

WISDOM AND THE STEWARDSHIP OF KNOWLEDGE\*<sup>1</sup>

Margaret Barker: Bishop's Lecture Lincoln 2004

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'Happy is the man who finds Wisdom', wrote one of the wise ones of Israel: 'She is the tree of life to those who lay hold of her (Prov.3.13, 18). The benefits of Wisdom are then listed: she is better than silver and gold, more precious than jewels, she gives long life and 'all her paths are peace'. In fact, had our wise ones known Cecil Spring-Rice's hymn 'I vow to thee my country', they would have recognised the last lines as a hymn about Wisdom.

And soul by soul and silently, her shining bounds increase

And her ways are ways of gentleness and all her paths are peace.

We know these lines as a description of the Kingdom of God, but Wisdom, as we shall see, is a closely related idea.

What, or rather Who, is Wisdom? Many of the great cathedrals of the Orthodox Christian world are dedicated to The Holy Wisdom, and yet she has become a stranger to the theological discourse of the West. In the ikons of the East she is depicted as a fiery angel, crowned and enthroned, surrounded by great rings of light, and with the foundation of the earth beneath her feet. But who is she? Bulgakov, the controversial Russian theologian who died in 1944, observed that since these ikons had been accepted by the Church, their meaning must have been clear when they were made. 'The time has come', he wrote in 1937, 'for us to sweep away the dust of ages... and to reinstate the tradition of the Church, in this instance all but broken, as a living tradition.' ('The Wisdom of God', reprinted in *A Bulgakov Anthology* ed. J Pain and N Zernov, 1976, p.146.). It was time, he believed, to rediscover the Holy Wisdom.

The wise one who wrote the first section of the Book of Proverbs clearly knew who Wisdom was, and there is good reason to believe that the other writers of the Old

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Testament knew her too. In Proverbs 8, for example, there is a wonderful poem about the Second Person present at the creation - a female Second Person present at the creation!- assisting the Creator as the world is brought into being.

When he established the heaven I was there,  
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,  
when he made firm the skies above...

I was beside him, like... (Proverbs 8. 27-8, 30)

Like what? Here there is a word which does not appear anywhere else in the Hebrew Scriptures, but is related to the word meaning craftsman. When this passage was translated into Greek, the word chosen was 'the woman who holds things together' *harmozousa*, which can also mean 'the woman who keeps things in tune'. Wisdom, then, was understood to be the female figure who joined things together, kept things harmonious. If I tell you now that the word for devil, *diabolos*, means the one who deceives and creates discord, you may begin to glimpse the importance of Wisdom, and what the neglect of Wisdom has brought upon us. The Book of Enoch, which is not in our Old Testament but was Scripture for the early Christians, teaches a great deal about Wisdom. Most significant, perhaps, is the information that just before the first temple was destroyed, at the end of the seventh century BCE, she was rejected by the priests in Jerusalem, and as a result, they lost their vision. The spiritual eyes of the priests were closed.

The mysterious Wisdom had something to do with spiritual vision, with the human mind, and with knowledge. The harmony of the world was closely connected to her way of perceiving the world, since she joined all things together. What Wisdom gave was not just knowledge and information; it was an attitude to knowledge and information such that the world was in harmony. Conversely, the fragmentation of the world was also due to human perception, to knowledge and how it was used, and the fundamental breach, as we shall see, was the separation of knowledge from the Source of knowledge. Today this is called secular knowledge, but the Enoch tradition recognised it as demonic, the teaching of fallen angels. So should we speak of destructive fragmentation or of post-

modern freedom? Of one truth or many? It was and is a matter of perception, and a matter of choice. *It is the question of the stewardship of knowledge.*

The great symbol of Wisdom was the Tree of Life. We find the Tree of Life at the end of the Bible, in the last chapter of the Book of Revelation, where the Tree of Life is watered by the River of Life, and its leaves are for the healing of the nations. Harmony and healing are Wisdom motifs. We also find it at the very beginning of the Bible, where the Tree of Life is one of the two trees mentioned by name in the Garden of Eden. Adam was allowed to eat from the Tree of Life, but forbidden the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall die.' (Genesis 2.16-17). When the serpent tempted Eve, he made the two trees seem identical: the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil would open her eyes, and she would be like God, knowing both good and evil. Almost the same was true of the Tree of Life, for Wisdom opened the eyes of those who ate her fruit, and as they became wise, they became divine. The difference was that one way of knowing was permitted and one was forbidden; one way led to life and the other to death. *Even though they knew this, the human pair chose the wrong tree.*

