

An Introduction to the Biblical and Theological Fundamentals of Literary Creativity*

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Resumen

Un tema discutido con asiduidad por los estudiosos que creen en las Escrituras como la revelación divina a los seres humanos tiene que ver con la moralidad del conocimiento y la empresa literaria. A menudo, tales discusiones pasan por alto la Biblia misma como respuesta a muchos de los interrogantes que resultan de estas consideraciones. En efecto, un análisis bíblico de la fuente y el origen de la creatividad literaria puede arrojar luz en relación con una mejor comprensión de la literatura y su estudio dentro del marco dado por las manifestaciones de la sabiduría divina. Este trabajo se remonta a los orígenes mismos de la literatura según se narran en la Biblia, y a continuación procede a analizar su relación con la sabiduría divina, así como sus aplicaciones bíblicas (en las vidas de los patriarcas, los profetas y Jesucristo) y contemporáneas en las empresas literarias humanas. De esta forma, la literatura aparece como dada y aprobada por la divinidad, un medio de comunicarse y de ayudar a los seres humanos a reflejar y a participar en la recuperación de la estampa divina original según les fue dada en el Edén.

Palabras clave: Biblia – literatura – creatividad – sabiduría divina – imagen divina

Summary

The morality of literary knowledge and the literary enterprise is a topic fervently discussed by scholars who believe in the Scriptures as God's revelation to humans. Often, such discussions overlook the Bible itself as the answer to many of the questions arising from these considerations. Indeed, a biblical analysis of the source and origin of literary creativity may shed light towards a better understanding of literature and its study within the scope of God's manifestations of His wisdom. This paper traces literature back to its very beginnings as narrated in the Bible, and then proceeds to analyze its relationship with God's wisdom, as well as the biblical (in the lives of the patriarchs, the prophets, and Jesus) and contemporary applications of such wisdom in the literary enterprises of human beings. Literature thus appears as God-given and God-approved, a means of communicating and helping humans to reflect and participate in the recovery of God's original imprint on them as given in Eden.

Key Words: Bible – literature – creativity – God's wisdom – God's image

Résumé

Un sujet qui a été étudié souvent par les érudits qui croient que les Écritures sont la révélation divine aux êtres humains, est le caractère moral de la connaissance et de l'activité littéraire. Mais

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plusieurs fois ces discussions laissent de côté la Bible même comme la réponse à maintes questions posées par ces considérations. En fait, une analyse biblique de la source et l'origine de la créativité littéraire peut nous permettre d'avoir une compréhension plus claire à l'égard de la littérature et son étude dans l'encadrement des manifestations de la sagesse divine. Cet ouvrage nous mène même aux origines de la littérature selon ils apparaissent dans la Bible, et à la suite elle analyse sa relation avec la sagesse divine et son application biblique (dans les vies des patriarches et prophètes, et de Jésus Christ) et contemporaines dans les activités littéraires humaines. Dans cet encadrement on présente la littérature comme donnée et approuvée par la divinité, comme un moyen de se communiquer avec les êtres humains, et de leur aider à récupérer l'image divine originelle, telle qu'elle lui fit donnée à l'Eden, et à la refléter dans l'actualité.

Mots clefs: Bible – littérature – créativité – sagesse divine – image divine

INTRODUCCIÓN

Literature has always been a controversial subject for Christians. Often, fundamentalist Christians (and I am not using this expression in a derogatory way) find it hard to grapple with the real meaning of some biblical verses such as, for instance, Paul's admonition to the Philippians to dwell on "whatever things are true" (Philippians 4:8).¹ Many of these sincere Christians find it difficult to relate literature with a depiction of reality, since they claim fiction involves thinking in events that did not actually happen.

Unfortunately, most researchers and commentators on the subject overlook the cornerstone of any value-related discussion: the Bible itself. It is within its pages that we should find answers when confronting those questions every Christian teacher or lover of literature must eventually face. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to search the Bible for insights into creativity and literature that may help us to meditate on "whatever things are true... noble... just... (and) pure" (Philippians 4:8).

