ḥākām* as a designated class of royal counsellors, as well as the use of the word in Psalms, Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes, and concludes that there is no evidence for the existence of such a class or school of the wise (1974: 15-54). According to him, the term "wise men" or "the wise" is a modern phrase that limits the discussion. He then focuses on the three canonical wisdom books to learn more about their authors (Whybray, 1974: 55-70).

In the diversity of Proverbs Whybray finds educational intent, the activity of court scribes and the bulk of the material written for an educated adult audience not confined to the court circles, with the goal of instruction and, in limited parts, also entertainment. He identifies the authors as gifted intellectuals who are deemed *ḥākām* by their contemporaries and successors (Whybray, 1974: 60-61). The author(s) of Job was familiar with some of Proverbs sayings as well as a variety of Israelite traditions. Rather than a professional wise man, the author of Job may be an "educated man of genius belonging to the same social class as the characters whom he portrays" (Whybray, 1974: 67). In the same sense the author of Ecclesiastes uses earlier proverbial literature, however, with his own individualistic agenda. He seems to be a man of great experience and great wealth – he rejects pleasure as the fruit of wealth not as a fanatical ascetic or a poor man jealous of what he has never possessed – but as the "genuine experience

of a man of means who has become disillusioned" (Whybray, 1974: 69). In his generation he might be of a similar social class than the author of Job, only more urbanised.

Whybray concludes that though there is absolutely no sign of a professional class of sages, it is clear that in different generations there have been highly intellectual and educated individuals with above average literary ability, who engaged the common theme of the struggle of human life. The continuation of this intellectual tradition is natural – each generation will have been familiar with some of the oral traditions, as well as the earlier written works (Whybray, 1974: 69-70).

Murphy points out that we are ignorant about the authors of wisdom literature, because of the lack of historical and sociological information (Murphy, 2002: 192).

Whether or not the sages belonged to an official class is not important to our current project. What can be said without a doubt is that the sages were highly intellectual, extremely skilled in handling language, and very perceptive about creation, human nature, life, and cult.

For our current research project, the item "sages" under "General characteristics" in the table at the end of section 3.2.1, did not deliver any stable element that can be used in our list of wisdom characteristics. The exceptional language and rhetorical skills of the sages will be dealt with under literary traits.

3.2.2.2 Literary characteristics

a) Form

Whybray discusses form and vocabulary as popular criteria for the identification of the intellectual tradition (1974: 71-156). The use of form-critical methods for the detection of the intellectual tradition in passages which differ in form from that of the books in which the intellectual tradition is normally at home, is clearly limited. "Consequently the forms proper to the intellectual tradition in its classical guise are unlikely to occur in other types of literature except as quotations, imitations, or interpolations" (Whybray, 1974). Forms that have previously been identified as specific to wisdom literature, like the admonition, the woe-oracle, the numerical saying, the rhetorical question, and the comparative saying, have seriously been questioned as being unique to wisdom. These forms were probably common stock of life in Israel in which writers of literature shared. According to Whybray it is important to distinguish between the original significance of a genre and the way in which it is employed in a new context. In this regard he refers to Isaiah's use of a love song genre in 5:1-7 while he certainly did not occupy the office of troubadour (1974: 73).

With reference to wisdom and other genres, Bartholomew and O'Dowd correctly argue that it is unlikely that Israelite authors would draw sharp lines between forms when they read and wrote their literature (2011: 23). They also make an important observation about the form of wisdom books: "'wisdom' (Hebrew *ḥokmâ*) finds its home above else in the *poetical books* – among metaphors, wordplay and more imaginative literature" (Bartholomew and O'Dowd, 2011: 23).

b) Vocabulary

Whybray conducts an extensive study of wisdom vocabulary but acknowledges the dangers of subjectivism, arbitrariness, as well as circular argumentation (1974: 155).

He starts off with words derived from the root *ḥkm* namely *ḥākam* meaning "to be wise", *ḥākām* meaning "wise", and *ḥokmā* (also *ḥokmōt*) meaning "wisdom" (Whybray, 1974: 75-85). From the 346 times this root occurs in the Old Testament, Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes account for 189 times - which is more than half. He evaluates the use of the root and the context in which it is used within each occurrence outside the wisdom literature, to search for the significant influence of the intellectual tradition. Whybray then eliminates the references to manual skill, magic, general human intelligence (not concerned with the problem of human life), the wise or wisdom of foreign countries, the use of the words in irrelevant contexts, as well as cases where the interpretation of the word is too uncertain, or clearly dependent on other sources. This left him with a small number of books and passages that, according to his hypothesis, clearly show the influence of the intellectual tradition.[63]

As far as other "wisdom words" are concerned, Whybray selects the words occurring frequently in Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes and then eliminates words that are common to life, e.g. *ṣaddïq, töb, limmad, yāda',* as well as other words that has no bearing on the intellectual tradition, like *ḥābal* meaning "to seize as a pledge". He divides the remaining words according to their occurrences within and outside the wisdom books into four general categories (1974: 121-150):

1) Words occurring only in Proverbs, Job and/or Ecclesiastes. Since these words only occur in the canonical wisdom books, they are of no use in identifying the intellectual tradition in other texts.

Words included in this category:

'lp cal "to learn" pi. "to teach"; *ḥᵃsar-lēb* "one who lacks sense"; *sikᵉlūt* "folly"; *'āṣēl* "sluggard"; and *taḥbullōt* "guidance" (Whybray, 1974: 124).

2) Words that occur frequently in Proverbs, Job, and/or Ecclesiastes, and also in other Old Testament traditions. None of these words can be allocated to a possible vocabulary of the intellectual tradition and is thus useless in a quest to identify other texts influenced by the intellectual tradition.

[63] The Joseph narrative (Gen 37-50); the introductory section of Deuteronomy (Deut 1-4); the song of Moses (Deut 32); the succession narrative (11 Sam 9-20 & 1 Kgs 1ff); the history of Solomon (1 Kgs 3-11); a small group of Psalms (Pss 19, 37, 49, 51, 90,, 104, 107, 111, 119); Isa 1-39; Jeremiah; Ezek 28; and Daniel (Whybray, 1974: 85-87).

Words included in this category:

ʾāwen “mischief, evil”; *ʾᵉnōš* “man”; *ʾōraḥ* “human or divine behaviour”; *ʾašrē* “blessed”; *bōgēd* “treacherous person”; *bïn* “understand”; *daʿat* “knowledge”; *derek* “road/way”; *hebel* “worthlessness”; *ḥāqar* “explore/investigate”; *yʿl* “profit/benefit”; *kaʿas* “vexation/grief”; *mēbïn* “understanding/intelligent”; *mūsār* “discipline/instruction/punishment”; *mᵉzimmā* “plan/thought”; *maʿga;* “path/track”; *māšāl* “proverb/saying/taunt”; *nābāl* “stupid/impious”; *nᵉtībā* “path”; *sōd* “meeting/friendship/discussion/consultation/plan/secret”; *ʿawlā* “wickedness”; *ʿēsā* “counsel/plan”; and *rāṣōn* “favour/delight” (Whybray, 1974: 124-134).

3) Words characteristic of Proverbs, Job, and/or Ecclesiastes, occurring occasionally in other Old Testament traditions. These words occur more frequently in the intellectual tradition and some of them may be characteristic of that tradition, but none of them is entirely confined to it and therefore none of these words is useable as identifiers.

Words included in this category:

ʿᵉwïl “fool”; *ʾiwwelet* “folly”; *ḥānēp* “godless”; *ḥēqer* “investigation/examination”; *ʿiqqēš* “perverse/crooked”; *ʿormā* “shrewdness/cunning”; *śkl* “be wise/consider/ successful/make wise/teach”; *tᵉbūnā* “understanding”; and *tōkaḥat* “rebuke/punishment” (Whybray, 1974: 134-140).

4) Words apparently exclusive to the intellectual tradition. These words, together with *ḥkm* constitute a criterion for the detection of the influence of the intellectual tradition (Whybray, 1974: 142-150).

Words included in this category:

bīnā “understanding”	Proverbs	14 x	Deuteronomy	1 x
	Job	8 x	Isaiah	3 x
	Qoheleth	0 x	Jeremiah	1 x
			Daniel	5 x
			Chronicles	6 x
baʿar “stupid”	Proverbs	2 x	Psalms	3 x
	Job	0 x		
	Qoheleth	0 x		
kᵉsīl “stupid”	Proverbs	49 x	Psalms	3 x
	Job	0 x		
	Qoheleth	18 x		
lēṣ “scoffer/arrogant man”	Proverbs	49 x	Isaiah	1 x
	Job	0 x	Psalms	1 x
	Qoheleth	18 x		
leqaḥ “understanding/teaching”	Proverbs	6 x	Deuteronomy	1 x
	Job	1 x	Isaiah	1 x
	Qoheleth	0 x		

nābōn "intelligent"	Proverbs Job Qoheleth	9 x 0 x 1 x	Genesis Deuteronomy 1 Samuel 1 Kings Isaiah Jeremiah Hosea	2 x 2 x 1 x 1 x 3 x 1 x 1 x
sākāl "senseless/foolish"	Proverbs Job Qoheleth	0 x 0 x 5 x	Jeremiah	2 x
ʿārūm "prudent/shrewd/cunning"	Proverbs Job Qoheleth	8 x 2 x 0 x	Genesis	1 x
tūšiyyā "wisdom/success"	Proverbs Job Qoheleth	4 x 6 x 0 x	Isaiah Micah	1 x 1 x

Armed with these words as criteria for the detection of the influence of the intellectual tradition, Whybray adds a few passages to the list belonging to the intellectual tradition, namely: the creation narrative in Gen 2ff., Pss. 1, 73, 92 and 94 as well as two glosses added to Hosea and Micah (Whybray, 1974: 154).

These words, as identified by Whybray, provide a valuable source of typical wisdom words against which the words of Song of Songs can be evaluated.

c) Rhetoric

According to Perdue the sages aesthetically combine form, metaphor, rhetoric, and content to engage the imagination in the transmission of beliefs, while reflecting on God, world and existence (1994: 69).

Rhetorical criticism focuses on the literary work, and how artistic compositions render meaning. Perdue mentions various literary techniques that strengthen unity and coherence, e.g. anaphora (repetition of initial words of clauses, lines or strophes), refrains (repeated words or phrases at the end of strophes or subunits), interweaving words or phrases that blend the units, inclusions (repetition of opening words/ideas at the close of the unit), and parallelism (strophes/lines within a poem that parallel one another in some fashion). He also mentions onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance, and different structural techniques like chiasms, acrostics, etc. (1994: 68-69).

Crenshaw offered a powerful point that the sages did not fall back on divine authority as an external force. For power of persuasion they relied on skilful presentation of the argument, as well as on the audience's internal capacity to perceive life intellectually and to make self-interested choices based on reason. That is why the sages used rhetorical devices liberally.

d) Metaphors

Perdue makes a valuable contribution with his focus on metaphors as part of sapiential language and rhetoric. These metaphors are much more than poetic enhancements; they carry linguistic constructs of God, the cosmos, and human existence (1994: 339).

Perdue identifies several distinct metaphors for cosmology, anthropology, and reality in wisdom literature:[64]

i) Metaphors in the cosmological tradition

Fertility

In the Ancient Near East the sexual prowess and fecundity of deities maintained the seasonal rhythm for fertility. Intercourse was important, and gods were metaphorically presented as consorts, lovers, and spouses. In Israelite wisdom literature, Woman Wisdom is portrayed as God's lover. She is the instrument of creation and mediator between God and humans. She is painted as a fertility goddess who lures eager students to her embrace. In contrast Folly is a seductive harlot leading fools to their death (Perdue, 1994: 330).

Artistry

In ancient myths deities are sometimes described as architects or builders. In Israelite wisdom God is an artisan with the skill to design, build, and maintain a well-ordered world.[65] Woman Wisdom also constructs a spacious house and invites students to take up residence.[66] (Perdue, 1994: 331).

