

**A LITERARY ANALYSIS OF THE BOOKS OF *PROVERBS*  
AND *ECCLESIASTES***

**BY**

**MARK OSAMAGBE IGHILE**

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## **Certification**

I certify that this work was carried out by Mr. Mark Osamagbe Ighile in the Department of English, University of Ibadan.

.....

**Supervisor**  
**N.O. Fashina**  
**B.A. (OSUA). M.A., Ph.D. (Ibadan)**  
**Senior Lecturer, Department of English,**  
**University of Ibadan, Nigeria.**

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To the memory of Dad:

For stressing the importance of a Ph.D

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For sustaining the melody and uniting the dynamic stars

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## Abstract

There have been efforts at research into biblical literature, particularly from the socio-historical and doctrinal perspectives. However, little attention has been given to the literary and stylistic analysis of the Bible. The devotion to the sacredness of the biblical text has short-circuited the needed attention to a proper literary critique of the narrative. This study therefore is a close critique that foregrounds the literariness of the Bible with particular reference to the King James Version of the Books of *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes*. Thus, the study goes beyond the works of scholars like Alter, Kermode, Norton, Damrosch, Gardiner, and others which have only focused on biblical intertextuality, theological and socio-historical interpretations of the Bible.

Literary stylistic approach from the perspective of Formalism and New Criticism was adopted for this study. This approach was used to examine the stylistic resources, literary forms and functions of the selected texts within the framework of the Bible as a literary piece.

The Books of *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes* draw upon a knowledge of philosophy, history, orature, sociology and culture. The literary stylistic approach proved an effective way of making the *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes* meaningful to their users and also established the credibility and relevance of literary biblical studies as different from doctrinal biblical studies. The development of a literary theory such as Bible as literature, Formalism and New Criticism, enable us to look at the Bible from the perspective of its literary elements. Instead of emphasising the Bible solely as a sacred text, this study enables us to acknowledge it as a literary text with literary features. There are recurrent patterns in the theme, imagery, structure and style of the selected texts. The figurative devices employed advance the persuasiveness of the style. Without ignoring their essentially religious contexts, the study shows the conscious literary framework that shapes meaning and interpretation in *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes* and intensifies their degree of literary appreciation.

The study extends the frontiers of extrinsic literary criticism. It has implications for scholars and teachers of literature, religion and culture, who are strategic, not only in situating literary studies within the context of moral instructions, but also in locating biblical values within literary texts. The use of the literary perspective enables the two books to be viewed against the socio-cultural background of the society, from which they emerged, thereby providing a more rounded appreciation of their contents. Literature thus has distinctive characteristics that make a literary approach to the Bible a worthwhile scholarly venture.

**Key words:** Biblical literature, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Literary Stylistics.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Introduction

This chapter provides the background from which this work has been written. It discusses the relationship between the Bible and literature and gives a synopsis of each of the selected texts. The chapter also focuses on the aim, objectives and statement of the problem. In addition, the chapter provides the scope and delimitation of the study, justification of theory, texts and version, and the significance of the study.

### 1.1 Background to the Study.

The Bible is central to the understanding of many works of literature. The influence of the sacred text on literary productions is certainly not in doubt. Biblical allusion and intertextuality abound in literary works. John Bunyan's *Prigrim's Progress*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Alighieri Dante's *Descent into Hell*, works of William Shakespeare and that of William Blake, for instance, and several other poems such as Anion's 'Dream of the Rood', Eliot's 'Journey of the Magi' and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* are easily appreciated within the context of the Bible. While possibilities of biblical influence on literary works are overt, some are, nonetheless, subtle. In the Narnia Chronicles, C. S. Lewis typifies the biblical character of Jesus Christ as the character of Aslan the lion, retelling certain events in the life of Jesus to children in a way that can be easily understood. In *The Tempest*, for instance, Shakespeare admits that while he controls the destiny of his characters, the ultimate control of life goes beyond individual human power. Recognizing the transient nature of the actors in the play, Shakespeare parallels the Psalmist: "For he

knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust." (Ps. 103:14). In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare says: "What a piece of work is a man; how noble in reason; how infinite in faculty...in apprehension how like a God." A reader of the Bible would easily relate this expression to the submissions of David in Psalm 8 about the incredible potentials of man. William Blake holds the view that the Bible is not just about morality and theology, but essentially one of poetry and energy. Indeed, "the whole Bible is filled with imagination and visions from end to end and not with moral virtue". (cf. Norton, 2000:50). One of his poems, 'The Tyger' from the collection *Song of Experience* is arguably an additional description of God's creation. (Job 40 and 41).