Now try to imagine hearing this story in Hebrew. Certain sounds and words echo and re-echo all through the story, making links that are lost in the English. The serpent was 'arum, subtle, says the English, but in Hebrew this word sounds very like 'erum, the word for naked. As a result of the subtlety of the serpent, the human pair realised they were naked. Naked looks like the word for blindness, 'iwwaron, and there is another similar word which means destitute, 'ar'ar. When the Lord drove them from the Garden, he made garments of skin, 'or, for Adam and Eve. What was the Hebrew storyteller inviting the hearers to hear? That the subtle one promised Adam and Eve sight but they became blind, promised them they would be like God, but they became naked and destitute. The original hearers would have known that Wisdom gave her devotees garments of glory, the symbol of divine life, but Adam and Eve were given garments of skin, the symbol of mortality. The scroll of Genesis kept in the temple in Jerusalem was

slightly different from the one we use today, and one of the most interesting variants is that Adam had a garment of light, *'or*, rather than a garment of skin *'or*, a very similar sound. In such wordplay we hear the older Wisdom teachings, and here, the medium is the message. She is glimpsed at the very edge of our perception and heard among familiar words which seem to tell a different tale. Wisdom is only discerned by those who have Wisdom, because her first gift is the gift of herself.

Once they had chosen fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam and Eve were barred from the Tree of Life. They discovered too late that they could no longer have the fruit of the Tree of Life and live as angels, *'elohim*. (Genesis 3.22). The New Testament reverses the story of Genesis: Paul talked about a second Adam who would undo the work of the first (1 Corinthians 15.45-50), and in the Book of Revelation, the heavenly Lord promised that those who were worthy would again eat from the Tree of Life (Rev.2.7). The Bible is the story of losing Wisdom and then finding her again, of leaving the presence of God and then returning, of humans breaking the only law they had been given, and discovering too late that they had made the wrong choice.

Let us pause for a moment and reflect on the type of material we are using. These passages about the Garden of Eden in Genesis and Revelation are not just old stories. They are the means by which profound issues were addressed in a culture which had storytellers and visionaries rather than philosophers. In the twenty first century, we might make the same point by saying that when humans lost contact with God, they caused the destruction of the world by their attitude to knowledge. This sounds rather familiar: the post enlightenment view of knowledge, and the situation this has now produced, especially in the destruction of the environment.

Scientific knowledge is so often considered to be real knowledge, whereas theology is not. From the very beginning, 'science' as a distinct body of knowledge was seen as a way of acquiring power over the creation. Descartes' notorious phrase is often quoted: 'Man as the master and possessor of the earth.' There would be no place for ethics or any of the superstitious constraint of religion. There would simply be the quest for pure

knowledge, and the consequences would be for others to cope with. But can the possession of knowledge be separated from its use? This is but one of the issues where the Genesis storyteller would have had something to say. Knowledge can be used for good or evil - and so there has to be some frame of reference for decisions about the use of knowledge. *Genesis is profoundly true*. There is no such thing as a value-free choice. Morality, like nature, abhors a vacuum.

Those who first heard the story of the Garden of Eden knew the Tree of Life as the symbol of Wisdom, and its fruits as her gifts: true riches, spiritual sight, everlasting life, and peace. Peace, the Hebrew word *shalom*, means far more than 'absence of war or discord'. It was one of the key concepts of the Wisdom tradition, and included ideas of harmony, wholeness, integrity - the creation as it was on the sixth day, when God saw that everything was very good. The fruit of the Tree of Life held all things together in harmony, and *the Tree of Life was not originally forbidden to the human pair in Eden*. It had been intended as their food. Those created in the image of God were not forbidden Wisdom; they were forbidden partial and fragmenting knowledge with potential for good or evil. Alas, the human pair chose the wrong Tree, and the great narrative of the Bible records the result. When the heavenly Lord in the Book of Revelation promised access to the Tree of Life (Revelation 2.7; 22.14), he promised not only eternal life in the Kingdom, but also a new way of knowing - the way of Wisdom. In the Gospel of Thomas Jesus says: 'The Kingdom of the Father is spread out upon the earth, and men do not *see* it.' (Logion 113)