Word

By the power of the Creator's words the cosmos originated and is also maintained. In this metaphorical cluster, language and words create worlds of coherence, beauty, and justice. This is also true of sapiential language and words through which the sages present the possibility of well-being and success. The power of word and language can, however, also be destructive. Foolish words can result in misery and failure (Perdue, 1994: 332).

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[64] This section deals with metaphors in the cosmological and anthropological tradition, as well as metaphors for reality, as identified by Perdue, but as part of the literary characteristics under section 3.2.2.2. It is not to be confused with characteristics of content (3.2.2.3) which also deals with cosmology (section 3.2.2.3 c) and anthropology (3.2.2.3 d) as sub-categories.

[65] "By wisdom the Lord laid the earth's foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place; by his knowledge the deeps were divided, and the clouds let drop the dew" (Prov 3:19-20).

[66] "Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out its seven pillars" (Prov 9:1).

Battle

Creation is forged in the battle between the divine warrior and chaos, and though chaos was defeated, the boundaries are not uncontested. Chaos continually threatens order (Perdue, 1994: 333).

ii) Metaphors in the anthropological tradition

Birth and nurture

Sages freely used birth and nurture metaphors in speaking about God as Creator and sustainer of the cosmos. God gave birth to Woman Wisdom, formed Job in the womb and raised him as a child. Woman Wisdom calls on humans as her children, to follow in her ways to find success (Perdue, 1994: 334).

Artistry

Divine activities weave humans' bones and sinews and the potter creates humans from the soil. God is the skilful artist who shapes human beings in the divine image. "Humans were wondrous creations of beauty, elegance, and delight with intelligence, life, and vitality" (Perdue, 1994: 334).

The Breath of God

According to Job all flesh is dependent of the breath of God (Perdue, 1994: 334).[67]

King

The king metaphor focuses on humans as royal surrogates to rule over creation. Woman Wisdom chooses kings and princes to rule (Prov 8), Elihu believes God shows no partiality to rulers over the poor, and exalt the righteous to rule as kings (Job 34 & 36), while Job discovers that his destiny is slavery not kingship. Even Qoheleth uses the king metaphor to place his words in the mouth of King Solomon (Perdue, 1994: 335).

Slave

In Mesopotamia gods determined the lot of humans. Human's primary duty were to serve them. In the creation story, the first man was formed to work in the garden (Gen 2-3). Job and Qoheleth experience human existence as slavery, and Job even launches a rebellion against the rule of God. This metaphor also focuses on the depravity of humans, their inability to create and sustain order, and affirms predestination and divine rule (Perdue, 1994: 336).

[67] "The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty give me life" (Job 33:4).

iii) Metaphors of reality

Kingdom

Creation is a kingdom where a deity reigns and civilization is established. In Job (Job 1-2) Yahweh rules a heavenly assembly, and Bildad (Job 25) sees God as a powerful, stern God. No part of this empire is hidden from God. In Proverbs 8, Woman Wisdom rules and chooses her representatives (Perdue, 1994: 337).

Household

The world is also a home with certain social roles and intimacy in relationships. In this household Yahweh is depicted as parent and husband, and Wisdom is portrayed as child and lover (Prov 8). Humans are also Wisdom's lovers (Perdue, 1994: 338).

City

Life's activities are actualised in images of a city. Woman wisdom goes to the city, walks along its walls, teaches in the gates, stands in the market and corners, and seeks for students. The city is not only the social location of wisdom teaching, but it constructs images of reality (Perdue, 1994: 338).

Garden

The use of the garden metaphor depicts "an environment teeming with life made possible and nurtured by divine providence" (Perdue, 1994: 338).

3.2.2.3 Characteristics of content

a) Connection to the Solomonic tradition

According to Murphy, serious scholars accept that ascription to Solomon is based on his reputation rather than genuine authorship (2002: 3).

b) Subject-matter

Murphy argues that the most striking characteristic of Israelite wisdom literature is the absence of themes, which are typically considered Israelite or Jewish (2002: 1). Wisdom literature deals with immediate life questions, and with an intensity of a life/death situation as expressed through the image of the tree of life (Murphy, 2002: ix).

Wisdom literature is conspicuously devoid of the traditional covenantal and salvation history themes, but Perdue points out that sages did deal substantively with cultic matters, such as rituals, vows, prayers, and sacred places. However, the motivation for participation still centres on the benefits received from observing rules and law. (Perdue, 1977: 345-350).

Whybray discounts the use of subject matter to discern influence of the intellectual tradition as universal human problems are liable to occur in almost any form of writing (1974: 72).

It is not difficult to see that the sages took great pains in putting the message (content) in an attractive and memorable, even educational container (form). The problem is not the marriage of form and content, but the delineation of what constitutes wisdom form and wisdom content. The sages did not dwell in isolation, and they consequently had the choice of a variety of genres and stylistic devices at their disposal as instruments to carry the content. At most we can identify the forms that were most used – not as a restriction and exclusion of other forms. As far as content is concerned, it is clear that the sages struggled with life's fundamental questions, therefore no theme can reasonably be excluded. The deliberate exclusion of historical faith language seems a more prominent characteristic than listing themes that may be included.

c) Cosmology

Most of the scholars note the importance of creation and the order of the cosmos in wisdom literature (Perdue, 1977: 135-137; Crenshaw, 2010: 12-13,221-223; Bartholomew and O'Dowd, 2011: 19,27-29; Zimmerli, 1976: 316). According to Perdue, justice is intimately connected to divinely created order and forms the basis of retribution, but order is not hostile. Order is beneficiently structured for human existence. In Job and Qoheleth order and retribution are questioned in the wake of the crises of state, but in Sirach evil is part of created reality and again finds purpose in the punishment of the sinners (Perdue, 1977: 135-137).[68]

Bartholomew & O'Dowd mention how wisdom is grounded in the traditional biblical imagery and theology. In the creation account in Genesis we find the magnificent beauty of creation, the possibility of life and death, the serpent's distorted truth, revolt, distrust, disgrace and judgement. The tree of knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life become powerful symbols for the loss of divine intimacy. The wisdom authors pick up the sexual, intellectual, and cosmic language and themes from Genesis 1-3. Woman Wisdom witnessed creation and she herself becomes the tree of life for all who takes hold of her (Bartholomew and O'Dowd, 2011: 29).

Creation as centre and focus of wisdom literature also provides the theological thrust. "Wisdom thinks resolutely within the framework of a theology of creation" (Zimmerli, 1976: 324). The primary theological assertion of the sages is "God as Creator" (Perdue, 1977: 137). God created a just and well-integrated order by using wisdom principles, because He is a just and wise God. "God's wisdom is the divine capacity to design, form, and order creation, and to rule providentially over what has been brought into being" (Perdue, 1994: 326). For early sages God is just and transcendent, as well as compassionate and immanent. When the dogma of retribution was proven untrue by human experience, the theological structure of the wise crumbled. In this crisis God is still perceived as Creator, but in Job He is stripped from righteousness, and in Qoheleth He becomes hidden to anthropological understanding (Perdue, 1977: 137-139).

[68] In section 3.2.1.4 c) it was stated that Crenshaw questions the hypothesis that the crisis of state lead to the questioning tone of Job and Qoheleth.

Bartholomew and O'Dowd point out the important differences between Israel and her Ancient Near Eastern neighbours on creation. Although Israelite wisdom's focus on creation is closely connected to the concept of *Ma'at* in Egypt and law in Mesopotamia, the difference of understanding lies in the single divine source of Israelite creational order. Israel's ethical monotheism is radically different from Babylonian polytheistic naturalism, and Egypt's confusing consubstantial pantheon. *Ma'at* was the goddess of creation and the pharaoh was her divine ruler. Yahweh is sole Creator and also true King – the kings and judges are forced to rule under Yahweh's wisdom and authority (Bartholomew and O'Dowd, 2011: 44-46,261-262).

In the creation theology of wisdom literature, chaos is always a fundamental threat (Crenshaw, 1976: 26-35). In Israelite wisdom literature even chaos is viewed differently from that in Egypt and Mesopotamia. Chaos is not all-powerful or monopolised between competing gods; chaos is part of the creation, but under control of Yahweh – "the only true and wise God" (Bartholomew and O'Dowd, 2011: 44).

Bartholomew & O'Dowd (2011: 33-38) argue that it is also important to realise the different world views of our modern minds from the ancient way of relating to the world. In today's civilization we orient our experiences through reason and scientific concepts. When a person today refers seriously to mystery, the transcendent, or the spiritual, he or she seems out of touch with reality. For the ancient mind the human life comprised a personal (I-Thou) and non-scientific relationship with creation. Time was primarily understood in terms of nature's rhythms and the problem of death did not create the need for medical advances, but was accepted as a mystery, like chaos, darkness, seas/waters, and creatures like the Leviathan. "Personifications like Israel's Woman Wisdom and Egypt's female goddess, *Ma'at,* were used to create a personal and sensual relationship to the order and rhythm of life in the world" (Bartholomew and O'Dowd, 2011: 34).

It is no wonder then that the "fear of the Lord" is Israel's radical reaction to the *mysterium tremendum* (repulsive mystery) and *mysterium fascinans* (mysterious attraction) of the Creator God (Bartholomew and O'Dowd, 2011: 25). This term is embedded in Proverbs (14 times) and also appears in Job 28:28 and Ecclesiastes 12:13, albeit in modified form. It represents the heart of Israelite religion, in sensing Yahweh's holiness and power, as well as embracing Him in love and obedience (Bartholomew and O'Dowd, 2011: 24-25). In their conclusion about the theology of Old Testament wisdom, Bartholomew and O'Dowd also identify wonder as an important element of the fear of Yahweh (Bartholomew and O'Dowd, 2011: 263).

It is important to point out the dynamic nature of wisdom thought, wisdom theology, and wisdom literature in the light of creation as the stable centre of wisdom. In this regard the recent publication of Perdue which focuses on the theological history of wisdom literature, offers valuable insight. The different nuances of wisdom literature even within the same wisdom texts (Proverbs) indicate how wisdom interacts with external stimuli. The role of the sage and the literary compositions were influenced by different cultures at different times. The theology of the sages responded to historical and social developments. With this in mind, it is

indeed remarkable that "creation continues as the centre of the matrix of sapiential theologies produced over eight centuries" (Perdue, 2007b: 326).

It is clear that the presence of a focus on creation is one of the most important identifiers of wisdom literature.

d) Anthropology

The human component in wisdom is also prominent for Perdue. He refers to "anthropological order" as the way of living for those who sought harmony with "beneficient spheres of world order" (Perdue, 1977: 139). Those who follow the divinely instituted norms embedded in anthropological order, will experience well-being and those who do not, plant seeds for their eventual destruction. There are only two religio-ethical groups – the righteous and the wicked (Perdue, 1977: 139).

Like Crenshaw, Perdue's definition of wisdom focuses on the aspect of "search". Perdue even builds a three tier "search" definition: 1) human's search for order in reality, 2) human's search for meaning and self-understanding and 3) human's quest to master life (Perdue, 1977: 227n3). The goal of the search is also well-being:

> *The wise man perceived his task to be that of discovering his proper place, function, and time within the order of reality. By finding his place, function, and time, he becomes aware of the meaning of existence for himself and may achieve self-understanding (Perdue, 1977: 227n3).*

e) Scepticism and critique

Though sages did support the observance of cultic participation (Perdue, 1977: 354-355) and also affirmed certain cultic dogmas (1977: 351-354), they also functioned as serious critics of the cult (Perdue, 1977: 356-359). Job questions both the theology and the practice of the lament-thanksgiving cycle. The expectation of reward for piety changes into a disinterested piety based on the response to a majestic and mysterious deity. Qoheleth, unable to discern order in the cosmos, views God as an inscrutable transcendent depot which voids prayers, divine blessings, and also the idea of beneficience through cult (Perdue, 1977: 358-359).

It is clear that wisdom literature is not afraid to be sceptical and critical of formerly held world views.

3.3 A MODEL FOR DEFINING WISDOM

From the previous discussion we can add some characteristics to expand the list of wisdom characteristics. The characteristics are also formulated in the form of questions that can be put to Song of Songs.