Warshaw (1978:31) and Gabel et al (2006:1-2) have gone ahead to explain the extent to which any work of art can be applied to the Bible. They hold the view that the Bible has the quality of multi-disciplinary application. There is perhaps no other text that enjoys the same universal significance as the Bible. The Bible is a text whose interpretation and criticism whether literary, cultural or historical, has elicited composite behaviour from people of different races. The biblical text has been appreciated for quite a long time by readers and scholars as a literally manifested - book format with a theological orientation (Gitay, Y 2006:633). This biblically-oriented theological movement, which has focused on the religious meanings of particular historical events and the lessons to be drawn from such interpretations, has not given much room for scholarly and cultural examinations of biblical text.

It therefore becomes imperative to begin to address more vigorously than before the literary value of the Bible with particular reference to some literary features and characters as they relate to selected aspects of the Bible. This study thus seeks to use the critical approach of Formalism and New Criticism to find out how much of

literature is in the Bible. This is done through a multi-dimensional incursion into the disciplines of religion, literature, philosophy, sociology and orature.

## **1.2 Motivation for the study**

This research is motivated by the fact that several studies have been carried out on the Bible using different approaches such as sociological, historical, theological and psychological, without much consideration for the literary and stylistic content of the sacred text. This study, using the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, for comprehensive illustration, will examine the stylistic and resources of the Bible. The work is, therefore, a necessity as it will certainly fill one of the gaps created by inadequate research on literary stylistics and the Bible as observed by scholars (Estes, 1995), Gottwald, 1985)

## **1.3 Statement of the problem**

There has always been a theological approach to the study of the Bible in general and the selected texts in particular. Even scholars who subscribe to the literary nature of the Bible do not feature it in their commentary (Leonard Ryken and Phillip Ryken 2001:11). The effect of this is that the concept of Bible as literature has tended to be essentially head knowledge. Estes (1995:415) and to some extent Gothwald (1985), hold the view that the literary criticism of the Bible has not received the same level of scholarly attention given to historical and theological issues. Central to this dilemma is the fact that the literary value of the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes has not been fully explored. Scholars have often interrogated the unsystematic nature of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes (Hilderbrant 1988:207). The research problem then is that the selected texts of the Bible have not

been given much literary investigation. While general statements about the literary nature of the two books have been made, the situation and the application of literary genres within the biblical context have not been intensive.

Our interest then is mainly to find out:

1. Why has much work not been done on the stylistic analysis of the Bible?
2. The relationship between Bible and literature.
3. The literary value of the Bible
4. What make Proverbs and Ecclesiastes critical to a literary discourse?

#### **1.4 Research questions**

The study seeks to provide answers to the following questions:

- RQ1. What makes the Bible fit for a literary enquiry?
- RQ2. How literary are the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes?
- RQ3. How does a theoretical approach advance the justification of literariness of the selected texts?
- RQ4. Does a literary criticism of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes draw upon other forms of knowledge?
- RQ5. What does a literary criticism of the texts reveal?
- RQ6. What is the importance of this discourse to literary study?

## 1.5 Research methodology/Theoretical framework

The study is based on literary stylistics from the perspective of Formalism and New Criticism. Literary stylistics is the critical approach which focuses on the “literariness” of texts. It examines the features that make the text a work of literature as opposed to history, journalism, travelogue, and the essay. In order to achieve this, it looks at those aspects of the literary artist’s imagination and creativity as demonstrated in his style. These aspects include the way in which he selects and uses figures of speech, and the way in which they help to realize the theme and subject matter of the literary work. This methodology is especially important to the study, because it will show precisely how Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, as two books of Christianity’s principal sacred texts can also be considered literary in the sense of being works of literature, even though it has been clearly acknowledged that that is not their primary aim. .