THE BEGINNING OF IT ALL

Whatever words you may use to define literature, it is generally accepted that—in its simplest form—it is an art that involves creation using words, either in written or oral form. Now, is there in the Bible any notion about the way in which human creativity started? When studying the account of Genesis 1 and 2, we normally point out Genesis 1:26, 27—the creation of man in God's image—as the key verses of the whole description. What we usually

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, biblical verses are taken from the New King James Version (1982).

forget to stress is that the divine image that God gave Adam was to be reflected in **all** of man's distinctive features. As Claus Westermann points out, "man, in his entirety, corporeally as well as spiritually and intellectually, is to be designated as a creature in God's image".² So we are likely to find an opening when analyzing what Adam received from God the very first day of his existence on this earth.

Genesis 2:8 says that God gave him **a place**, the Garden of Eden. It reads: "... God planted a garden...and there He put the man whom He had formed". God also provided him with **the means** to live in the garden. Genesis 1:29 states that God gave him food, saying: "I have given you every herb that yields seed...and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food". Adam also received from God **a special time**, the Sabbath, since "...God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it" (Genesis 2:3). By accepting the woman (with the implications of marriage and family), he was also granted the blessings of **a relationship**, as we read that God "made... a woman... Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife..." (Genesis 2:22, 24). Finally, we must remember that God gave Adam **a job**, which was divided in tending and keeping the garden ("...God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it" [Genesis 2:15]), that is to say, a **physical job**, and in naming the living creatures ("...God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them" [Genesis 2:19]), that is to say, an **intellectual job**.

It is difficult not to see God's purposeful intentions in giving man this intellectual activity. After all, God did not need man to give names to the living creatures, since he did not participate in the naming of all the other objects of creation (See Genesis 1:10). God could have well said, "Look, Adam, this is a horse", or, "Do you see that? It is called cow". Undoubtedly, God had another purpose in mind. Some commentators relate the naming of the animals with an evidence of man's ruling over all the living creatures.³ But there is another feature to point out: **God wanted Adam to start using that God-given capacity of creating**. The naming of the animals was much more

² Claus Westermann, *The Genesis Accounts of Creation*, trans. Norman E. Wagner (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 20.

³ See, for instance, William G. Heidt, *Old Testament Reading Guide: The Book of Genesis* (Collegedale: The Liturgical Press, 1969), 39; Harold G. Stigers, *A Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 72; Esteban Voth, *Comentario Biblico Hispanoamericano: Genesis* (Miami: Caribe, 1992), 79.

than mere words applied to inferior beings. It implied knowing the nature and the character of the ones named.⁴ And, as Herbert C. Leupold adds, the fact that “whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name” shows that “the names given had been appropriate and worthy of man’s intelligence”.⁵ By creating associations, comparisons, and similes, Adam began to reflect an essential part of God’s image, that is, the capacity of being part of the process of invention and creation.

Here we are forced to make a distinction. Naming animals may be a creative act, so to speak, but it is not creation as God created. Gerhard von Rad agrees when stating that “in this nominative process there is an act of secondary creation...by which man makes other creatures mentally objective”.⁶ In this secondary creativity, however, the act of **noticing, knowing, making figurative connections**, can be fairly said to be “in the image of God”. **Such seeing, noticing, and expressing in words or pictures or sounds** is the very heart of the creative process. Again, it is less an actual creation than it is a knowing (intuition) and an expression of that intuition in a way which successfully communicates the intuition to others.

Nevertheless, we should never overlook the fact that the human ability of “creating” is considered “the prime manner in which we are made in God’s image”⁷, since it constitutes “a manifested and attempted response to an innate and original cultural mandate that links man with God in activities”.⁸ Once more, we should never forget that even though God is the only one able to actually create (taking into account the ultimate meaning of the word, that is to say, *ex nihilo*), it is humanity’s privilege and challenge to somehow reflect that divine attribute in the pale constructions of imagination.