General Characteristics		
Comparable international works	Are there any comparable international works?	3.2.1.1 b)
Literary Characteristics		
Form	Are there any typical wisdom forms present in Song of Songs?	3.2.1.1 d), 3.2.2.2 a)
Vocabulary	Are there any distinctly sapiential words utilised in Song of Songs?	3.2.2.2 b)
Rhetoric	Are there signs of skilful argumentation in Song of Songs? Did the author of Song of Songs use rhetorical devices?	3.2.1.2 c), 3.2.2.2 c) 3.2.2.2 c)
Metaphors	Are there any of the metaphors identified by Perdue present in Song of Songs?	3.2.2.2 d)
Characteristics of content		
Solomonic Tradition	Did the author use the Solomonic tradition in Song of Songs?	3.2.1.4 b), 3.2.2.3 a)
Subject Matter	Are the themes in Song of Songs about living in realtiy?	3.2.1.1 d), 3.2.1.3 d), 3.2.2.3 b)
Cosmology	Is creation an important element in Song of Songs? Are there signs of God's created order in Song of Songs? Is the threat of chaos present in Song of Songs? Is there any sign of a "fear of the Lord" reaction in Song of Songs? (duty/dread/awe)	3.2.1.1 c), 3.2.1.2 a), 3.2.1.4 d), 3.2.2.3 c) 3.2.1.1 c), 3.2.1.2 a), 3.2.1.4 d), 3.2.2.3 c) 3.2.1.2 a), 3.2.1.4 d), 3.2.2.3 c) 3.2.1.2 b), 3.2.1.4 d), 3.2.2.3 c)
Anthropology	Is there a search for meaning/ success in Song of Songs? Are there signs of egocentric and self-indulgent behaviour in Song of Songs? Is there an appeal to intellectual capacity for good choices in Song of Songs? Is there a focus on pragmatism, moderation, and restraint in Song of Songs?	3.2.1.1 c), 3.2.1.2 a), 3.2.1.3 a), 3.2.2.3 d) 3.2.1.1 c), 3.2.1.2 a), 3.2.1.3 c) 3.2.1.2 a), 3.2.1.2 c), 3.2.1.3 b), 3.2.2.3 d) 3.2.1.2 a)
Scepticism and critique	Is there any sign of scepticism or critique in Song of Songs?	3.2.1.2 a), 3.2.1.4 c), 3.2.2.3 e)

3.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter we endeavoured to put forward a model for defining wisdom. This was first of all done by exploring the work of Crenshaw. On the basis of this information, characteristics of wisdom were clustered under common identifiers and subcategories. These characteristics were then enriched with the views of other scholars, to determine their applicability in a model for defining wisdom. In section 3.3 a table was put forward that constitutes a list of characteristics of wisdom literature, formulated in the form of question.

In the next chapter these questions will be used in an accumulative argument approach to determine if the Song of Songs can reasonably be read as wisdom literature.

CHAPTER 4

THE WAY OF A MAN WITH A MAIDEN[69]

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Two the history of interpretation showed a clear dualistic divide between the spiritual and sexual interpretations of Song of Songs, as well as the lack of a frame of reference for reading this enigmatic book. In Chapter Three we explored the characteristics of canonical wisdom literature, and ended with a list of characteristics that can be utilised to test Song of Songs for possible identification with wisdom literature.

In the current Chapter the model for wisdom literature will be applied to Song of Songs.

4.2 TESTING SONG OF SONGS AGAINST THE QUESTIONS OF THE WISDOM MODEL

4.2.1 General characteristics

4.2.1.1 Are there any comparable international works?

Archaeological discoveries presented us with a vast number of love manuscripts from the Ancient Near East (Barbiero, 2011: 26). Studying the characteristics of Song of Songs in the light of these non-canonical literary texts was, according to Murphy, the "single most important factor in discerning the ascension of the modern critical views" about Song of Songs (1990: 41).

In the ancient orient fertility cults occasioned the inception of love literature for the sacred couple whose sexual union guaranteed the fertility of the earth. On the occasion of a new year a ritual sacred marriage ceremony was celebrated, where a priestess and a king/priest represented the divine couples such as the Sumerian Inanna and Damuzi, the Akkadian Ishtar and Tammuz, the Ugaritic Anat and Baal, and the Egyptian Isis an Osiris (Barbiero, 2011: 26).

a) Sumerian love literature

Murphy (1990: 48-49) sites Kramer in dividing Sumerian love poetry into three broad categories: 1) the courtship of Dumuzi and Inanna, 2) texts depicting rites of the *hieros gamos* (sacred marriage) of Dumuzi and Inanna or their representatives, and 3) courtly love songs sang at festivals.[70] According to Barbiero interpretations of Song of Songs as a comparable cultic drama did not convince, but managed to show thematic influence, for example, the identification of the woman with the earth (vineyard), the theme of the garden, the identification of the woman with heavenly bodies, and the strange use of plural in the

[69] "There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a maiden" Prov 30:18-19).

[70] Kramer, S. N. 1963. 'Cuneiform Studies and the History of Literature: The Sumerian Sacred Marriage Texts', *PAPS* 107, p. 489.

description of intimacy. It is also important to point out the obvious differences: the explicit description of sex is contrasted by the Songs' vague metaphoric references, while the focus on the fertility of the country for a new season, does not feature in Song of Songs at all (Barbiero, 2011: 26-27). Murphy also points out the similar themes of youthful desire, liveliness, mutual passion, the maternal house, dialogues, and problematic family interferences; obvious differences are the absence of ritual descriptions, the absence of prayers for fertility, and the absence of divine blessings (1990: 49-50).

b) Ugaritic, Akkadian and other cuneiform texts

Examples of Ugaritic love poetry are meagre. The only text worth mentioning is the "Birth of the Gracious and Beautiful Gods", where the impregnation of two young women by the high god El is depicted. They conceive and bear the deities "Dusk" and "Dawn". The only similarity with Song of Songs is the theme of "fruit-sweet kisses", while the obvious difference is the focus on procreation rather than love or love making (Murphy, 1990: 55-56).

The closest Akkadian parallel seems to be an old Babylonian dialogical poem which is interpreted either as King Hammurabi attempting to persuade a priestess to marry his son, or a woman abandoned by her lover, but persevering and eventually reuniting with him. The only similarities with Song of Songs feature in the woman's yearning for the man and a chorus of gossipy women resembling the role of the daughters of Jerusalem (Murphy, 1990: 56).

A Middle Assyrian text depicts fifty-four titles of what is presumed to be secular love lyrics, for example, line forty-six's "During the night I thought of you", reminds one of the Shulamite's soliloquy in 5:2-6. The Babylonian divine love lyrics are also fragmentary and incoherent with bizarre reference to genitalia and unclear sexual content (Murphy, 1990: 55-56).

Murphy's conclusion is that cuneiform texts "bear little resemblance to the primary themes and subtle eroticism of the Song's poetry" (1990: 57).

c) Egyptian love poetry

From all the amorous texts in the Ancient Near East, Egyptian love songs come closest to the Song of Songs (Barbiero, 2011: 27).

Fox refers to a collection of Egyptian love poetry he classifies as an anthological collection (P. Harris 500, groups A and B; P. Chester Beatty 1, group C). These poems consist of independent and autonomous songs. There are no signs of repeated refrains, keywords, deliberate connection between units or dialogue between lovers as in Song of Songs. Another collection has six complex songs ("The Flower Song", "The Crossing", "Seven Wishes", "The Orchard", "The Stroll", and "Three wishes"). These songs all have a far higher degree of formal structure than Song of Songs and display a clearly uniform pattern throughout (Fox, 1985: 204).

There is a huge range of similarities between Song of Songs and Egyptian love songs, namely a humanistic perspective, absence of obvious cultic interests, mortal and youthful lovers, anonymity of lovers, social obstacles, *wasfs*, desire for an absent lover, sexual yearnings,

lovesickness, reference to the female lover as "sister" and the use of burlesque[71] (Murphy, 1990: 47). Barbiero also adds to the list the role of the mother and mother's house, the kiss as an exchange of perfumes, love, embrace, union, and mutuality between lovers. As in the Song there is neither concern for procreation, nor is there a moralising theme. Love is passionately celebrated for its own value (Barbiero, 2011: 27). The main difference between Egyptian love songs and Song of Songs is the latter's dialogical speech. Egyptian love songs use first person speech and juxtaposed soliloquies. The lover is always referred to in the third person and they never seem to be in each other's presence. These differences emphasise the important role of dialogue as a stylistic device for achieving unity in Song of Songs (Murphy, 1990: 47-48).

Barbiero makes an important observation about the context in which the Egyptian songs had their beginning:

> *The environment in which these songs have arisen is not a cultic but a sapiential one, the court schools designed to prepare public officials. … Like the Song, the Egyptian love songs do not belong to popular poetry, but are works of exquisite literary construction* (2011: 27).

4.2.2 Literary characteristics

4.2.2.1 Form

a) Are there any traditional wisdom forms in Song of Songs?

Most scholars agree that the *genre* of Song of Songs is love songs, or lyrical love poems – though some see it as a collection,[72] and others as a unitary work[73]. As far as poetic literature, metaphors, wordplay, and imagination are concerned (refer to section 3.2.2.2 a), Song of Songs fits well into the body of wisdom literature.

The challenge surrounding the identification of wisdom forms have already been pointed out in chapter three. As far as traditional wisdom forms are concerned, the climactic unit in Cant 8:6c-7b displays an artistic *mashal* (saying/proverb), typical of wisdom literature.[74] Tromp cites Eissfeldt's characteristics of a *mashal* and applies it on this unit (Tromp, 1990: 92-93):[75]

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[71] Burlesque, also called "literary fiction", is role-playing between characters where the boundaries between reality and fantasy are blurred. Murphy identifies three categories: 1) royal fiction, 2) servant fiction, and 3) shepherd fiction (1990: 47).

[72] Barbiero refers to the following scholars who view Song of Songs as an anthology: Gordis (1974); Falk (1982); and Keel (1994). (Barbiero, 2011: 19n90).

[73] Scholars accepting Song of Songs as a unitary text: Fox (1985), Exum (2005a), Assis (2009), Barbiero (2011).

[74] Tromp's division of the climactic unit (1990: 89):

6c For love is strong as Death,

6d Passions fierce as Hell.

6e Its flashes are flashes of fire

i) A metrical form, preferably 3+3;

Though there is an obvious metrical form in 6c-f, though scholars still disagree on the rhythm.

ii) Parallelismus membrorum

In 6a-b there is a cumulative parallelism, and in both 6c-f and 7a-b there are synonymous parallelisms.

iii) Consonantal and vocalic assonance

There are striking repetitions of different sounds throughout these lines.

iv) A terse and vivid style

The richness of sounds, the metrical qualities, and use of personified forces culminate in vivid imagery.

v) A general truth normally made clear with examples

The imagery in the passage is unique and expresses a general truth incisively.

It is clear that this unit displays all the characteristics of a typical wisdom saying. In addition, the message of this climactic unit is displayed throughout the Song, in the different episodes of the lovers' desires and closeness.

4.2.2.2 Vocabulary

a) Are there any distinctly sapiential words in Song of Songs?

Not one of the words exclusive to wisdom as identified by Whybray (see section 3.2.2.2 b block 4) is used in Song of Songs. This is not surprising if one keeps in mind the very different tone and subject of Song of Songs in comparison with the didactic tone of Proverbs, and the sceptical and questioning tones of Qoheleth and Job. It is not strange not to find a reference to "arrogance", "stupidity", or "intelligence" in a poem describing lovers' yearnings and activities.

A word left unconsidered by Whybray that appears only in Prov 8:30 and Cant 7:1, is the word "master hand" or "master craftsman". In Prov 8:22-36, the birth and function of Woman Wisdom is described. She was brought forth by Yahweh as the first of his creative acts (v 22), she witnesses creation, and is the craftsperson at his side (v 30). She rejoices in Yahweh's presence (v 30) and delights herself in humans (v 31). This term is also found in Cant 7:1, where the graceful legs of the female lover are the work of a master craftsman. Reese finds this word an important linguistic link between Song of Songs and the biblical sages (1983: 244).