Formalism is a critical approach which buttresses and strengthens the case for literary stylistics as a methodological approach for this study. Its most significant feature is the way in which it seeks to focus intensely on the text itself to the almost total exclusion of extraneous contextual issues which serve as the text. Formalism major proponents (Viktor Shlovsky, Yuri Tynianov, Roman Jakobson, Vladimir Propp, Boris Eichenbaum, Grigory Vinokur) preferred to see the literary text as complete, neither requiring or needing an external context to explain or justify it, or give it validity.

The significance of this approach for the study is that it provides vital critical tools which enable the research to “sidestep” the almost overwhelming religious, spiritual and sacred contexts in which the Bible is immersed which has made it so difficult to approach it as a literary text. Formalism, in other words, provides the study



with a conceptual third eye with which these two books of the Bible can be viewed, at least temporarily, as literary texts, without regard for their sacred status.

New Criticism is similar in its near-total focus on the text qua text. The principal proponents of New Criticism (Browth John and Cro Ramsom) felt that too much of the literary critical methodologies of their day concentrated on issues which, strictly speaking, lay outside the purview of the text. They believed sincerely that the literary text was so holistically complete that meaning could be found by concentrating solely on the text and nothing else. Indeed, they argued that New Criticism offered the purest, most objective, most trustworthy and most scientific analysis of the literary work. Like Formalism, New Criticism offered tools which enable the study to go beyond issues of religion and spiritual significance and focus on the two books as literary texts from which an understanding can be successfully derived based only their status as literary texts and nothing else.

### **1.5.1 The Bible as Literature: Formalism and New Criticism**

The crux of formalist criticism is the discovery and explanation of form in the literary work. The approach assures the autonomy of the work itself and thus the relative unimportance of extra-literary consideration- the author's life, his times, sociological, political, economic or psychological implications (cf. Guerin et al 1979:70). The formalist places great importance on the literariness of those qualities that distinguish the literary form from other kinds of writing.. Neither the author nor the content is crucial to the formalist. It is the narrative that speaks while the form constitutes the content. Raji-Oyelade (1993:3) believes that the link between Russian Formalism, New Criticism and phenomenology, and its extension into structuralism, semiotics and reception theory provides the synthetic ground for the primacy of

reading as the real authorizing process of a literary text, an enterprise that appropriates a critical space for itself and becomes a new writing.

It is not out of place to note that Russian formalism, a literary concept of the 20<sup>th</sup> century marks an important departure from theories of literature associated with particular individuals which existed before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, all of which include the idea of Plato, Aristotle, Horace etc. The main thrust of formalist scholars, was the science of language. Their fascination with language was translated into a deep interest in the language of poetry. This literary interest culminated in their disdain for all the previous theories of literature, which they regarded as chaotic. To these formalists, the existing approach to literary criticism was unsystematic and unscientific: it was disorderly and had no clear-cut identity of its own. The initial concern of the formalist, it will be recalled, was that literary study should have its own identity, must be scientific, systematic and capable of generating its internalised terms of reference. Fundamental to the formalist argument is that if literary study is to be scientific, what would shape its conduct must come from literature (cf, Jefferson, (1987:20-222). This naturally leads to the concept of literature. What is literature? In responding to this poser, the formalists, in dislodging all the mimetic theories of literature, contend that all the previous attempts to describe the literature as the expression of the psychology of its author are not acceptable. Rather they respond to the question of literature by drawing attention to the principle of difference and opposition.