Coming back to the Genesis account, we find a few verses later the first recorded poem of the Bible, as Adam suddenly became a “poet” when seeing Eve for the first time. He said (Genesis 2:23):

⁴ Gerhard Ch. Aalders, *Bible Students’ Commentary: Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 95; Herbert C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 131.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Gerhard von Rad, *Sabiduría en Israel: Proverbios, Job, Eclesiastés, Eclesiástico, Sabiduría* (Madrid: Ediciones Cristiandad, 1985), 100.

⁷ Glenn Spring, “In the Image of God: the Creative Act in Teaching and Learning”, in *Christ in the Classroom* (Silver Spring: Institute for Christian Teaching, 1998), 21: 317.

⁸ Genevieve Blackwell, “Creativity and culture”, in *Christ in the Classroom* (1992), 7: 373.

*This is now bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called woman,
For she was taken out of man.*

After sin entered into the world, human faculties were affected. God's image in humanity suffered from the transformation. However, though stained by sin, human beings continued to reflect God's image, since "as long as we are humans we are, by definition, in the image of God".⁹ God himself said after Abel's death: "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man" (Genesis 9:6; cf. James 3:9). And of course, man's capacity of creating outlived the scope of Eden. In Genesis 4, three interesting characters are mentioned: Jabal, "the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock" (v. 20); Jubal, "the father of all those who play the harp and the flute" (v. 21); and Tubal-Cain, "an instructor of every craftsman in bronze and iron" (v. 22). These verses show clearly that humanity kept developing creative abilities, some of them related to manual activities and others to more intellectual ones. Undoubtedly, such development went on to the present, where the creative manifestations have been defined as possessing "originality, variety, fluency, and flexibility".¹⁰

From the Bible it becomes clear, however, that in order to understand how this ability can be developed in human beings, it is essential to consider it within the scope of God's wisdom. Only when we comprehend the nature and purpose of His wisdom do we become able to grasp the importance and necessity of creativity in human life as part of that wisdom. Therefore, what is God's wisdom? Can it be "transferred" to human experience? If yes, how?

THE MANIFOLD WISDOM OF GOD

In the Bible, the word "wisdom" (OT Heb. *hokma*, NT Gr. *sophia*) "represents a wide semantic field, and is used in a variety of different contexts".¹¹ In fact, various scholars have theorized on the uses of biblical

⁹ Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1967), 51.

¹⁰ Floyd L. Ruch, *Psychology and Life* (Chicago: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1958), 361-68, quoted by Blackwell, 373.

¹¹ *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*; rev. ed., S.V. "Wisdom", by Allen C. Myers; assoc. eds. John W. Simpson, Jr., et. al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 1058.

wisdom, dividing it in wisdom related to thought, discourse, or action.¹² It is clear, however, that in the Bible, the connotation of the word is “intensely practical, not theoretical”.¹³ According to the Scriptures, God is the source of all wisdom (Job 12:13; 38:36). Likewise, in Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). But, what is the nature of that wisdom? Is it an abstract quality that belongs only to God? Can it somehow be received or developed by human beings? As we said, God’s wisdom is much more than a nice theoretical definition. Even when He prescribed His laws, God “explored wisdom, which is treated as a tangible object or idea”.¹⁴ What is more, the Bible itself assures us that God’s wisdom is revealed in human lives. Paul calls that “made-known” wisdom of God “manifold” (Ephesians 3:10); that is to say, that can be manifested in many different ways. The word “manifold” (Gr. *polypoioulos*) deserves special analysis. According to John Eadie, it means not simply “varied” but actually “much varied”¹⁵, and Leslie Mitton understands it as “richly diversified”.¹⁶ The original Greek word, though, suggests “the intricate beauty of an embroidered pattern”¹⁷, since it may imply both beauty and diversity.¹⁸ Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene Nida translate it as “his wisdom in all its different forms”, and they think that the phrase refers to “the application of wisdom to the different areas of human experience”.¹⁹ For a Christian, it is the wisdom that “takes insights gleaned from the knowledge of God’s ways and applies them in the daily walk”.²⁰

¹² For a complete explanation, see S.V. “Wisdom”, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne & Ralph P. Martin; assoc. ed. Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 967-68.