The mystics and seers of ancient Israel were granted Wisdom. They saw. There was a temple ritual in the holy of holies, which we shall look at later, when they were anointed with an oil of sweet myrrh, the essence of the Tree of Life. It opened their eyes and turned them into angels, that is, messengers from God. Perhaps they were called the children of Wisdom. Jesus spoke of the children of Wisdom, and of Wisdom sending the prophets and apostles (Luke 7.35; 11.49; what else could he have meant?) The name of the prophet Malachi simply means 'my angel'. When they had been anointed and transformed into messengers, they brought the knowledge of heaven to earth. Those who

failed, who gave false teaching and divorced that teaching from the Law of God, were deemed to be fallen angels. They had broken the covenant, and so corrupted both creation and human society (Malachi 2.7-8).

Other texts from the ancient Hebrew tradition say more about the Tree of Life. It had a beautiful perfume- hence the sweet myrrh of the anointing oil - and its fruit was 'sevenfold instruction concerning his creation' (1 Enoch 93.10). In other words, the fruits of the Tree of Life gave complete knowledge about the creation - that is what sevenfold means. One day they would be given to the righteous (1 Enoch 25). The priests and prophets of the Old Testament believed that knowledge of the creation, the scientific knowledge of the time, could not be separated from Wisdom who bound all things together.

This knowledge was received in a vision of the six days of creation, when the prophets and seers learned how everything came to be. The six days of creation in Genesis 1 record this vision, and Jewish tradition said that when the Glory of the Lord settled on Sinai and a cloud covered it for six days, Moses saw the six days of creation (Exodus 24.16). A Jewish text written just after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70CE has a long list of what Moses learned on Sinai. Apart from the ten commandments, he learned about the weight of the winds, the number of the raindrops, the height of the air, the characteristics of fire, lightning and thunder, and a good deal more - but also about the root of Wisdom, the fountain of knowledge and the ranks of the archangels (2 Baruch 59). In other words, he learned about the natural science of his time, and this included Wisdom and the angels. *This is the stewardship of knowledge.* When the fallen angels abused this knowledge, they corrupted the creation.

The early Christians described themselves as angels on earth. When Paul wrote to the saints/holy ones of this place or that, he meant that they were the angels of that place, the messengers. 'Christian', like 'Christ', means anointed, and is another indication that the Christians were the angels on earth, and thus entrusted with knowledge about the creation and how all things joined together. The gift of angel knowledge is what St John meant

when he wrote in his first letter: 'You have been anointed by the Holy One and you know everything' (1 John 2.18); and 'His anointing teaches you about everything and is true (1 John 2.27). *'Knowledge about everything' would have been the Wisdom vision of the creation - and should form the basis of any Christian theology for the environment.*

Let us now return to Wisdom herself. Wisdom, as we have seen, was beside the Creator at the beginning, and joined things together. In the ceiling of the Sistine chapel there is the familiar picture of the creation of Adam, and we tend to focus on the Creator in the cloud, stretching out his finger towards Adam. But look closely at the cloud and you will see that it is shaped like the human brain. The Creator enthroned in the human mind? What was Michelangelo saying about the creation of Adam? Was this the tradition he received, or was it an inspiration? And at the side of the Creator, in the very centre of the brain, there is a dark haired female figure: Wisdom, beside the Creator as Adam is brought to life. Because we see only what we look for in that picture, we miss Wisdom, both who she is and where she is; and what is true of this picture is also true of the ancient texts. Reading with familiar eyes - often called the traditional reading - we miss what is actually there. *This is another aspect of the stewardship of knowledge.* We have a tendency to see what we have been taught to see, to hear what we have been taught to hear, and to use only what we have always used, whether or not that is true to the original, or even to the Scriptures.