Central to the formalist school are a number of concepts. Primary among them and relevant to this discourse are defamiliarisation and literariness. Defamiliarisation is essentially a process rather than a concept. A process that is understood in terms of other concepts that it may be different from or opposed to. In applying

defamiliarisation, to literature, the formalist observes that there are two basic qualities of language which include the ordinary and the poetic. While ordinary language is marked by the fact that it is the language of everyday usage, Roman Jakobson describes poetic language as organised violence brought on ordinary language. In other words, poetic language is the product of the defamiliarisation of ordinary language. It is everyday language made strange. The other key formalist concept, literariness, raises the issue of what literature has that will serve as justification for systematisation. Literariness, which makes for science in literary study, is seen in the context of specifics, that is, with reference to specific items that are capable of being isolated. These are items of literature that are determined and which support statements about literature that are not in conflict.

### **1.5.2 Formalism and poetry**

Formalists see the working of the principle of defamiliarisation in terms of organised violence being committed against ordinary speech. When organised violence is brought against ordinary speech, ordinary speech is made strange. The result is poetic speech or poetry. To the formalist, poetry comes alive when ordinary speech is defamiliarised. First is the argument that in using the ordinary speech, certain elements of sound, certain phonemic features operate in the habitual mode such that sound is not given conscious attention, but for the purpose of poetry, it becomes necessary for the principle of defamiliarisation to come into play and in the process there is a “roughening” up of sound. There is an implying element of experience at the level of sound in order to make sound strange. . This is as a result of conscious attention being brought upon phonemics of sound and certain devices are involved and these devices are formal elements which are located at the level of form.

Literary devices such as alliterations, constituted by assonance and consonance, other elements such as rhyme are enabling devices which convert ordinary into the strange.

Formalists argue that in a conversational situation, a speaker does not ordinarily arrange for certain sounds that are consonant to be similar or be repeated in a speech segment to bring about particular rhythmic effect. These strategies involving poetic devices are simply product of defamiliarisation which constitute an opposition of the poetic to the ordinary variety of speech. There are lot of figures, devices that relate to sound which are not found in everyday communication or scenario. but which are necessary for the conversion of the ordinary into poetic. In essence poetry is the defamiliarisation of ordinary speech. Poetic language is concrete prose. To achieve a poetic line, the formalists argue, it is required to leave the habitual. The use of rhyme, rhythm, figures of speech is unusual in everyday language. The idea of juxtaposing the Bible with literature is an incursion of defamiliarisation. The Bible is a sacred text which should be seen fundamentally as such. Appreciating the biblical text therefore from the literary perspective, is a deviation from the norm. The various literary strategies are products of defamiliarisation involving the opposition of the poetic to the ordinary variety of speech.

### **1.5.3 New Criticism**

With New Criticism came a more systematic and methodological formalistic approach to literary criticism. The new critics included a teacher –scholar-poet John Crowe Ransom and some young scholars such as Allen Tate, Robert Penn and Cleanth Brooks. The ideals of New Criticism included the perception of literature as an organized ‘tradition’, the importance of strict attention to a form of conservatism

related to classical values, the ideal of a society that encourages order and tradition, a preference for ritual and the rigorous and analytical reading of literary texts. The New Critics were in search of precision and structural tightness in the literary work. They favoured a style and tone that tended towards irony; they insisted on the presence within the work of everything necessary for its analysis and they called for an end to a concern with matters outside the work itself (cf. Guerin et al 1979:75). Also central to this critical approach was the advancement of clear reading and detailed textual analysis of poetry rather than an interest in the mind and personality of the poet, source, the history of ideas and political and social implications (cf. Cuddon 1979:412).

Under the general spectrum of 'New' literary criticism in secular literature associated with literary critics such as Northrop Frye and I A Richards, it is possible to situate the Bible as literature. This approach emphasizes the uniqueness and distinctiveness of each literary product and seeks to analyze the peculiar conventions of genres, rhetorical devices, metaphor and irony, and the overall resulting unity and effect. This approach focuses in part on the stylistic devices and verbal formulations which tend to be of the sort that previously drew the attention of biblical form critics and tradition critics. New literary criticism however looks at the rhetorical texture of the work as a finished whole rather than viewing it as a chronological line of development from small unit through larger cycles to the last stage of composition. In this sense the Bible as literature movement is closely related to rhetorical criticism as a spin off from form criticism that seeks to establish the literary individuality of text by analyzing their arrangements of words, phrases and images that structure from beginnings and endings, sequences of actions, or argumentation, repetition, point of focus and emphasis and dynamic interconnections among the parts.