¹³ *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, S.V. “Wisdom”, by org. ed. James D. Douglas (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 1650.

¹⁴ Roy B. Zuck, ed.; *Sitting whib Job: Selected Studies on the Book of Job* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 301-02.

¹⁵ John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 232.

¹⁶ Leslie C. Mitton, *New Century Bible Commentary: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 128.

¹⁷ J. Armitage Robinson, quoted in Francis Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1978), 98.

¹⁸ Curtis Vaughan, *A Study Guide Commentary: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 76.

¹⁹ Robert G. Bratcher & Eugene Nida, *A Translator’s Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1982), 79.

²⁰ Douglas, 1651.

As we study the exemplary lives of the great men of the Bible, we find not only the various means by which God’s wisdom was manifested in their lives, but also the purpose of such manifestations. For instance, in Exodus 35:30-35 we read that Bezaleel was given wisdom “to design artistic works, work in gold and silver and bronze... and in all manner of artistic workmanship”. In Deuteronomy 34:9, we read about Joshua, who received wisdom to be in charge, to be a leader. Moreover, when we analyze the story of King Solomon, we find that he received wisdom “to administer justice”, on one hand (1 Kings 3:28), and to write proverbs, compose songs and be a lecturer, on the other (1 Kings 4:29-33). We also learn that Daniel was granted wisdom to interpret dreams, solve riddles, and explain enigmas (Daniel 5:11, 12). Finally, in the New Testament, Peter says that the apostle Paul received wisdom to write epistles and “essays” (2 Peter 3:15, 16). It is interesting to point out that, under this meaning, God’s wisdom is given to everyone in order to fulfill a specific task that—as in Bezaleel’s case—is not necessarily an intellectual one. Thus the pattern of Eden is repeated. In Daniel’s story, God’s wisdom for him “speaks of knowledge and capacity for proper decision...of mental reflection and discernment”.²¹ On the other hand, in Solomon’s case that wisdom seems to cover a rather wide range of intellectual achievements (judge, writer, composer, lecturer). But even then it is not as simple as that. Martin Noth says that Solomon’s wisdom in judging was more than “human sagacity or shrewdness”²², since it implied “understanding mind and the ability to distinguish between good and evil”.²³ Gene Rice also considers the wisdom of 1 Kings 4:29-33 as a “breadth of learning and the ability to gain insight from the observations of nature”.²⁴

From these considerations, the link between wisdom and creativity becomes obvious. God, the source of all wisdom, gives human beings the ability of creating by giving them a small “portion” of His wisdom in order that they can apply it to their everyday projects. So wisdom becomes “the ordering principle of this creation process”²⁵ and—as J. Gerald Janzen puts it

²¹ Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 142.

²² Martin Noth, *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* 3 (1955), 230-37; quoted by Gwilym H. Jones, *New Century Bible Commentary: 1 & 2 Kings* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1984), 1: 133.

²³ Gene Rice, *Nations under God: A Commentary on the Book of Kings* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 37.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁵ Norman Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 400.

so nicely— it “emerges in the creative act, as it were at the edge of the knife, the point of the chisel, the tip of the brush...”²⁶