*Christianity lacks a credible theology for the environment because we have lost the knowledge of the angels and the vision of Wisdom.* The tendency in this area is to look at positions formulated by secular environmentalists, lightly baptise them, and deck them with a few lines of Scripture. This will not do. When we hear, as we do nowadays, about the web of ecology and so forth, and realise, in some cases too late, that the web of life is a finely spun and delicately balanced system, what do we offer as theology? In the time of the Hebrew story tellers, this would have been the domain of Wisdom. Ezekiel's great vision of the Glory leaving the temple described her as the Living One (Ezekiel 1 and 10), but this is not apparent in many translations, because Bible translators also see what they have been conditioned to see. The four living creatures of the divine throne are in

fact a single fourfold Living One - and she left the temple. The Glory of the Lord which Ezekiel saw was enthroned over Wisdom.

Biblically based environment theology rarely looks beyond the story of Adam as the steward of the creation. It examines in minute detail what the story implies about dominion, about Adam as the manager, Adam set over the creation, how and how much Adam was permitted to use the creation, and so forth. Management, dominion and use are words which imply separation, Adam over against the earth. I recently heard a 'green' sermon, in penitential mode it has to be said, which included the confession: '*We rape the earth as though we owned it*'. The Hebrew words, however, suggest a different story: '*adam*', means a human being, and '*adamah*', the feminine form of the word, means the land. The human and the land were a couple. There is a lovely description of prosperity in the time of King Uzziah, who encouraged farmers and vinedressers throughout his kingdom, and dug cisterns so that huge herds could graze. He *loved* the land, says the Chronicler (2 Chronicles 26.10).

And what of Wisdom in all this?. She has been victim of the idea that we own knowledge. 'Intellectual property' has commercial value, and so knowledge cannot be shared, only traded. There is little sign of Wisdom's influence in the way *we use* information and knowledge, or in the way life processes are patented and exploited for profit. Ecosystems have been destroyed, not through ignorance, but through knowledge divorced from Wisdom. Well might we ask, in the words of T.S Eliot:

Where is the Wisdom that we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge that we have lost in information? [The Rock, Chorus 1.]

The Book of Enoch records the fate of Wisdom, how she was rejected on earth and returned to her place among the angels (1 Enoch 42); and then how Iniquity was received and honoured in her place 'like dew on a thirsty land' (1 Enoch 42.3). The poem does not say that Wisdom left a vacuum when she returned to heaven; the wise ones knew otherwise. When Wisdom departed, Iniquity took her place.



Wisdom had been abandoned in the time of Ezekiel, and the priests lost their vision (1 Enoch 93.8). This must have been the Iniquity that Enoch had in mind: *priests without vision*. The Book of Proverbs also warned about losing Wisdom. ‘Where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint’ is the RSV of Proverbs 29.18. The AV is nearer the original, with: ‘When there is no vision, the people perish.’ Literally, it says: ‘When there is no vision, the people go loose’, the word ‘loose’ being used elsewhere for unplaiting or unbinding hair. The proverb means that without the Wisdom vision, things fall apart. Everything - creation, human society, individual lives - everything disintegrates.

The words of W.B Yeats come to mind:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere,  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

Sometimes this great system was called the covenant of peace - that Wisdom word ‘peace’ again- or the eternal covenant. Isaiah saw the eternal covenant broken through human sin; the whole created order collapsed.

The earth mourns and withers  
The world languishes and withers,  
The heavens languish together with the earth.  
The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants for  
They have transgressed the laws  
Violated the statutes  
*Broken the everlasting covenant.*  
Therefore a curse devours the earth,  
And its inhabitants suffer for their guilt.  
Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched  
And few men are left (Isaiah 24.4-6).

The RSV has 'the everlasting covenant' but this is the same as the eternal covenant and the covenant of peace. 'Everlasting' or 'eternal' here do not just mean 'lasting for ever'. 'Eternity' meant the timeless state of the ever-presence of God, and the eternal covenant not only bound all creation together; it also bound all creation to the Creator. Breaking the eternal covenant meant separating the creation from the Creator; and the fragmentation which followed was the inevitable consequence. *Thus the state of the creation, and knowledge about the creation, were closely linked. When one was fragmented and separated from God, so was the other.*

To picture the bonds of the eternal covenant, try to imagine a multi-dimensional spider's web. All creation and all human society were believed to be one system, and so maintained within the bonds of one covenant. When one filament of a spider's web is broken, or two, or even several, the overall structure survives due to the strength in the other parts of the web. But when there is wholesale destruction, the web collapses. Even parts of the web that have not been broken simply collapse. This is the context of Isaiah's lament.