6f Flames of Yah

7a Mighty waters cannot quench Love,

7b No torrent can sweep it away.

[75] Eissfeldt, O. 1913. 'Der Maschal im Alten Testament', *BZAW* 24. Giessen: Topelmann.

Reese also sees the hand of sages in the *hapax legomena* which abound in Song of Songs – more than in any other biblical book (1983: 207). "Such words make passages difficult to understand and create the type of ambiguity that fosters variety in interpretation" (Reese, 1983: 207). Murphy also acknowledges the presence of the *hapax legomena* as significant. "The wealth of symbolism, the large number of *hapax legomena*, and the high literary quality would suggest that this is *Kunstdichtung*, poetry produced by an educated class" (Murphy, 1981: 102).

4.2.2.3 Rhetoric

a) Are there signs of skilful argumentation in Song of Songs?

A pressing question with regard to the argument in Song of Songs, is the question of unity. If Song of Songs is regarded as a collection of separate love songs, it would be difficult to find a skilfully presented argument. If there is unity in Song of Songs it is possible to explore the probability of a flowing argument.

According to Fox there are six arguments against unity, which he finds weak (1985: 202-209):

i) Some of the units are connected with wedding ceremonies and others not. Fox points out that there is no proof that these units were actually sung at ceremonies. It could be part of unmarried lovers' occasional idealistic references to marriage.

ii) The reference to a variety of geographical locations in Song of Songs. A variety of geographical locations do not necessarily imply disunity. The book of Jonah contains multiple locations, but is still read as a unit.

iii) The varied linguistic characteristics indicate diverse dates of composition. Fox argues that the mixture of language points to a transitional phase in language and the fact that all parts of Song of Songs display the same mixture, strengthens the argument for unity.

iv) Song of Songs contains doublets. Fox reckons that doublets only point to composite authorship when they differ significantly in style. The doublets in Song of Songs display the same style and vocabulary.

v) The units display a variety of persona, for example: two male characters, a king and a shepherd, and two female characters, a peasant and a city girl. Fox refers to Fohrer who distinguishes between characters and disguises.[76]

vi) Other Near Eastern love poetry, like certain Egyptian texts, consist of short poems collected in anthologies. In section 4.2.1.1 there is a detailed reference to Fox's dealing with comparable love texts from Egypt. There are clear differences between Song of Songs and these anthologies.

[76] Fohrer, G. 1970. *Introduction to the Old Testament.* Trans. by D. Green, London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

Since Song of Songs was received as a unity without titles or indicators of separate songs as it happened in the Psalter, "the burden of proof lies primarily on those who wish to assert *disunity*" (Fox, 1985: 202,205). The strongest and most common argument for disunity in Song of Songs is the lack of comprehensive structure (Fox, 1985: 205). Fox acknowledges that no satisfying sequential or schematic structure has been identified, but Song of Songs' cohesion lies in a network of refrains, associative sequences, consistency of characters, and a loose narrative framework (Fox, 1985: 209). Barbiero (2011: 12) cites Grober[77] who argues that the unity in Song of Songs is founded on the coherent use of metaphors; it is "unthinkable that such a coherent use of metaphor is to be attributed to different hands".

Other contemporary scholars like Exum (2005a), Assis (2009), and Barbiero (2011) also opt for unity.[78] Exum's initial intention with her commentary was to interpret Song of Songs both as a unity and as a collection of individual poems. As the project progressed, she found it more and more difficult to identify independent units. Eventually she gave up and concluded "that only by reading it as a whole can we do justice to its poetic accomplishment" (2005a: 37). For Assis the unity of Song of Songs is much more than thematic affinity and common motifs, metaphors, and similes. Though it is not a plot-based narrative, it is a unitary literary work with a beginning, middle and an ending in which there is development in the sexual relationship between a man and a woman (Assis, 2009: 266-270). The premise of Barbiero's commentary is that Song of Songs is a unitary work with a precise lyrical structure and an ideological programme (2011: xi).

As far as argument is concerned, Sadgrove identifies Song of Songs 8:6-7 as the climax of the book, where the meaning of love is probed in typical style of wisdom's proverbial form.[79] What is described in this climactic unit – the power of love – is on display in the rest of the Song: "from coquetry, flirtation and courtship, through lovesickness, separation, and fear of loss, to fulfilment and consummation" (Sadgrove, 1978: 245, 248). Sadgrove compares this climax with Ecclesiastes 12:13 – a universal statement explaining the meaning of the whole document (1978: 246).[80] Exum notes how these climactic verses in Song of Songs could be at home in the book of Proverbs where we "would no doubt praise the affirmation that love is strong as death as an inspired insight" and that we would discuss the allusion to "cosmic powers" and "the struggle between life and death" as typical wisdom discourse (2005b: 78).

Fox also makes an important observation as to the placement of this climactic unit:

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[77] Grober, S. F. 1984. 'The Hospitable Lotus: A Cluster of Metaphors. An Inquiry into the Problem of Textual Unity in the Song of Songs', *Sem 9*. pp. 86-112.

[78] Also Fox (1985), Viviers (2006).

[79] "…for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned"(Cant 8:6b-7).

[80] "Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." (Coh 12:13).

The statements of love's power and value are most appropriate towards the end of the song, for they derive their force and credibility from the experiences of the speakers. At the start of the poem they would sound grandiose, even somewhat hollow. Now they are a satisfying and convincing statement of truths the poem has demonstrated (1985: 218).

As far as the skilful presentation of the argument is concerned, Exum has much praise for the poet: "…our poet is too good a poet, too subtle and too sophisticated, to preach to us directly about love. Here in these verses, near the poem's end, the female protagonist speaks to her lover not, as she has up till now, about their love, but about love itself" (Exum, 2005b: 79). The content of the poem is the proof of the affirmation that love is as strong as death. Though the climax gives us an explanation, the poem is the medium for the message (Exum, 2005b: 79). So skilful is the argument that Exum calls it "poetic genius" (2005b: 80).

According to Dell, the adjuration refrain from the Shulamite to the daughters of Jerusalem in 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4, can be linked to the climactic unit in 8:6b-7 as part of editorial wisdom links.[81] The refrain also ponders the nature of love (Dell, 2005: 15) and thus forms part of the argument that love is "an irresistible and quasi-fatal factor, a dynamic and vital force, a creative, divine power which unite a man and woman in an exclusive and lasting relationship" (Tromp, 1990: 94), for which the daughters must rather wait patiently (Dell, 2005: 15). For Reese this cautionary refrain is an expression of personal responsibility and a major underlying thrust of the Song as a wisdom composition (1983: 221, 225).

The argument unfolds in the poetic pictures of a sexual relationship between the girl and her lover. According to Fox, there even seems to be a loose narrative framework as well as slow movement.[82] At the beginning (1:5-6), the woman expresses frustration about her brothers making her tend the vineyard rather than developing herself – her own vineyard. At the end, in the climactic unit, the Shulamite speaks of what she has discovered – the "inexorable power of love" (Fox, 1985: 217-218). With this new self-understanding the girl confidently challenges her brothers who still plan to guard her chastity (Cant 8:8-9).[83] She alone decides her destiny and her decision is to bring contentment to her lover. The movement in the middle is slow and displays recurring patterns of sexual desire. Johnston proposes that the repetitions, refrains, and parallel panels are arranged in cyclic fashion. The cyclic arrangements prevent linear

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[81] "Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires" (Cant 2:7).

"Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by die does of the field: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires" (Cant 3:5).

"Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires" (Cant 8:4).

[82] The idea of a narrative framework is strengthened by Barbiero's reference to the prologue and epilogue that forms an *inclusio* (2011: 502).

[83] "We have a young sister and her breasts are not yet grown. What shall we do for our sister, for the day she is spoken for? If she is a wall we will build towers of silver on her. If she is a door, we will enclose her with panels of cedar" (Cant 8:8-9).

reading, but create an ebb and flow that imitates the repeated longing/search/fulfilment experience of the lovers (Johnston, 2009: 297; 305). The pattern of love, desire, and passion supports the message as Assis (2009: 269) explains:

> *Lovers can never be satisfied, they will always want more. They seek a total, absolute experience. The secret of true love is that it can never be satisfied. Therefore, after every peak, a decline is bound to occur, and after every decline the lovers will again be uplifted to a new, even higher peak, but only to descend once again to a low point after which they will ascend again. This endless cycle that lovers undergo, which stems from the all-consuming nature of love, can seem restless and incomplete.*

Even the open ending of Song of Songs seems to reiterate the message: "Closure would mean the end of desiring… The Song strives to be ongoing, never-ending … desire that is never sated because it folds back upon itself" (Exum, 2005a: 86).

There is no doubt that a strong argument is skilfully presented in the Song. In Crenshaw's marriage of form and content, Song of Songs passes the test with flying colours. The poetical language, creatively arranged rhetorical devices, the presentation of the whole text, and the content form a strong cohesion that presents a powerful message.

b) Did the author of Song of Songs make use of rhetorical devices?

According to Exum, the genius of Song of Songs lies in the way the poem shows us that "love is as strong as death" (Cant 8:6), from both the man's and the woman's point of view. She identifies dialogue as the main rhetorical device that is applied in different "controlling poetic strategies" (Exum, 2005a: 1 ,3). Within these strategies certain rhetorical techniques are employed to achieve the desired results (Exum, 2005a: 3-13):

i) The illusion of immediacy (Exum, 2005a: 3-5).

The impression is created that the action is taking place right now, virtually unfolding in front of the reader. The key to achieving this impression is the dialogue between the lovers, a unique feature even in comparison with Egyptian love literature. The direct speech creates the illusion of being in the present and hearing what the lovers say. Grammatical imperatives, jussives, and cohortatives impart urgency to the present moment, for example, the erotic opening in 1:2 "Let him kiss me", but also "draw me after you", "let us run" (1:4), "tell me" (1:7), "rise up" and "come away" (2:10,13), etc. The use of vocatives strengthen the illusion of the lovers' presence when endearments like "my beautiful one" (1:10) and "my sister, my bride" (4:10) are uttered. The employment of participles also vividly portrays immediacy, such as when the man is approaching and leaping across the mountain (1:8), standing (1:9), and knocking (5:1).

ii) The blurring between anticipation and consummation of love (Exum, 2005a: 9-11).

The sophistication of the Song can be seen in the unique quality that it can be read both as delicately erotic, and at the same time explicitly sexual. Coitus is expertly veiled by rhetorical devices, like double entendre, metaphor or roundabout description. The reader can slip from a

literal level of erotic desire to a figurative level of consummation. The figurative is cleverly encoded in the suggestive images and is activated by the reader.

iii) The illusion of a never-ending cycle of love (Exum, 2005a: 11-13; Assis, 2009: 270).

The progression in Song of Songs creates the illusion of a repetitive pattern of desire and fulfilment. This is achieved by the repetition of themes, episodes, and refrains. The powerful open end is the Song's most important technique for immortalising the love and sexual desire between the lovers.

iv) The illusion of universal lovers (Exum, 2005a: 8-9; Barbiero, 2011:28).

The Song's lovers are not presented as specific lovers with specific identities; they are rather portrayed as archetypal lovers. This is achieved by burlesque – by taking on various guises. The man is a king and a shepherd, while the woman is a member of the royal court, as well as a peasant who tends sheep and keeps a vineyard. She is described as black (1:5) as well as white as the moon (6:10). The illusion is created of both young lovers, and lovers experienced in the art of lovemaking.

v) The illusion of the reader's participation (Exum, 2005a: 7-8)

By the act of reading the reader is privy to the erotic intimacy between lovers, which can be experienced as voyeurism. To soften the reader's participation, the poet introduces an audience with which the lovers converse and are aware of. This audience is the daughters of Jerusalem that are sometimes addressed, sometimes they speak, and sometimes their presence is implicit. Through rhetorical questions the woman not only addresses the poetic audience, but ultimately also the reader.