Now, where does literature fit in this pattern? Here we are forced to make a distinction: On one hand, the creativity related to words —that is to say, literature— is just another way in which that manifold wisdom of God can be manifested in human life. As we have seen, God’s wisdom given to Solomon in order that he could write proverbs and compose songs was no less than the one given to Joshua to act as a leader or to Bezaleel to design, engrave, and teach. On the other hand, in His infinite wisdom, God chose to communicate His message in written form. It seems that —between all the possible means of transmission— God decided to give His lasting message of love in a way that could endure both space and time. Time after time God’s order to the prophets is: “Write” (See, for instance, Jeremiah 30:2 and Habakkuk 2:2). Sometimes, the written word represents an additional opportunity given by God in order his people could listen to His voice (Jeremiah 36:2, 3). What is more, in Exodus God said to Moses: “Write these words, for **according to the tenor of these words** I have made a covenant with you and with Israel” (34:27). So for God the written word has an authority that does not seem to be present in other human expressions, at least not to such a degree. And of course, this fact was emphasized by Jesus when —dealing with temptation or controversy— He resorted to the authoritative words: “It is written”. In addition, it is impossible to overlook the fact that God chose to communicate not only through the written word, but also in a literary way.²⁷ The discussion of God’s reasons to do so go beyond the scope of this paper. But perhaps an insight can be found in Peter Morea’s statement: “As yet, the experience of being human cannot even be captured other than by poets, novelists and dramatists; it certainly cannot be described scientifically”.²⁸ God’s longing to reach man may account for His literary preferences when transmitting His messages. Be it what it may, it implies that when analyzing the content of the Bible, a literary approach (taking into account imagery, for instance) is “imperative to understand its meaning”.²⁹ As Moisés Silva humorously puts it,

²⁶ J. Gerald Janzen, *Job: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 198.

²⁷ Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 151.

²⁸ Peter Morea, *Personality: An Introduction to the Theories of Psychology* (London: Penguin, 1990), 154-55; quoted in Vanhoozer, 330.

²⁹ Wilma McClarty, “El libro de Ester: ¿Una obra literaria?”, *Diálogo Universitario*, 1: 2; reprinted in *Christ in the Classroom* (1998), 20: 369.

“Forget that fact [the imagery of the Bible], and you will decide that David was not a person but a lamb”.³⁰ It is as simple as that. So, if we consider the Bible, what can we learn from literature about man’s creativity? As usual, the answers can be found in the Bible itself.

TOWARDS A CREATIVITY-BASED LITERARY APPROACH TO THE BIBLE

Such important scholars as Stendhal, C. S. Lewis, Herder, and T. S. Eliot have always opposed the idea of simply considering “the Bible as literature”.³¹ Apparently, it is not enough to scan the Bible looking for good examples of similes, metaphors, and hyperboles. Paradoxically, this approach may minimize one of the purposes of using such devices, that is, to communicate God’s truth in human terms. So it seems that a deeper analysis is required if we want to grasp the implications of using a literary “frame” to get a better understanding of biblical truths. By a literary approach we mean what Meir Sternberg calls “discourse oriented analysis”. Such analysis “sets out to understand not the realities behind the text but the text itself as a pattern of meaning and effect”.³² Kevin J. Vanhoozer further explains that “most appropriations to date of literary methods by biblical scholars” belong to a conservative version of “reader-response” criticism, where scholars acknowledge that “the text has certain indeterminacies or gaps that the reader needs to fill in, but the text itself provides some guidance as to how to do so”.³³ In short, we can say that a literary approach to the Bible should acknowledge, among other considerations, that:

“God has...spoken to us...through human languages... If we ignore the character of human language, we will likely misunderstand Scripture”.³⁴

³⁰ Moisés Silva, *God, Language, and Scripture: Reading the Bible in the Light of General Linguistics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 17.

³¹ Longman, 8.

³² Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 15, quoted in Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, *In An Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah*; The Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series, number 36; ed. Adela Yarbro Collins; assoc. ed. P. Kyle McCarter, Jr. (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars, 1988), 3.

³³ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in this Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 108.

³⁴ Silva, 17.

“The literary approach and methods are no less important than the historical ones... It is impossible to appreciate the nature of biblical narrative fully... without having recourse to... literary scholarship”.³⁵ Obviously, we should not “deny or downplay historical reference of the biblical text in the face of its literary artifice”.³⁶

“The writers of the Bible had an amazing talent whose subtleties we are just beginning to comprehend”.³⁷

“Jesus found it impossible to communicate... without using literary discourse”.³⁸

God himself resorted to literary forms to communicate His truth. In addition, more than once He ordered a prophet to use that means, as in Ezekiel 17:2, where He tells the prophet, “Son of man, pose a riddle, and speak a parable to the house of Israel”.