It is instructive to observe that New Criticism, and to some extent Formalism, stresses close readings of the text itself. As a strategy of reading, New Criticism views the world of literature as an aesthetic object independent of historical content and as a unified entity that reflects the collective sensibility of the artist. According to Raji-Oyelade (1993: 1), the refined but traditional scholarship of New Criticism, which was essentially interpretative and fixated to the text, contributed immensely to the “death” of the author. The rise of the reader sets the ordinary project of competing literary discoveries beyond mere ontological interpretations. In reading, there is a dynamic will to construct models of interpretative processes, to be analytic. Literary texts ceased to be observed as inactive, static and monumental. New Criticism confines itself to careful scrutiny of the text and a formal structure of metaphor, paradox, ambiguity, irony, etc.

The study however acknowledges that: “all theories leak and old assumptions give way to new ones” (cf. Osundare 1993:9). Formalism and New Criticism have their own weaknesses. The absorption with details, their obsession with intensive rather than extensive criticism, their relative relevance with poetry rather than the novel and drama are sore areas for the formalist school (cf. Hugh Holman (1955:238). Besides, scholars have stressed the restriction of formalist criticism to a certain kind of literature that has proved to be amenable--lyric poetry generally but especially English poetry of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the modernist poetry that stems from Ezra Pound and T S Eliot. New critics tended to ignore or undervalue some poetry and other genres that do not easily respond to formalist approaches. (cf. Guerin et al 1979:117). The dilemma increases whenever the language of the literary work tends to approach that of a philosopher or the critic. The formalist approach, as is often observed, tends to overlook feelings and is somewhat cold in its assumption with

details. Langbaum (1970) has certified New criticism as sick of its very success because “we are all New critics whether we like it or not in that we cannot avoid discerning and appreciating wit in poetry, or reading with close attention to words, images, ironies and so on” (11).

## **1.6 Purpose of the study**

While there have been efforts at research into biblical literature particularly from the historical, doctrinal and theological perspectives, there appears to be no comprehensive study on the literary genres, forms and functions of the Bible. Even when attempts are made to address some literary features in the Bible, as Alter (1981, 1985) and Ryken (2001) have done, several questions still remain unanswered. The present study attempts to fill the existing critical gap by examining in details the literary features, genres, forms and functions of the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Within the scope of biblical scholarship, there seems to be an emphasis on the study of theology. The literary and stylistic dimensions to the Bible are relatively neglected; therefore studies in this area are scarce. This present study is intended to fill this gap.

## **1.7 Significance of the study**

The study is designed to meet the following challenges:

First, it will help us to appreciate the Bible and in particular, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes better. In other words, this work is an effective way of making the selected texts meaningful to their users and thereby establishes the credibility of literary biblical studies as different from doctrinal biblical studies. Coupled with this,

the study is designed to identify the literary-stylistic elements in the texts. Also it will bring out the socio-cultural, historical and linguistic contexts of the texts.

Secondly, it should be noted that Ryken and Ryken (2001: ii-iii) have explained some of the reasons for the scholarly neglect of a literary and stylistic analysis of the sacred text by identifying the misconceptions of a literary approach to the Bible. Such fallacies include the position that a perception of the Bible as literature betrays a liberal theological bias; that the idea of Bible as literature is a modern one that is foreign to the Bible itself; that to speak of the Bible as literature, is to claim that the Bible is fictional; that to approach the Bible as literature means approaching it only as literature, and that to say that the Bible is literature denies divine inspiration. While these positions have been proved to be misleading, they have however constituted limitations in literary and biblical scholarship. While fictionality is not strange to literature, it is not an essential element of literature. The properties that make a text literary are not affected by the historicity or fictionality of the material. A text is literary based on the writer's selectivity and moulding of the material and the style of presentation, regardless of whether it happened or is made up. A literary study of the Bible is also by no means a modern phenomenon. The writers of the Bible refer with technical precision to a whole range of literary genres in which they write. Some of the forms we find in the Bible correspond to the literary forms that were current in the author's immediate culture. Besides, analysing the Bible as literature does not mean abandoning the special authority that Christians ascribe to the Bible. Nor does it mean that readers will not pay equal attention to other aspects of the Bible. The Bible requires different approaches and the literary approach is just one of them.