The earth mourns and withers  
The world languishes and withers,  
The heavens languish together with the earth.

(Isaiah 24.4.)

Wisdom - and you will recall that Ezekiel had called her the Living One - Wisdom was later described as the bonds of the covenant. *In other words, it was her way of knowing the creation that determined whether or not it was one living system.* The Book of Wisdom, compiled by Jews in Egypt about one hundred years before the time of Jesus, described her thus:

Though she is but one, she can do all things,  
And while remaining in herself, she renews all things;  
In every generation she passes into holy souls  
And makes them friends of God and prophets. (Wisdom 8.27)

Elsewhere in the same poem we read that ‘nothing defiled gains entrance into her’ (Wisdom 8.25), and that ‘She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well’ (Wisdom 8.1). Wisdom and her gifts renewed the creation and transformed human beings into holy souls, friends of God and prophets. She bound things together; but she did not bind *all* things together. Anything defiled was excluded, and Isaiah had already defined this defilement:

The earth lies *polluted* under its inhabitants for  
They have transgressed the laws  
Violated the statutes  
*Broken the everlasting covenant.*

The Enoch tradition knew of the great bond holding all creation in its appointed place. Only fragments survive of a poem describing how the heaven was suspended and the sea was limited, how the sun, moon and stars were kept in their courses. Similar images appear in the Old Testament, for example in the Book of Job, where the Lord set bounds for the sea and chains for the stars (Job 38.11, 31), and in Psalm 2 where the kings and rulers of the earth tried to rebel against the Lord and his anointed: ‘Let us burst their bonds asunder and cast their cords from us.’ (Psalm 2.3). The eternal covenant bound everything - sea and stars, kings and rulers - into one system under the Lord and his anointed. Creation and human society did not run as separate systems; the sins of the one impacted on the other. The main function of temple liturgies was to maintain the eternal covenant with right teaching, and when it was damaged or even broken, the priests had to repair it with rituals of penitence and atonement, ‘cleansing and consecrating’ the temple which represented the creation.

The Book of Enoch also describes how the eternal covenant was broken by rebel angels. Genesis 6 alludes to the fallen angels, and there are traces of the story in Isaiah, as we shall see, but the Book of Enoch has the fullest account. The story is that 200 angels bound themselves in a counter-covenant and came to earth to take human wives. Then, in this state of rebellion against the Most High God, they taught their heavenly

knowledge on earth. There are three accounts of this knowledge, possibly fragments of a fuller text, but even what remains gives a glimpse of how creation was corrupted. The fallen angels taught about metal working, and how to make weapons of war. They taught how to make jewellery and cosmetics, and thus encouraged fornication. They taught about roots and plants, in other words, medicine (1 Enoch 7 and 8). They taught about astrology, about 'smiting the embryo in the womb', and about writing (1 Enoch 69). And they abused the daughters of men. 'The earth laid accusation against the lawless ones', said Enoch, 'and the souls of those who had died cried out to the gates of heaven.' (1 Enoch 7.6; 9.10).

One version of the Ethiopic text says the fallen angels taught how to change the world, and the classical commentary says this meant changing humans into animals. The visionary texts like 1 Enoch had the curious convention of describing humans as animals - we are familiar with this in the parable of the sheep and the goats - and then describing angels as 'men'. If the rebel angels turned men into animals, this was the Enochic way of saying that they turned angels into mortals. They gave them knowledge but deprived them of Wisdom - exactly the story of the Garden of Eden. You will recall that the Tree of Life which gave Wisdom was only forbidden to those who had already chosen the other tree. And so the fallen angels corrupted by world with 'secular' - or was it demonic? - knowledge, through astrology, weapons, medicine - we might perhaps say drugs - fashion and fornication, 'writing' - we might perhaps say the media, smiting the embryo in the womb, and the abuse of women. *I will make no further comment on that list.* The rebels turned angels into mortals, and probably convinced them it was a freely chosen liberation, just as the serpent in Eden had persuaded Eve.