Murphy also praises the poet for "her" skills in using rhetorical devices: "In sum, the multifaceted rhetorical structures of the Song contribute in substantial measure to its aesthetic beauty, as well as to a strong sense of its literary coherence", and the poet deserves recognition (1981: 91).

4.2.2.4 Metaphors

a) Are there any of the metaphors, as identified by Perdue, present in Song of Songs?

This section deals with metaphors in the cosmological and anthropological tradition, as well as metaphors for reality, but as part of the literary traits – see section 3.2.2.2 d. It is not to be confused with characteristics of content (4.2.3) which also deal with cosmology (section 4.2.3.3) and anthropology (4.2.3.4) as sub-categories.

i) Metaphors in the cosmological tradition

Fertility

Song of Songs abounds with metaphors of fertility. Henna-blossoms (1:14), fragrant white flowers, were known in ancient Egypt to "contain life"; the Lotus flower (2:2) was known for life-giving and life-enhancing powers; the pomegranate (4:3) was used for decorations, as aphrodisiac, and as a symbol of life (Keel, 1994: 115, 143). All the references to gardens, vineyards, water, blossoms, etc. create the impression of a fertile cosmos ready to procreate.

Artistry

Though there is no specific reference to the Creator, the beauty, vibrancy and abundance of creation as described in Song of Songs, in the minds of the Israelite hearers, created a consciousness of the artisan behind it all – the Creator.

Battle

Canticle 8:6b and 8:7a is written in cosmic language. Love is personified as a pun that refers to the "flame of Yah", as well as a "most vehement flame". Mot, the king of the underworld, is personified as "death". The danger of the waters in verse 7 refers to the mythical forces of chaos (Reese, 1983: 251). Death is an elemental force that pursues humans as long as they live (Murphy, 1990: 197).

Though the metaphor of chaos is explicit in these verses, the battle with this powerful force of love extends to the world of the girl who experiences the agony of sexual desire so potently that she risks crossing social boundaries, challenging her oppressive brothers, and facing the violence of city-guards at night.

Keel also notes that the Lotus flower not only represents regeneration, but also a transition from dark primeval waters to an ordered world (Keel, 1994: 80).

ii) Metaphors in the anthropological tradition

Artistry

The metaphor for anthropological artistry features clearly in Cant 7:1 with the reference to the master craftsman or artisan who formed/created the graceful legs of the female lover.

King

According to Reese, Song of Songs frequently makes use of "royal fiction" when the title of "king" is given to the man (1983: 216). The king of Cant 1:4 is indeed the youthful male lover (Fox, 1985: 98). In the same way Perdue sees Qoheleth using the king metaphor to place his words in the mouth of Solomon, Song of Songs uses the king metaphor to display a world of riches and abundance typical of royal life.

Slave

The Shulamite keeping and tending the vineyard for her patriarchal brothers, is faintly reminiscent of the first human working in the garden. According to Keel, this job was normally reserved for men who could drive away thieves and animals (1994: 49). However, this is more of the burlesque feature where the woman plays the role of a lowly peasant girl – part of the working class.

Garden

In Song of Songs the garden does not only feature as a metaphor for reality, but also as a metaphor for the woman. "The woman is a garden whose fruit are ripe for the plucking, and a vineyard to be tended" (Exum, 2005a: 27). The metaphors for the male lover's sexual activities are to enter the garden, to gather, to eat, and drink (Cant 5:1).

iii) Metaphors of reality

Household

Reference to "the mother's house" in Cant 3:4 and 8:2, suggests the mother's role in love and arrangements of marriage, and functions as a counter to the frequent use of "father's house" in the Bible. The act of bringing her lover to her mother's house is an expression of her intention to make their love public (Exum, 2005a: 137).

City

At least two incidents are without a doubt in the city – the dream sequences where the girl wanders the streets; at one stage she finds her lover, and on the other occasion the guards of the city find her and beat her (Cant 5:7).

Garden

Though the venue in Song of Songs changes regularly, the field or garden is frequently the metaphor for the lovers' tryst. In Cant 1:17 their bed is beneath cedars and firs. In Cant 2:12-13 he invites her to come and see the flowers, the early figs, and the blossoming vines. In Cant 6:11 the male lover goes to the grove of nut trees in the valley where vines are budding and pomegranates bloom, and again in Cant 7:11 he invites her to go to the vineyard.

4.2.3 Content

4.2.3.1 Solomonic tradition

a) Did the author use the Solomonic tradition in Song of Songs?

Crenshaw dismisses the legend attached to Solomon's wisdom (see section 3.2.1.4 b). In the wisdom texts, however, two of the canonical wisdom texts are linked to Solomon. In Proverbs Solomon is directly identified in the opening verses, and in Ecclesiastes he is alluded to in the

opening verses.[84] In Song of Songs Solomon is also directly mentioned in the heading, as well as in the text.[85]

The question remains: Why is Song of Songs explicitly linked to Solomon? Is it not because Solomon was the patron of Israel's wisdom literature – at least in the eyes of the final redactor who added the ascription? Reese contends that the ascription of Song of Songs to Solomon is grounded both on his wisdom and his reputation of having many lovers (1983: 215), and that references to Solomon within the text of Song of Songs, like "curtains of Solomon" in Cant 1:5 or "Solomon's carriage" in Cant 3:7, is a literary technique to link the poem to the patron of wisdom literature (Reese, 1983: 216).

It is interesting how scholars easily accept the role of Solomon as patron of Israel's wisdom in texts like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, but not in Song of Songs. It is possible that the reason for Song of Songs' exclusion lies entirely within the dualistic inclinations of interpreters, who still struggle to see anything but the erotic content of Song of Songs.

4.2.3.2 Subject matter

a) Is the theme/s of Song of Songs about living in reality?

Sadgrove indicates that the theme of Song of Songs is a profound comment on the sexual aspect of being human, just like Job comments on suffering, and Qoheleth on the meaning of life (1978: 248-248). Ceresko adds that the Canticle's focus on human love as a powerful experience noticeably exhibits the concerns of the wisdom movement (1999: 167). Bergant also notes that in the wisdom tradition humans learn from experience; in Song of Songs love is the ultimate experience in life (1997: 140).

The theme of sexuality and the use of erotic language are not foreign to the scope of the sages. Proverbs refers to the sexual relationship between a man and the wife of his youth in 6:18-19, and in Proverbs 30:18-19 Agur reflects on the limits of wisdom; on things that defy his understanding, one of which is "the way of a man with a maiden". In Proverbs 1-9 the difference between wisdom and folly is explained in erotic language and vivid, sexual images. Even Qoheleth encourages readers to "enjoy life with your wife, whom you love…" (9:9).

Sex and sexuality are an integral part of life and of God's created order, which the sages found worth reflecting on. Again we can pose the question: Is it not the dualistic thinking of interpreters that puts sex and sexuality in the realm of secularity, or non-wisdom perspectives, that leads to the exclusion of Song of Songs from the classification of canonical wisdom literature?

[84] "The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel" (Prov 1:1), and "The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem" (Eccl 1:1).

[85] "Solomon's Song of Songs" (Song of Songs 1:1).

b) Are the typical Israelite historical faith themes absent in Song of Songs?

As is typical in canonical wisdom literature, there is no sign of salvation history, or covenantal themes in Song of Songs. However, more than in Proverbs, Job, and Qoheleth, themes that are typically Israelite abound in Song of Songs. Solomon is more than an ascription in Song of Songs; he is referred to in 1:5, 3:7, 9, 11 and in 8:11, 12. There are references to David (4:4), the noble warriors of Israel (3:7), Jerusalem (1:5; 2:7; 3:5, 10; 5:8, 16; 6:4; 8:4), and Tirzah (6:4).

4.2.3.3 Cosmology

a) Is creation an important element in Song of Songs?

Creation is an overwhelming element of Song of Songs. The beauty and lavishness of creation are described so vibrantly that you can hear the doves cooing; you can smell the lilies and taste the honey. "Its poetry is so sensual that we can almost taste the figs and almonds and smell the fragrant oils" (Robinson, 2004: 12). Grossberg notes that the poet uses metaphors of creation to evoke human love: "…humanity, nature and love are all budding, blossoming, and ripening into fullness and readiness" (2005: 242). Creation is good and beautiful, bodies are good and beautiful, making love is just as good and beautiful. As far as embodiment and creation are concerned, Yarber observes:

> *The belly dance in chapter seven helps us recall that our bodies were created as 'good' – not depraved, less-than, or despised by God – but 'good'. As the lover gazes upon the dancing Shulamite with complete adoration and delight, so too does God gaze upon each of our dancing bodies, delighted and in awe. Our bodies are 'crafted by artist hands,' beautiful, beloved, and a dancing place for the sacred* (2008: 478).

According to Oosthuizen (2011: 108-110), creation is also much more than "goodness". Creation becomes an additional character that is silently, and yet abundantly present, witnessing the lovers' desires and anxieties,as well as the ecstasy of their oneness. Fischer (2011: 65) identified Cant 4:16-5:1 as the theological hub of Song of Songs. He identifies three speakers, the female, the male, and a third voice that invites the lovers: "Eat, friends, drink, and be drunk, beloved!" (Fischer, 2011: 65). He suggests that this is the voice of an omnipresent narrator who is present in this garden of intimacy, addressing the lovers. At a theological level he identifies this as the voice of God (Fischer, 2011: 66). In the Wisdom tradition this might be the voice of creation, the omnipresent witness of the lovers in the Song, or even Lady Wisdom who delights herself in humans (Oosthuizen, 2011: 110).[86]

b) Are there signs of God's created order in Song of Songs?

Both Fox (1985: 218) and Sadgrove (1978: 247) refer to the spring setting as a constant creational backdrop for the lovers in Song of Songs. For Sadgrove springtime functions as a

[86] "Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind" (Prov 8:30-31).

theological self-revealing pattern and example to humans. Springtime represents the "wholesomeness and promise of the male-female relationship, and, implicitly, divine approval" (1978: 247). In God's created order, spring is the time for renewal, bearing fruit and procreation. The lovers find themselves reacting with exuberance to the influential example of creation, and without concern for the restrictions of society or cult, integrate themselves into this created reality. "The parallelism between the awakening of nature and the awakening of love in the human heart is very close" (Barbiero, 2011: 117).

c) Is the threat of chaos present in Song of Songs?

Though Song of Songs seems blissfully ignorant of trouble, there are several threats present, as well as a reference to primordial forces of chaos.

The Shulamite experiences the threat of patriarchy. The angry brothers want to control her chastity (1:6 & 8:8-0) and the city guards punish her for breaking social norms (5:7), though it seems that she is not deterred in her quest for her lover (5:8 & 8:10).

In Cant 2:15 the little foxes threaten to ruin the vineyards. Barbiero argues that this threat must be understood metaphorically as the dangers connected to sexuality – the "foxes" probably represents rivals who are competing for her affections (Barbiero, 2011: 119).

That love is a powerful threat to the well-being of the lovers is also visible. In Cant 2:5 the woman admits that she is "faint with love", and in 6:5 her eyes "overwhelm" him.

In the climactic unit (Cant 8:6), the language of love is put on a cosmological level where love is personified and put against forces of chaos and death (Dell, 2005: 14). The parallelism is synonymous. Love and jealousy are synonymous, as well as death and Sheol. Jealousy is a violent emotion often associated with anger. The struggle is between love and death, and the quest is the possession of the loved one (Exum, 2005a: 251).

d) Is there any sign of a "fear of the Lord" reaction in Song of Songs?

It has already been mentioned that Song of Songs displays many themes typical of Israel, but the absence of the Israelite God, Yahweh, is conspicuous. As Viviers notes, "The poet of the Song of Songs is far too sophisticated to attribute this to a slip of the mind" (2008: 447).

It may be that the poet avoided direct reference to Yahweh due to the Song's alternative perspectives on gender relations, but it is more likely that the poet used wordplay to draw the attention to Yahweh. Barbiero (2011: 3) also finds it significant that the term *dôdî* (my beloved) is uttered exactly 26 times, a sacred number in Hebrew gematria, denoting the tetragrammaton YHWH.