It would be helpful to consider a few additional comments to the previous points. First of all, it is not my purpose to describe the nature of revelation and inspiration according to the Bible. Enough explanations have already been produced in order to prevent people from thinking of its writers as simple robots or dictating-machines. What I would like to present, though, are a few examples of the ways in which some of the authors used their creativity when transmitting the messages from God. From all the examples available, I have chosen some related to what we call in the Old Testament “the prophetic books”. Some of them are probably the least read by Christians, though their richness is not minimized by that fact. The following examples are mostly based on the work of Gary Smith, from which they are taken.³⁹

Prophet Amos used creative ways of thinking, by writing oracles in pairs (1:3-2:16). He also made use of literary forms of speech common in his setting, such as hymn, vision, disputation, judgment oracle, woe oracle, and

³⁵ Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Decatur: Almond, 1992), 10.

³⁶ Longman, 151.

³⁷ Robert Alter, “Introduction to the Old Testament”, *The Literary Guide to the Bible*; eds. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 15; quoted by McClarty, in *Christ in the Classroom* (1988), 1: 373.

³⁸ Leland Ryken, *The Liberated Imagination* (Wheaton: Harold Shaw, 1989), 125, quoted in Luz L. Barayuga, “An Ethical-Theological Approach to Literature: Some Suggestions for Adventist Teachers”, in *Christ in the Classroom* (1993), 11: 3.

³⁹ Gary V. Smith, *The Prophets as Preachers: An Introduction to the Hebrew Prophets* (Nashville: Bradman & Holman, 1994).

salvation oracle.⁴⁰ The book of Jonah displays literary forms of speech from the nation's hymnic tradition, as it can be seen in Jonah's prayer (2:2-9).⁴¹ Moreover, it is not difficult to see the surprising use of irony throughout the book, especially in the theme of God's compassion.⁴² In Micah, we find that the author makes use of his literary skill by weaving similar themes together, and by playing with words by repetition, including the use of puns relating the names of the cities with their punishment (1:10-16).⁴³ Habbakuk is a prophet and songwriter, who writes according to the literary traditions of his time, such as laments (1:2-4; 1:12-2:1) and a hymn (3:1-19).⁴⁴ On the other hand, prophet Joel uses imagery taken from agricultural, military, and temple life.⁴⁵ Finally, Ezekiel resorts to parables, allegories (15-17; 19-20), and even to drama (4-5; 12:1-7) to convey God's message to His wayward people.⁴⁶

From this brief description, it is important to notice that God used every one of the prophets according to their own skills; in other words, God-given wisdom to talk and write stressed the prophets' natural abilities and took into account their background and setting. Smith believes that they "were faithful to their calling, but they had the freedom to communicate the divine word in a way that was appropriate to the Judean audience they addressed".⁴⁷

In some cases, God's intervention seems to be given in a much more direct way, as when Ezekiel writes, "The word of the Lord came to me saying..", or, "Say to the house of Israel...". One of these great examples is found in Ezekiel 16. In that chapter and through His prophet, God tells a striking allegory of His love relationship with Jerusalem. It is almost impossible to read its metaphors and vocabulary and remain unmoved. God speaks of Jerusalem as a bastard girl (v. 3) who was abandoned in her blood the day she was born (v. 5). Later, she is described as a beautiful woman with long hair and formed breasts (v. 7) who was saved by a lover (remember we are talking about God Himself!) and accepted as his wife (v. 8). Unfortunately for the loving husband, when she became famous she played the harlot,

⁴⁰ Ibid., 52.

⁴¹ Ibid., 90.

⁴² Ibid., 92.