Isaiah described the corrupt society of his own time, the end of the eighth century BCE, as a world ruled by fallen angels and heading for disaster. The land was full of diviners and soothsayers, full of silver and gold, full of war chariots and horses, and people worshipped the work of their own hands, which was the ultimate idolatry (Isaiah 2.6-8). He described the women of Zion with their fashions and finery, their wanton eyes and perfumes (Isaiah 4.16-24). He denounced those who called evil good and good evil, who

were *wise in their own eyes* (Isaiah 5.20). These were not breaches the ten commandments. Isaiah saw a society ruled by the fallen angels. Psalm 82 describes the condemnation of the rebel angels, the ‘sons of God Most High’ who would perish like mortals.

They have neither knowledge nor understanding,  
they walk about in darkness,  
and the foundations of the earth are shaken...

Even though you are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you;  
Nevertheless you shall die like men... (Psalm 82. 5-6).

We learn here that the fallen angels were called ‘the sons of God Most High’, which explains why the Book of Isaiah begins: ‘Sons have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me.’ The prophet describes the rebel sons as corrupted, a word which looks and sounds very like the word for anointed, and so as early as the eighth century BCE, we hear a prophet’s wordplay contrasting the corrupted sons of God who have no knowledge or understanding, with the anointed sons of God. The same contrast and the same wordplay is implied in the Book of Revelation [I say implied, because Revelation has been translated into Greek and so the original sounds have been lost] The great harlot, who had replaced Wisdom, was described as the mother of the corruptions of the earth (Revelation 17.5), whereas Wisdom was the bride of the Lamb, and would have been the mother of the anointed ones.

This contrast was in Paul’s mind when he wrote Romans 8. Using key ideas from the story of the fallen angels - sons of God, bondage to decay - he wrote: ‘All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God ... The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God, for the creation was subjected to...’, and here Paul chose the interesting word *mataiotes* which means foolishness, profanity, going nowhere, having no purpose. ‘The creation was subjected to going nowhere’. Paul continued: ‘The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the sons of God.’ (Romans 8.19-21). This was the renewal of the creation and implied that the (new) sons of God would not abuse knowledge and would not be separated from unity with the Creator. The eternal covenant would be restored. And so

the chapter concluded with Paul's confident assertion that angels, principalities and powers - why them? - would no longer be able to separate us from the love of God.

Let us return now to Wisdom, and how she was remembered. The Book of Ben Sira, better known as Ecclesiasticus, was written in Jerusalem about 180BCE, and includes a long poem about Wisdom. She stands among the angels and speaks about herself, enthroned in a pillar of cloud, and given Israel as her inheritance. She had been created in eternity, and set to serve in the holy tabernacle in Zion; in other words, as late as 200BCE, *a female figure was the heavenly archetype of the high priesthood in Jerusalem*. She took root there as a great tree, and gave forth the perfume of incense, and the perfume of sweet myrrh, which was in the anointing oil. She fed her devotees with her fruit *and even with herself* - which is a startling image (Ben Sira 24).

Wisdom was given with the anointing oil. Tradition said the true anointing oil had been hidden just before the destruction of the first temple (Babylonian Talmud Horayoth 12a), in other words, when Wisdom left the temple, the true oil was lost. The means of resurrection and access to the angel state had gone. The same text says the high priest was anointed on his eyelids, i.e. to open his spiritual eyes. The Enoch tradition recorded the ancient ritual, how Enoch had stood before the heavenly throne and been anointed. The oil was like a bright dew, perfumed with sweet myrrh, and it turned Enoch into an angel. Then he learned all the secrets of the creation (2 Enoch 22). When Paul wrote to the Corinthians about 'the fragrance of the knowledge' and 'the sweet perfume of the anointed one.' (2 Corinthians 2.14-15), this is what he meant.

The early Christians knew that anointing the mind transformed a human into an angel. The *Odes of Solomon* are a collection of early baptismal hymns where we read, for example:

My eyes were enlightened, and my face received the dew,  
And my soul was refreshed with the pleasant fragrance of the Lord.