The wordplay is clear in the oath charge in Cant 2:7 and 3:5, where the divine names "Almighty" and "Lord of Hosts" are hidden in the sentence "by the gazelles or the wild does" (Assis, 2009: 73n62) as similar sounding phrases (Murphy, 1990: 133n7). Not all scholars accept this hypothesis. Keel reckons the reference to gazelles is a remnant of a mythological allusion to the Egyptian goddess of love. He discounts the wordplay on the name of Yahweh on grounds of

1) precaution of using Yahweh's name is unknown in the Old Testament and 2) it seems to be a modern trend to substitute God's name with curse terms, for example "God" with "gosh" (Keel, 1994: 92). Keel's arguments are not convincing. The book Ester also avoids the name of God and one can scarcely compare the use of modern curse words with the poetical wordplay that is employed in Song of Songs.

Scholars are also divided about the interpretation of the expression *šalhebetyâ* in the Cant 8:6. Exum refers to the Masoretic tradition of Ben Asher, who reads the *yh* as part of the word and thus not as an explicit reference to the short form of Yahweh, versus the tradition of Ben Naphtali who reads it as two separate words and a clear reference to Yahweh (2005a: 253). Exum opts for the suggestive translation of "an almighty flame" (2005a: 243), Murphy (1990: 190) uses "flames of Yah", and Barbiero (2011: 436) "a flame of Yah". Reese finds it unfortunate that some translations like the Revised Standard Version use "a most vehement flame" instead of "the flame of Yahweh" because it diminishes the polemic against the cult of the dead and the deliberate ambiguity between Yahweh and the god of death. Reading the expression *šalhebetyâ* as "the flame of Yahweh", celebrates Yahweh's victory over gods of nature (Reese, 1983: 207, 251). In his commentary on Cant 8:6, Keel also describes the habit where Hebrew writers combine a noun with Yah(weh) to build a superlative, for example, the expression "Yahweh's noise" for thunder in Ps. 29:3-4, but opts for a more descriptive translation with "flaming bolts of lightning" (1994: 275, 270). In the light of Song of Songs' rich suggestive and figurative language, and clear Israelite themes, it would not be out of line to read *šalhebetyâ* as wordplay on Yahweh.

However, the greatest source of Yahweh's presence in Song of Songs is not in the poetical wordplay, but in the vibrant description of an abundant and dynamic creation. According to Sadgrove creation theology plays such a powerful role in wisdom literature that the divine name can be dispensed with, and the literature will still remain indisputably Yahwistic (1978: 248). Therefore, Bartholomew and O'Dowd deduce, "God is not absent, but he is not in the foreground; he is hidden behind the things, the source of wisdom, the foundation of cosmic order" (2011: 40). In Song of Songs the fear of the Lord reaction is not one of religious duty or dread, but an overwhelming awe before the mystery of creation and the mystery of a transcendent experience of sensual and erotic sexual desire and love between a man and a woman as so well versed in Prov 30:18-19:

> *There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand; the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a maiden.*

4.2.3.4 Anthropology

a) Is there a search for meaning/insight/success in Song of Songs?

The search is an important theme in wisdom literature and is also prominent in Song of Songs. On the surface the Shulamite searches for union with her lover in different cyclic episodes of

desire, longing, and fulfilment, or rejection. However, more important is her character development, whicht can be described as the quest for self-understanding.

Perdue (1977: 11) defines wisdom as the wise man's search for self-understanding in relationships with things, persons, societal and religious institutions, as well as the deity. Typical of a wisdom world view, this search is founded on the principle of "order" that permeates all of reality. If humans integrate themselves within this "order", they can achieve harmony. According to Oosthuizen (2011: 106-107) the Shulamite also searched for self-understanding, for understanding of her sexuality in relation to her cult, her patriarchal brothers, and societal constraints. From her experience in life, she came to know the ecstasy and agony of love. This experience compelled her to warn her friends, the daughters of Jerusalem, about the power of love: "Do not awaken love before the time is ready, because sexual love is as strong as death and passion is like a blazing fire!" She achieved harmony. Peace with herself is reflected in her answer to her brothers when they plan to guard her chastity:

> We have a young sister and her breasts are not yet grown. What shall we do for our sister, for the day she is spoken for? If she is a wall we will build towers of silver on her. If she is a door, we will enclose her with panels of cedar (Cant 8:8-9).

Then her confident answer:

> I am a wall and my breasts are like towers. Thus I have become in his eyes like one bringing contentment (Cant 8:10).

Within her "order" she found herself. She alone decided on her chastity, and her decision is to bring contentment to her lover. To him she was faithful and steadfast – like a wall. With him she shared her body – for him her small breasts were like towers. Her search was fulfilled and she attained success.

b) Are there signs of egocentric and self-indulgent behaviour in Song of Songs?

The sexual relationship in Song of Songs is not about the Shulamite embracing the traditional role of a young virgin and potential mother. She experienced love, desire, and sex; the relationship is depicted as "a profound source of human happiness" (Tromp, 1990: 95), and, in the light of Cant 8:10, we might add contentment. The two lovers are definitely indulging in satisfying their sexual needs and the joys of intimacy.

The lovers indulging in their sexual escapades automatically bring the question of free love to the fore. If the message of Song of Songs was pure celebration of sexuality, it could easily be interpreted as a licence to the so-called free love that is so characteristic of contemporary culture. Garber and Stallings note that "it seems as if contemporary culture has traded its birthright (a healthy expression of erotic desire) for a bowl of pottage (a pornographic culture that focuses on immediate gratification and consumption rather that the relishing of desire)" (2008: 464). The Song, however, though reflecting a sexual love relationship before marriage, has a powerful ethical (not restrictive or moralising) message. You choose what you do with

your own vineyard, but you should be prepared for the powerful emotions that you will have to deal with. Does this make the sexuality in the Song immoral? Viviers answers:

> *Allermins! Die seksuele moraliteit van die jong paartjie is aanprysenswaardig en ook navolgenswaardig. Hulle aanvaar die gawe van seksualiteit met oorgawe. Hier is geen ongefundeerde inhibisies dat die gees die liggaam in toom moet hou nie. Daar is ook geen hiërargie tussen eros en agape nie, liggaam en gees is in harmonie verenig in die omhelsing van die lewe en die liefde. Hulle verhouding is eksklusief en toegewyd, hulle het oë slegs vir mekaar en geen derde party is welkom in die intimiteit van hierdie verhouding nie. Die jong verliefde paar is immuun teen status, rykdom en mag, dit wat verhoudings gewoonlik vertroebel en vernietig. Trouens, hulle 'speel' ryk en arm, hoog en laag, kultuur en natuur en oorbrug die kloof tussen hierdie mensgemaakte dualismes wat eintlik nooit moes gewees het nie. Hulle vehouding is speels en interessant, hulle respekteer mekaar as gelykes en offer vir mekaar op. Hooglied vergestalt al die gekoesterde huweliksdeugde, maar ironies, buite die huwelik* (2006: 101-102).

The ethics and virtues reflected in the Song suggest that it is not marriage that is the sacred space for sexuality. It is not a secret that sexuality within many present-day marriages does not mirror either ethics or virtue. Rather, the Song suggests that sexuality in itself is a "good" created reality which has the capacity to be a holy act, a holy space of intimate communion. Indulging in such an exclusive sexual relationship, however egocentric, is not deemed irreligious in Song of Songs.

c) Is there an appeal to intellectual capacity for good choices in Song of Songs?

The adjuration refrain (Cant 2:7, 3:5 and 8:4) could be read as the Shulamite's intellectual appeal to the daughters of Jerusalem not to indulge in a sexual relationship too soon (Exum, 2005: 117-118; Assis, 2009: 73). However, the refrain could also be interpreted as an appeal not to disturb the lovemaking of the lovers (Fox, 1985: 109; Keel, 1994: 89; Barbiero, 2011: 93).

Viviers builds an argument for the "disturb" option around the placement of the refrain at the end of the periscope, after intimacy is achieved or alluded to. According to him a warning not to awaken love will instil a moralising tone into a book that celebrates sexual love (Viviers, 1989: 80-89). While his remarks on the placement of the refrain are accurate, his interpretation seems forced. It is also possible that in the afterglow of their union the Shulamite, from the experience of the powerful force of sexual desire, wants to warn her friends not to enter into a sexual relationship lightly. As far as the moralising tone is concerned, it may again be our dualistic thinking, now tilting to the other side of ignoring sexuality, which refuses to taint this enigmatic book with anything that remotely resembles reason. Exum's warning that this text is turning hardened feminist critics into bubbling romantics (Exum, 2000: 25), seems to carry over to male scholars wanting to protect a pure sexual thrust for the Song of Songs.

Evidence stacks in favour of the first option because the verb *'wr* is never used with the meaning "to disturb". Furthermore, the word *ʾahăbâ* is used in Song of Songs for love as an

abstract term in the climactic unit, not for the act of lovemaking. The woman is giving advice from her experience – that love is overpowering (Exum, 2005b: 118).

Whether you read the refrain as an appeal for good choices or not, the intellectual persuasion of the argument lies in the poetic snapshots of the power of love as already discussed in section 4.2.2.3.

d) Is there a focus on pragmatism, moderation and restraint in Song of Songs?

It is obvious that there is no focus on pragmatism, moderation or restraint in Song of Songs. The lovers show no restraint or moderation in their passionate verbal admiration or in their energetic search for physical unity.

4.2.3.5 Scepticism and critique

a) Is there any sign of scepticism or critique in Song of Songs?

Noegel and Rensburg are convinced that the Song of Songs might have functioned as an invective where Solomon is satirised. The Bible gives ample material for such a rebuke in 1 Kgs 11:1-13. Accordingly, Song of Songs portrays Solomon as lazy (sitting on a divan in 1:12, a litter in 3:7, and a palanquin in 3:9) and with his mother (3:11) who is credited for his crowning as king. Solomon's inclination to excess is also ridiculed in Kgs 8:11-12. Noegel and Rensburg also find many words in Song of Songs which point to a northern dialect of ancient Hebrew. They conclude that Song of Songs was written by an exceptionally gifted author who was "able to create the most sensual and erotic poetry of his day, and all the while incorporating into his work a subtext critical of the Judahite monarchy in general and Solomon in particular" (Noegel and Rendsburg, 2009: 167, 184).

In the same vein, Miles did an interesting study on the possibility of reading Prov 1:9 as satire on Solomon's wealth and women, where the satire mocks the "wise king" as "royal fool" (2004: 28). He contends that satire can assume a variety of forms and use attack, play, humour and judgement as elements. Satire is focused on a specific object, and employs wit, wordplays and puns to ridicule. It often tends towards didacticism and the end of such literature is not resolved but remains open-ended (Miles, 2004: 29-31). It is quite possible that Song of Songs could also be interpreted as satire to mock Solomon's sexual relationships with multiple women in marriage, in contrast to the Shulamite's exclusive sexual relationship with her lover outside of marriage. Barbiero also refers to criticism against Solomon in Cant 6:8-9 and 8:11-12, which is "hardly veiled" (2011: 34).[87] Fox also terms Cant 8:11-12 a possible "mockery" of Solomon

[87] "Sixty queens there may be, and eighty concubines, and virgins beyond number; but my dove, my perfect one, is unique, the only daughter of her mother, the favourite of the one who bore her. The maidens saw her and called her blessed; the queens and concubines praised her" (Cant 6:8-9).

"Solomon had a vineyard in Baal Hamon; he let out his vineyard to tenants. Each was to bring for its fruit a thousand shekels of silver. But my own vineyard is mine to give; the thousand shekels are for you, o Solomon, and two hundred for those who tend its fruit" (Cant 8:11-12).

(1985: 95). This, however, is a subject for another study and needs only to be mentioned here for purposes of pointing out the distinct possibility of critique against the polygamy of Solomon as king of the Yahwistic cult. Such a critique could easily fall into the scope of a sage (see section 3.2.2.3 Scepticism and critique).