⁴³ Ibid., 104.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 182.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 232.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 256.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 342.

accepting lovers from every land and forgetting her covenant (v. 15-43). She is described as the opposite of other prostitutes, since she pays for her services instead of being paid (v. 34). The allegory ends with a promise of future forgiveness (v. 63). Any sincere person who analyzes biblical stories like this one will definitely gain a new vision of the purposes and importance of literary creativity as given by God, who should be considered —according to Shirley McGarrel— “the greatest literary artist”.⁴⁸

In the New Testament, “the Gospels....do their work in our minds and hearts because of their unique literary form”.⁴⁹ In addition, we can see how Jesus resorted to literary devices time after time in order to communicate his eternal truths in an effective way. Parables and allegories are usually the first words that come into our minds when talking about Jesus’ teaching methods. And a deeper analysis of the way He used to communicate with humanity would show us that:

1. His use of literary narratives went beyond their effectiveness as a teaching device: The Son of God could have transmitted His eternal truths in a very simple way without resorting to literary devices. Beyond the teaching device of allegories and parables, there is an aesthetic element in Jesus’ stories that should not be overlooked.
2. Above subject, Jesus was interested in literary narratives as ways of thinking critically in eternal truths: More than once, Jesus made up or imagined stories that were not only contrary to the Old Testament teachings but also to His own beliefs. The story of “The Rich Man and Lazarus” constitutes a clear example, where you can meditate on the importance of paying attention to the prophets —among other things— though we cannot argue that Jesus is making a statement on the immortality of the soul or the doctrine of hell. For Jesus’ audience, it was very clear that his story was just that, a story with a moral.

Summarizing, we can say that the Bible identifies clearly this process of origin and transmission of creative language as one that starts with a Creator God who decides to reveal His truth in human languages —languages which are a product of the one human beings acquired from God when humanity

⁴⁸ Shirley A. McGarrel, “Faith and Fiction: An Inspiring Dilemma for Seventh-day Adventist Teachers of Literature”, in *Christ in the Classroom* (1994), 14: 295.

⁴⁹ James W. Sire, *The Discipleship of the Mind: Learning to Love God in the Ways We Think* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), 164.

was created in God's image. Above all this use of language was sanctioned by Jesus' example, which we are supposed to follow.

A WORD ON THE LIMITATIONS OF LITERATURE

The previous analysis may take us to a stance where we —often unconsciously— come closer to a belief in something like the “infallibility of literature”. Nothing is further from the truth. According to the Bible, the origins of literature and literary creativity are divine, we are not. The Bible also tells us that we are humans, who only “see in a mirror, dimly” (1 Corinthians 13:12). As any other human enterprise, literature falls short of portraying an ultimate vision of reality. If there is a word that captures the essence of any human achievement, it is “incompleteness”. Accordingly, this side of eternity the best literary works can represent but a partial view of reality. Acknowledging this fact may nevertheless encourage Christians as they wait for the day when they will achieve full knowledge (See 1 Corinthians 13:12).

It is important to remember, however, that our literary knowledge and the ability of interpretation, while not **absolute**, may be **adequate**. “Interpreters —states Kevin J. Vanhoozer— may not know everything but they often know **enough** —enough to understand a text and to respond appropriately”. And he adds: “... interpretation is not an all-or-nothing affair. We need not to choose between a meaning that is wholly determinate and a meaning that is wholly indeterminate. Neither we need to choose between a meaning that is fully present and a meaning that is forever deferred”.⁵⁰ Thus, literature and literary studies, while not giving us the whole picture, may nevertheless render a picture that places us closer to the full knowledge we will get in heaven.

CONCLUSION

The Bible presents clear evidences that creativity was part of the image of God humanity received when created in God's image. In spite of the fact that we live in a sinful world, “the power to think and to do”⁵¹ is still part of that image. Literature, one of those products of human creativity, should be a means of reflecting “the manifold wisdom of God”, and its careful analysis and methodical study should be encouraged by Christians who believe in the Bible as God's revelation to humanity. In doing so, we are both following the

⁵⁰ Vanhoozer, 139.

⁵¹ Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1952), 17.

path of the great patriarchs, prophets, and kings of the past, and imitating Christ himself. Finally, the realization of the limitations of literature should not become a stumbling block but one more incentive to pursue the path of knowledge, as we wait for the day when all things will be made anew and God's image in humans will be once more perfectly imprinted in every one of their thoughts, actions, and achievements.

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