(Ode 11)

and

He anointed me with his perfection  
and I became as one of those who are near him' (Ode 36).

Another early text, *The Clementine Recognitions* (1.45-6) says that Peter taught about the oil: 'God anointed [the Son] with oil from the wood of the Tree of Life...' Aaron, said Peter, had been anointed with an oil which imitated the heavenly oil, and 'If this temporal grace, compounded by men, had such efficacy, consider how potent was that ointment extracted by God from a branch of the Tree of life...'

Dionysius, writing in the fifth century, taught that the baptismal anointing was a sign of divine birth which joined them to the Spirit of God. He added: '[The oil] spreads its sweet fragrance into their mental reception... the transcendent fragrance of the divine Jesus distributes its conceptual gifts over our own intellectual powers.' (Hierarchy 404C, 476C, 477C). Pope St Leo, in an Epiphany sermon at about the same period, explained why myrrh was brought to the infant Jesus: 'He who offers myrrh believes that God's only begotten son united to himself man's true nature' (Sermons, Epiphany 6). The oil of Wisdom, then, was the sacrament of *theosis*, of humans returning to the angel state by the transformation of their minds.

All these ideas are deeply rooted in the Old Testament. Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah describes how anointing would transform his mind.

The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,  
the spirit of Wisdom and understanding,  
the spirit of counsel and might,  
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. (Isaiah 11.2)

Wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge and the fear of the Lord. Familiar words, but how often, when we talk of the gifts of the Spirit, do we consider that the most important gift of all is the transformation of the mind? And so Isaiah prophesied that the anointed one would no longer judge with human eyes or with human ears. Anointed eyes and anointed ears would see what everyone else saw, but see it differently, hear what everyone else heard, but hear it differently. And then the anointed one would judge

differently and act differently. The English translations of this passage attribute to Isaiah something like: 'His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord' (Isaiah 11.3), but what the Hebrew actually says is: '*His perfume shall be the fear of the Lord.*' The one whose mind had been transformed brought with him the fragrance of Wisdom, what Paul was to call 'the fragrance of Life for Life' (2 Corinthians 2.16).

In the early Church, this teaching about Wisdom and her gifts must have had a prominent place. For example, there is a very early text known as The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, (in Greek The Didache), which has the earliest description of the Eucharist outside the New Testament. This was the prayer over the bread:

We give thanks to thee, our Father, for *the life and knowledge* thou hast made known to us through thy Servant Jesus. (Didache 9).

And after the distribution, the prayer was:

Thanks be to thee Holy Father, for thy sacred Name which thou hast caused to dwell in our hearts, and for *the knowledge and faith and immortality* which thou hast revealed to us through thy servant Jesus.' (Didache 9).

This Eucharist was based on more than the Last Supper as described in the Gospels. Thanks for 'life and knowledge' and for 'knowledge and faith and immortality' suggest that Wisdom was at the heart of the original Liturgy.

There is something very similar in Bishop Serapion's Prayer Book, used in Egypt in the middle of the fourth century. This was the prayer at the fraction:

Count us worthy of this communion also, O God of truth, and make our bodies contain purity and our souls prudence and knowledge. And make us wise, O God of compassions by the participation of the body and the blood...'

What is a prayer for Wisdom doing at the heart of the Eucharist? In the offertory prayer, Bishop Serapion had prayed:

Make us living (i.e. resurrected) men... that we may be able to tell forth thy unspeakable mysteries...'

The heavenly knowledge was a gift given with the Eucharist, and we recall that Wisdom had fed her devotees with herself.



One of the best known passages in Isaiah is the prophecy read at Christmas: 'Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder... (Isaiah 9.6).. This was the angels, singing at the ritual birth of the new ruler, when he was anointed and became one of them. The Hebrew text then gives his four titles: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace - to use the familiar translation. The Greek version, however, gave only one title: he would be called the Angel of Great Counsel, that is, the Wisdom Angel. All Christians who use, and have used, the Greek Old Testament - would have known Jesus as the Angel of Great Counsel.