Aside from the possible subtext critical of Solomon, Song of Songs is a thoroughly subversive text, and extremely critical of a variety of accepted norms. In Song of Songs the lovers celebrate each other's naked bodies in descriptive poems (*wasfs*), in contrast to Israel's norm of being fully clothed. The Shulamite challenges the patriarchal system by ignoring her brothers' rules and choosing her own lover. She defies the traditional cultic guard of her virginity and she refuses the accepted role of women. She ventures into the public arena of men in search of her lover, and pays the price by being beaten as if she were a prostitute. Song of Songs also challenges gender hierarchy, specifically in sexual roles, when the woman participates freely. Desire and the joys of sexuality are experienced mutually. Class hierarchy is challenged by the rural focus versus the city as power bastion. The rural area becomes the backdrop of the lovers' union with each other and with nature. Song of Songs also challenges the ban on premarital sex. Though the Shulamite dreams of a more permanent union, there are no signs of a marital relationship. The absence of a focus on procreation, which was deemed as women's most important function in antiquity, is remarkable (Viviers, 2006: 933-100).

4.3 CONCLUSION

It is clear that Song of Songs exhibits most of the traits of wisdom literature as identified in Chapter Three.

There exists a comparable body of Ancient Near Eastern love literature that resembles Song of Songs. Many of the similarities and differences have been pointed out. As far as form is concerned, Song of Song's poetical nature, the climactic mashal, and repetitive admonitions to the daughters of Jerusalem fit in with wisdom characteristics. As far as vocabulary is concerned, Song of Songs did not perform well. By far the strongest argument for the inclusion of Song of Songs as part of the wisdom corpus, is the fact that a clear argument is present, and it is beautifully (poetical language) and skilfully (a rich repertoire of rhetorical devices) presented. Even some of the typical wisdom metaphors, as identified by Perdue, feature in Song of Songs.

The Solomonic tradition is used liberally in Song of Songs and the subject matter (love, desire, sex) is a powerful and integral part of real life. As in other wisdom literature, historical faith themes and covenantal language is absent, but creation is powerfully present. Creation, seasonal order as well as different threats of chaos are features of the Song. The fear of the Lord manifests in wonder and awe of the lush beauty of creation, as well as the transcendental experience of love.

The aspect of search is also present: the Shulamite searches for her lover, as well as for her place in the order of things. Though the lovers are egocentric and self-indulgent, they are not deemed irreligious. There is also an appeal to the daughters of Jerusalem and to the readers to

make intelligent choices as far as sex and sexuality are concerned. As far as criticism is concerned, Song of Songs also passes with flying colours. However, the Song did not do so well in the areas of pragmatism, moderation and restraint.

In the next chapter we will conclude our findings and focus on how reading Song of Songs as wisdom literature affords us the opportunity to integrate spirituality and sexuality.

CHAPTER FIVE

LOVING GOD BY MAKING LOVE

5.1 REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH PROCEDURE AND FINDINGS

In chapter one a problem statement was formulated, as well as the following problem questions:

i) Is it justified to read Song of Songs as wisdom literature?

ii) How does reading the Song of Songs as wisdom literature contribute to the integration of sexuality and spirituality?

The section on the theoretical framework contains a hypothesis proposing that reading Song of Songs as wisdom literature, offers us the opportunity to integrate sexuality and spirituality. The hypothesis is followed by introductory remarks on the main themes, namely Song of Songs, wisdom/wisdom literature, sexuality, spirituality, and the integration of sexuality and spirituality. In the section on methodology and literature review, the methodology of each chapter, as well as the relevant sources are discussed. It is followed by a few preliminary remarks on the value of the research, and the chapter is concluded by a table with a general outline of the themes and content of each chapter.

Chapter two contains a description of the main trends in the rich history of interpretation of Song of Songs. The description is built on the suggestion that the extreme variations in interpretation are due to the dualistic sacred/secular roots of biblical interpretation. The discussion on the Jewish and Christian spiritual interpretation is preceded by introductory remarks on the allegorical method for spiritualised interpretations. The interesting developments in sexual interpretation are followed through, from the Babylonian Talmud's famous condemnation (90 A. D.), to the exciting new perspectives brought on by the enlightenment, and ending with a few contemporary approaches.

What became clear in chapter two is that interpreters are children of their own time and context. At first, interpretations were intensely spiritual and extremely antagonistic towards both sex and women. As history unfolded, especially after the enlightenment, interpreters no longer spiritualised the Song, but either put it in the context of fertility cults, funeral feasts, wedding songs, drama, marriage, or plain secular love poetry. Many contemporary approaches highly value the pure sexual thrust and fail to see any appeal on reason or any other ethical considerations.

Both spiritual and sexual interpretations contributed much to our contemporary understanding of this text, but what is sorely needed, is a steady frame of reference to stabilise the bewilderingly divergent interpretations.

Chapter three is concerned with the exploration of the characteristics of wisdom literature through the eyes of Whybray, Perdue, Murphy, Crenshaw, and Bartholomew. The important common feature of these scholars is that they do not accept Song of Songs as part of the corpus of wisdom literature. Starting with the work of Crenshaw, a preliminary list of characteristics of wisdom literature is compiled, with three main criteria: general characteristics, literary characteristics and characteristics of content. The perspectives of the other scholars are used to further enrich our knowledge of wisdom traits, and at the end of chapter three an extended list with eighteen characteristics of wisdom literature is offered.

Armed with the model for wisdom literature, chapter four focuses on Song of Songs. Each element in the list is carefully applied to Song of Songs to explore the possibility of acquiescence. In most elements Song of Songs performed well, though not in all.

In chapter five I endeavour to answer the problem questions.

5.2 ANSWERING THE PROBLEM QUESTIONS

Question one

Is it justified to read Song of Songs as wisdom literature?

In only three areas Song of Songs did not perform exceptionally well: vocabulary, order, and pragmatism.

The Song of Songs does not display the wisdom vocabulary as identified by Whybray, but it is understandable in the light of the subject matter and poetical form, and need not disqualify Song of Songs as wisdom literature. Furthermore, the reference to "master craftsman" strongly connects Song of Songs with wisdom literature and Yahweh (Reese, 1983: 244).

As far as order is concerned, there are definite signs of creation's seasonal order, but not the stark order of retribution. The seasonal order of spring is reminiscent of Qohelet's focus on "a time to embrace" (Qoh 3:5).

Other areas where Song of Songs did not perform well, was in the areas of pragmatism, moderation and restraint. Again this needs not disqualify Song of Songs as wisdom literature, because in accepted wisdom texts the enjoyment of sex and the pleasures of intimacy are pondered and promoted. The question is whether this warm-blooded behaviour of lovers fits in with the calm, calculated, and reasoned approach the sages had towards living an orderly life. Wisdom literature itself answers this question with insight into a meaningful and joyful life:

> *May your fountain be blessed and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer – may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love (Prov 6:18-19).*

In most of the other areas Song of Songs displays the characteristics of wisdom literature.

Though it is probably not a significant characteristic to use as a measurement, Song of Songs boasts a comparable body of similar Ancient Near Eastern literature. These are loosely termed "love literature", but it is the work of the educated classes or sages.

Like other wisdom texts, Song of Songs displays no interest in salvation history or covenantal themes, but draws richly on references to Solomon – the iconic symbol of the wisdom movement.

The metaphors often associated with wisdom literature features abundantly in Song of Songs. From these metaphors as identified by Perdue (1994: 330-339), fertility, artistry, battle, and garden are most prominent in Song of Songs,

Though difficult to spot at first, threats are present in Song of Songs, in the form of social restrictions, violence of the guards, and the little foxes that ruin the vineyard. The greatest threat is love. In the climactic unit love is placed on the same level as primordial forces of chaos waters and the jealousy of death. This power of love is seen in both the ecstasy and agony of the lovers' experience in each other's presence and absence.

The problem of circular reasoning as far as vocabulary and form are concerned, has already been mentioned. Though the traditional wisdom form of the *mashal* features only once, Song of Songs uses rich poetical language with an abundance of wordplay and rhetorical devices, as is typical of wisdom literature. The admonition to the "daughters of Jerusalem" reminds us of the sages' didactic use of "my son". The contents focus on an important and powerful element of human life – sexual love and desire. There is indeed a strong marriage between form (lyrical poems about the power of sexual love and desire) and content. The beauty of lyrical poems is the perfect form to carry the message about the power of love and sexual desire.

The theme of search is also prominent in Song of Songs. The Shulamite searches for her lover and together they search for the consummation of their love. The deeper search is the Shulamite's quest for self-understanding within the restrictions and boundaries of her own social world. She finds fulfilment and success in the fact that she brings peace to her lover. The lovers' conduct is clearly self-indulgent and egocentric – another trademark of the humanistic focus of wisdom literature.

Within the beautifully crafted poetical language there also is sharp criticism of socially accepted norms. Critique against patriarchy and the subordination of women, especially women's sexuality, are very prominent.

Creation features strongly in Song of Songs and is one of the persuasive elements of reading Song of Songs as wisdom literature. The theology of wisdom literature is based on creation. Creation is the artistic work of Yahweh, the Creator. The lush and fertile garden in Song of Songs, the exquisite and fertile bodies of the lovers, as well as the transcendental moments of intimate union is the work of the master craftsman. No wonder that the fear of the Lord reaction to Yahweh's creation in Song of Songs is one of awe and wonder.

I find the strongest accord of Song of Songs with wisdom literature in the fact that the text displays a dicernible argument about the power of sexuality and desire, as well as an intellectual appeal to be aware of the dangers of engaging this primordial force before the time is right. The message of Song of Songs is not moralistic, but rather a realistic view of life – true to the approach of sages. In this regard the Song of Songs' message about the joy and anguish of human sexuality resonates remarkably well with the portrayal of sexuality in the Old Testament. The Old Testament is extraordinarily honest in its portrayal of sexuality. Menn found that the Old Testament disclosed both the beauty as well as the horrific aspects of sexuality (Menn, 2003: 41). "… the Old Testament does not allow us to deny or forget our human sexuality, it also does not allow us to idealise it" (Menn, 2003: 41). In this regard Harding aptly summarises the message of Song of Songs:

> *Perhaps, then, this aspect of the Song, its attentiveness both to the heady intoxications of love, the desperate yearnings of lovers, their exquisite moments of union, and to the simultaneous vulnerabilities they suffer, their crises, their agonizing moments of doubt, is the locus of the Song's endless appeal, for it creates a vision of love that is at once beautiful and exuberant, perceptive and realistic* (Harding, 2008: 59).

On grounds of accumulative proof, I propose that it is indeed justified to read Song of Songs as part of the canonical wisdom literature.

Question two

How does reading the Song of Songs as wisdom literature contribute to the integration of sexuality and spirituality?

Accepting Song of Songs as wisdom literature and reading it from the perspective of creation theology, immediately integrates sexuality and spirituality. Sexual intimacy then becomes much more than "secular love". It is part of being fully human in the presence of God. It becomes a way of praising God by crossing ego boundaries, accepting vulnerability, enjoying sensuality, and experiencing love and acceptance in the most intimate way it can be experienced.

Reading Song of Songs as wisdom literature does not tame our erotic desires and sexuality or subdue them to appear calm and pious for a church audience. It accepts the wildness, the urgent search for union, the warm-blooded exhilaration and exuberance of sex as part of the goodness and order of Yahweh's creation.

5.3 RELEVANCE OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this section the relevance of the research findings will be discussed in relation to the main themes as identified in the theoretical framework in chapter one.

5.3.1 Song of Songs

Barbiero pointed out that in both the Hebrew and Christian traditions the Song of Songs was positioned among the wisdom books, and that this fact should also be a clue to its interpretation (2011: 4). Finally accepting Song of Songs as wisdom literature could have a huge reconciling impact on the divergent interpretations as demonstrated in chapter two.