Finally, and as Gross, (2009:2) has observed, a major reason why a literary approach to the Bible has suffered from the lack of scholarly attention is because of the fear that the literary investigation might assault the sensibilities of readers and in response, might abandon their faith entirely or minutely. This research reveals that the Bible possesses its own distinctive stylistic attributes as well as general literary features. In other words, while this research shows the reliance of the Bible on literature, it also highlights the concepts they both share. This work will serve as a reference material for further study. In view of the relative dearth of stylistic research in biblical literature, the significance of the present work becomes all the more telling in its choice of the literary and stylistic approach to the study of the Bible in general and the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes in particular.

### **1.8 Choice and justification of the primary texts and version**

The two texts of the Bible, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, are purposely selected partly because they project unified themes and belong to a common tradition of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. They share high literary merit and an interest in everyday life and the desire to create order out of human experiences. While they offer no single theology that can be described as ‘wisdom’ theology, they nonetheless display a common concern for the conditions of human life and for human experience as the basis for theology. Their conceptual origin is of a world created and therefore ordered, but they disagree on whether man is capable of perceiving that order. They agree that the path to wisdom is through experience, but whether an underlying order can be construed from human concrete experiences is debatable.

The preference for King James Version of the Bible for this research is informed by its unique literary and stylistic content. It is instructive to note that 400

years after it was first published; the King James translation has continued to occupy a central place in literary interest and investigation. That the language of King James is essentially poetic is self evident in its creative choice of words, imagery, symbolism and style. . Backwell (2010) has observed that the King James Bible has shaped the English language, noting that from an early age, children were encouraged to learn biblical verses by heart, with the result that for generations, written and spoken English was shaped by the language and imagery of King James Bible, adding that the translation has been a source of inspiration to poets and dramatists such as Milton and Shakespeare. Iris Murdock (in Backwell: 2010) presents the picture in graphic terms when she observes that “the King James is a great piece of literary good fortune...when language and spirits conjoined to produce a highly unique eloquence”.

Contrary to myths that have grown up around it, as David Norton has demonstrated, the King James Bible only gradually and fitfully became synonymous with “Bible” in the English-speaking world, by the nineteenth century. However, it was hailed as a literary achievement rivaled only by Shakespeare. This celebration came at the expense of its consideration as a sacred text. But before this apparent triumph of literature over religion transpired, there were writers who very much revered the Bible as “holy”, and still esteemed it as a Word, more to obey than to admire, but who nonetheless spoke passionately about its literary power. Hawkins (2010:203) has noted that at roughly the same time that Lowth was writing about the poetry of the Bible and the King James Bible was on its way to apotheosis, the Bible was also (at least among the intelligentsia) something of a neglected masterpiece. William Blake, flavouring his diction with King James Bible language has worked to build a poetic Jerusalem. His notion of the Bible was highly “idiosyncratic and heterodox”. It stood replete with “imagination and visions from end to end”. Blake

observes that Jesus and his disciples were all artists, and both Testaments of scriptures together formed the “the great code of art” (Blake 1978: 1665). Although William Wordsworth was not as visibly “biblical” as Blake, he celebrated the poetic vision of the King James Bible in his preface to the revolutionary *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). Coleridge, Wordsworth’s friend, praised the Old Testament as “the true model of simplicity of style” (Norton, 1993:ii.).