The gender issue had caused huge problems for the Church. In the temple tradition, where Wisdom was at home, this was not a problem, for it was recognised that there were gender distinctions only in the material world. Angels, Wisdom, the bodiless powers, have no gender. The Second Person present at the creation in Proverbs 8 was a female figure, but in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel the figure was male, the Logos. In the Wisdom poem of Ben Sira, the archetype of the high priesthood was feminine. Paul wrote of the Christ, the Anointed One, as the Power of God and the Wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1.24), a twofold incarnation.

Most striking of all was John's vision in the Book of Revelation, when the heavenly Lord dictated the letter to the church at Laodicea: the Lord was Wisdom. He offered true riches - gold refined by fire; he offered white garments to hid their nakedness - a clear allusion to the fate of Adam and the garment of glory; he offered to anoint their eyes so that they could see; and then he asked them to open the door and let him in, so that they could eat together - the rejected Wisdom sharing her table again.

I began with a quotation from Bulgakov, and I should like to return to it.

Scholastic theology commonly abandons the whole field of research into sophianic churches and ikons, together with the appropriate texts for divine worship, to the realm of archaeology, as something essentially antiquated, or else interprets it somewhat unsympathetically as a theological misunderstanding...

All this wealth of symbolism has been preserved in the archives of ecclesiastical antiquities, but, covered by the dust of ages, it has been no use to anyone. The time has come, however, for us to sweep away the dust of ages and decipher the sacred script, to reinstate the tradition of the Church, in this instance all but broken, as a living tradition.

And now, to conclude, I want to tell you something about a remarkable development in this area - knowledge coming together, being seen as a whole, and then used for the healing of the creation. Since 1995, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has convened five Symposia - 'Religion Science and the Environment' - to draw attention to the state of the waters of the earth. A group of scientists, environmentalists, policy makers, and leaders of the Church and other world faiths, meet on a boat for discussions about the state of the waters through which they are sailing. The first of these Symposia was in the Aegean Sea, the second in the Black Sea, the third on the Danube, the fourth in the Adriatic, and last summer, the fifth was in the Baltic. Global attention has been drawn to the problems, because an important element of the Symposium is involvement of the media. A large number of journalists travel with the Symposium, to report what they see and hear.

The Symposium is a remarkable experiment, visionary in the Wisdom sense of that word, insofar as it draws together experts with a wide spectrum of knowledge who are able to listen to each other in a new context - that of theology. Personal friendships are established. I have talked theology at breakfast with some very interesting people. Experts on marine ecosystems have heard talks on Wisdom. During the Adriatic Symposium, for example, the Bishop of London gave a brilliant presentation on Wisdom, Knowledge and Information.

The crisis we face is not in essence an ecological crisis but a crisis of awareness. We are not dealing with any inevitable conflict between science as such and religion, but rather a way of being the world which is out of sympathy and communion with the creation. This lack of sympathy is manifested in symptoms of ecological distress.

I am discussing nothing less than participation in the wisdom of God...

Science and religion should be allies in the search for Holy Wisdom, which is at once respectful of the divine gift of reason but chooses the Tree of Living Wisdom not the Tree of Fragmented Knowledge.

The Wisdom themes are all there: lack of awareness, that is, not seeing; lack of sympathy, that is, not loving; lack of communion, that is fragmentation. The Bishop's observation: 'Manifested in symptoms of ecological distress' is exactly what Isaiah said:

The earth mourns and withers

The world languishes and withers

The heavens languish together with the earth

The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants...

What seems at first sight to be an impossible or unlikely operation really does work. People ask different questions, and so begin to suggest different answers. My personal feeling - and I have had the privilege of being involved in this work - is that a new theology is emerging which will prove to be very significant indeed. The familiar interface of science and religion, who have so often met as enemies in the past, has been concerned mainly with cosmology and creationism, the origin of the universe and the understanding of Genesis 1. This has a different emphasis, springing as it does from the Orthodox tradition which is still so little known in the West.

The Great Church in Constantinople, which was for centuries at the heart of the Orthodox world, was dedicated to the Holy Wisdom. Sadly, it is now a museum, but the Wisdom it represents is not a museum piece. Theological discourse has again taken up the distinction between fragmented knowledge and the Holy Wisdom who joins all things together.