What is missing in the field of study as far as the Song is concerned, is a frame of reference from which it can be read. Accepting the Song as wisdom literature and reading it from the perspective of creation theology, can just possibly fill this lacuna in our scholarly endeavours. Instead of isolating the Song of Songs from the other books in the canon by identifying it as "secular love songs", or creating hermeneutical keys from our own sexual or theological ideologies, Song of Songs can come home and be accepted like Woman Wisdom and Job, as a different, critical, and good voice on an important subject – the power of sexual love.

Reading Song of Songs as wisdom literature could then bring a new centre of gravity that can curb the bewildering variety of interpretations. This stability will probably open doors to new and creative insights and comparisons between the wisdom books. It could bridge the impasse in current lines of interpretation and provide a meaningful theological message.

At a secondary level this research project pointed out the dualistic sacred/profane approach of interpreters. The implication is that when working with a highly erotic text like Song of Songs, it is important to be conscious of our own subjective views of sexuality and how this can hinder or aid our interpretations.

5.3.2 Wisdom

As far as wisdom literature is concerned, this list of characteristics is a valuable frame of reference which can be utilised in further studies.

The list of characteristics presented is compiled on the views of the chosen wisdom scholars. In compiling the list I experienced the following challenges:

1) Some of the identified characteristics seemed more important than others. As already mentioned, the danger of circular reasoning is very real in identifying wisdom vocabulary or form. Also the characteristic of a comparable international body of literature seems to deny the creativity of sages as well as cultural differences. Though some of the characteristics could probably have been eliminated on critical grounds, it was carried through for the sake of consistency. With more critical consideration the list can be altered or even extended in the light of the views of more scholars. However, as presented, it provides a valuable starting point for reflection.

2) The characteristics as defined by scholars are not always applied by them in dealing with the individual texts. For instance, Crenshaw refers to the "fear of the Lord" as one of the basic premises of wisdom literature. In dealing with the individual wisdom texts, he does not adequately point out how this characteristic features. It seems that wisdom is dealt with in general terms in the introductory chapters in handbooks about wisdom literature. In dealing with the individual texts, however, the principles are not carried through, nor are the deviancies from the principles explained. It could be an interesting study to see how the list of characteristics performs when applied to the accepted body of wisdom literature.

5.3.3 Sexuality

Reading Song of Songs as wisdom literature and from the perspective of creation theology helps to stabilise the extreme sacred/secular perspectives that plague society's view of sex (see section 2.2). Accepting that erotic desire and sexual love are part and parcel of God's created order in which He finds joy, can help eradicate the notion that sex is evil, or only for procreation. Van Niekerk cites Schibler in listing the positive implications of re-uniting sexuality with religion.[88] Men can be freed from sexual performance pressure, power exploitation, and egocentrical behaviour. Women can be freed from the subordination and shame of their own sexuality. Love and sexuality become intimacy with God (Van Niekerk, 2007: 327).

While Song of Songs helps us to accept the sensuality and the unbridled passion of lovers, it also appeals to our intellect and common sense not to enter into sexual love relationships too soon. Oosthuizen (2011: 130-131) spells out the Song's argument as intellectual capacity for good choices:

> *Sexual love is good and beautiful, an integral element of an abundant, living and growing creation. Long for it, desire it, relish it – but be aware not to enter these ecstasies too soon! Sexual love awakens powerful emotions – emotions as strong as death and blazing like a mighty flame. On awakening sexual love, you become vulnerable and you enter into an eternal cycle of desire, longing and searching for consummation. You might be rejected; it is even possible that you will be abused. You might need to challenge social boundaries. Take responsibility for your sexuality, it is yours alone to give. When you give it, give all of you, your total being and give erotically and exclusively. Be strong in sexual love – do not look for instant satisfaction, but delay the gratification playfully and creatively. When consummating love, know that it is a deeply spiritual experience. God is there, in your capacity to be intimate, and in omnipresence, enjoying the sights, sounds and smells of humans making love and encouraging you: "Eat, friends, drink and be drunk, beloved!*

[88] Schibler, G. 2002. 'Der Leib ist Heilig: Erotiek und Spiritualität Schliessen Sich Einander Nicht Aus', *EvK* 3, pp. 28-31.

5.3.4 Spirituality

Carr states that there is "some kind of crucially important connection between the journey toward God and the journey toward coming to terms with our own sexual embodiment" (2003: 10).

Reading Song of Songs as wisdom literature, helps us come to terms with living all aspects of our lives, including desire and sexual love, in the continued presence of God. He is the artisan of creation and the artisan of human sexuality. Accepting and enjoying sexuality is a way of thanking and praising Him for the wonders of creation.

An integrated reading of Song of Songs also helps us come to terms with the beauty and sensuality of embodiment. As Landman points out on Bernard of Clairvaux's reading of Song of Songs, the body is the "site of relationship" with people, nature, and the divine (Landman, 2005: 241).

Song of Songs teaches us about the sensuality of the body. The lovers experience the thrill of creation's springtime through sights, sounds, smell, taste, and touch. The pinnacle of these sensual stimuli is in the vulnerability of the boundary crossing of sexual union.

The body is also important in our spiritual experiences. We perceive God through our senses, through sights, sounds, smells, touch, and tastes as He reveals himself in Word and creation. When studying God's Word, we use our bodies to sit, our eyes to see, our intellect to understand. When we pray we use our bodies to kneel in worship, we use our voices to praise, beg, and love. When helping others we use our eyes to see the needs, our ears to hear their pain, and our bodies, arms and legs to help.

Like lovers, we are in a relationship with God. We constantly search for him, desire his presence, and crave moments of intimate union. These moments can happen any time, when you pray, when you worship through song and dance, or when you serve someone with God's love. "These moments are also sensual culminations, an extraordinary consciousness of your Beloved in you, around you, and through you" (Oosthuizen, 2011: 130). Appreciating our created capacity for intimacy can indeed aid us in unlocking a deeply sensual spirituality.

5.3.5 Integrating sexuality and spirituality

Reading Song of Songs as wisdom literature presents us with the wonderful opportunity to engage the Bible reading communities with new and fresh insights about sexual love. Most churches ignore this subject completely or regulate it through strict rules and condemnation, completely missing the opportunity to integrate sexuality and spirituality. Song of Songs can be used in a variety of teaching settings in congregations, to empower people to live sexually without guilt and shame in the continued presence of God.

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SUMMARY

This history of interpretation of Song of Songs clearly shows interpreters' struggle to understand this blatantly sexual text in the midst of Holy Scripture. The widely divergent interpretations indicate how hermeneutical keys are constructed according to the context, theology, and/or sexual ideologies of the interpreters.

In a society that was hostile towards the body and towards women, the Song of Songs was interpreted spiritually for centuries by means of allegory. According to this line of interpretation Song of Songs portrays the love relationship between God, as the male lover, and the church, synagogue, soul, or Mary as the female lover. In the wake of the Enlightenment, the literal meaning of the text moved sharply into focus and a new wave of sexual interpretations abounded ending in a vague, a-theological, appreciative approach for a text that seems to be nothing more than an anthology of secular love poems.

The inability of interpreters to cross the dualistic spiritual/sexual divide is a reflection of a serious problem in society where people still view sexuality as secular and removed from the realm of spirituality. The traditional and contemporary lines of interpretations of Song of Songs are at an impasse – spiritual interpretations ignore the sexual content and sexual interpretations provide no theological meaning.

This research project explored the possibility that Song of Songs can be read as part of the corpus of biblical wisdom literature corpus and by doing so, can contribute to the integration of sexuality and spirituality.

A list of characteristics of wisdom literature was compiled by examining the views of prominent wisdom scholars. The list consists of three main divisions, namely: 1) general characteristics; 2) literary characteristics; and 3) characteristics of content. Literary characteristics are further divided into subsections exploring form, vocabulary, rhetoric, and metaphors. Content is explored in terms of Solomonic tradition, subject matter, cosmology, anthropology, and scepticism and critique. Eighteen characteristics are identified and formulated in question forms to test against the text of Song of Songs.

When the list of wisdom characteristics was applied to Song of Songs, it was found that Song of Songs performed exceptionally well in most instances. It was concluded that it is justified to read Song of Songs as part of the canonical wisdom literature.

Reading Song of Songs as wisdom literature presents us with an opportunity to provide a frame of reference that can curb interpretational extremities. A wisdom reading of Song of Songs also offers a stable centre of theological focus. Teaching the Bible-reading communities to read Song of Songs as wisdom literature affords us the opportunity to empower people to experience a God-conscious sexuality and a deeply sensual spirituality.

OPSOMMING

Die interpretasiegeskiedenis van Hooglied weerspieël duidelik hoe eksegete worstel om hierdie blatante seksuele teks, wat deel is van die Heilige Skrif, te vertaan. Die wyd uiteenlopende interpretasies is ‘n aanduiding van hoe hermeneutiese sleutels gebruik word wat verbonde is aan die konteks, teologie, en/of seksuele ideologieë van die interpreteerders.

In ‘n wêreld wat vyandiggesind was teenoor liggaamlikheid en teenoor vroue, was Hooglied vir eeue lank geestelik geïnterpreteer met behulp van allegorie. Volgens hierdie lyn van interpretasie weerspieël Hooglied die verhouding tussen God as die minnaar, en die kerk, sinagoge, siel, of Maria as die minnares. In die nadraai van die Verligting is daar gefokus op die letterlike betekenis van die teks, en ‘n verskeidenheid nuwe interpretasiebenaderings wat fokus op die seksuele aspek het ontstaan. Hoewel daar tans groot waardering vir die teks bestaan, word dit meestal benader as ‘n versameling liefdesgedigte met geen teologiese waarde nie.

Die onvermoë van interpreteerders om Hooglied te gebruik om ‘n brug te slaan tussen seksualiteit en spiritualiteit is ‘n weerkaatsing van ‘n ernstige problem in die samelewing, waar mense steeds seksualiteit as sekulêr en verwydererd van die sfeer van spiritualiteit beskou. Die tradisionele en komtemporêre interpretasiebenaderings van Hooglied het vasgeval – geestelike interpretasies ignoreer die seksuele inhoud en seksuele interpretasies het geen teologiese betekenis nie.

Hierdie navorsingsprojek verken die moontlikheid dat Hooglied gelees kan word as deel van die wysheidsliteratuur, en deur dit so te lees, lewer dit ‘n waardevolle bydrae tot die integrasie van seksualiteit en spiritualiteit.

‘n Lys van die eienskappe van wysheidsliteratuur is saamgestel deur die benaderings van prominente akademici, wat kenners van wysheidsliteratuur is, te ondersoek. Die lys bestaan uit drie hoofafdelings, naamlik: 1) algemene eienskappe; 2) literêre eienskappe; en 3) eienskappe van die inhoud. Die literêre eienskappe word verdeel in subkategorieë wat vorm, woordeskat, retoriek, en metafore verken. Die karaktereienskappe van inhoud word ondersoek in die tradisie van Salomo, onderwerp, kosmologie, antropologie, en kritiek. Agttien eienskappe is geïdentifiseer en in die vorm van vrae geformuleer aan die hand waarvan die teks van Hooglied ondersoek kan word.

Die lys van die eienskappe van die wysheidsliteratuur is toegepas op Hooglied, en daar is bevind dat Hooglied wel die meeste van hierdie eienskappe vertoon. Daar is tot die gevolgtrekking gekom dat dit aanvaarbaar is om Hooglied te lees as deel van die wysheidsliteratuur van die Bybel.

Wanneer Hooglied gelees word as wysheidsliteratuur verskaf dit ‘n stabiele verwysingsraamwerk wat ekstreme interpretasies beperk, en dit voorsien ook ‘n waardevolle teologiese fokus. Wanneer geloofsgemeenskappe geleer word om Hooglied in die lig van die wysheidsliteratuur te lees en te verstaan, het ons die geleentheid om gelowiges te bemagtig om ‘n Godsbewuste seksualiteit te geniet, en om terselfdertyd ‘n sensuele spiritualiteit te beleef.

KEY TERMS

Allegory

Dualism

Characteristics of wisdom literature

Eros

Integration of sexuality and spirituality

Sex

Sexuality

Spirituality

Song of Songs

Wisdom literature