### **1.9 Scope and delimitation of the study**

There have been diverse approaches to biblical studies. These include the religious/theological/doctrinal, historical and linguistic among others. The religious and doctrinal approach to the Bible, for instance, cannot be overlooked. This is because, the religious uses to which the Bible has been put, have their clear and exclusive place in biblical interpretation—as distinct from the historical. Gabel et al (1986: 307) have observed that religion has drawn from the Bible sacred history, theological doctrine, moral precept, ecclesiastical structure and practice, ideas about the old times and personal guidance. In other words, it is possible to approach or analyse the Bible purely from a doctrinal perspective, bearing in mind the Christian values inherent in the Bible, and drawing attention to our relationship with God and what happens when we die, thereby emphasising the relevance of interpersonal relationship and how Christians should organize themselves. However, the limitation of a religious approach to the Bible is not far to seek—those who apply the Bible in a religious way must first select from the sacred text what seems to them to be significant and then must interpret it in such a way as to make it consistent within itself and relevant subjectively.

Besides, historical approach, especially nurtured in the universities, has focused on philology, grammar, sources, and redaction history. Ryken (1987:20) believes that theological approach, especially cultivated in the seminaries, has often reduced the Bible to a system of abstractions and propositions. Although both historical and theological approaches have legitimate concerns, in practice they fail to read the Bible adequately on its own terms before using its data for other purposes. As Thompson (1978:9) notes:

When biblical interpretation is dominated by historical and theological concerns, the world in the Bible tends to be passed by too quickly in order to relate it to one of the other two worlds. At its worst such biblical interpretation tends to level out the fantastic world of the Bible for the sake of either historical credibility or theological viability. It does not allow a reader time to enjoy and to savor that wondrous world.

Literature is also one pronounced way of approaching the Bible. Deductions will be based on findings from the poetic and wisdom books and will focus on the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The present research work is based on a literary approach to the study of the selected texts of the Bible. It is possible to x-ray appreciable number of literary forms found in the chosen texts which correspond with the forms and figurative expressions found in conventional literature and works of writers such as Shakespeare, Marlowe, Brecht, Dickens, Bronte, Soyinka, and Achebe, to mention just a few. It examines the poetry of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. In addition, the study, using the tool of stylistic analysis, identifies the peculiar stylistic features of the Bible.

Stylistic analysis, and more specifically, literary analysis, assumes from the outset, that most critical evaluations of literary text tend to focus on the subject matter and themes of the literary texts. In achieving this end, they look at character, point of view, dialogue, setting, plot and other aspects of the texts to help them understand and explain what the text is saying. Literary stylistics, unlike most thematic critical approaches, does not focus on the what of the text, but on the How of the text; not on what the literary text is saying but on how he is saying it. As has been demonstrated in Formalism and New Criticism, the How- the style- of a work of literature is not just essential for understanding the What- the subject matter- and theme – of the work of literature, but that , more importantly, it is fundamental to the very status of the literary text as a work of art. In other words, without an acknowledged literary style, a text simply cannot be recognised as a literary text in the first place. While situating Ngugi and Okara, for instance, within literary stylistic framework, Fashina (2009:77) has observed that in *The Voice* as well as in Ngugi's works, a corresponding literary stylistic pattern is noticed in these writers' valorization of the "voice", essentially a female voice, as a complex symbol and an elaborate metaphor that always acts as ever-present guiding spirit (a kind of *dues-ex machina* "that encourages and propels the male protagonist to action).

This study investigates the literary value of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. This is achieved through a detailed analysis of various literary forms applicable to the Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The approach to biblical studies as well as the position of the present research on the Bible differs from that of earlier studies which read the Bible essentially as a theological document. This approach enriches the literary horizon and makes the Bible enjoy inter-disciplinary appreciation and universal applicability.

## **1.10 Contextualisation of the texts**

In this section, we shall give a synopsis of each of the texts under study.

It is hoped that this will provide the basis for the analyses that follow in the next chapters.

### **1.10.1 The Book of Proverbs**

The book of Proverbs is the 20<sup>th</sup> book of the Bible. It has 31 chapters and 852 verses. The original Hebrew title of the Book is “Mashal”. When this title was translated into Greek and Latin, it took several forms such as: taunt song (Mic. 2:4), byword (Ps. 44:14), discourse (Num. 23:7), allegory (Ezek 17:2) and proverbs (Ps. 49:4) (Hinson 1974:104). The English title has its roots from the Latin vulgate Bible title “Proverbia”. The book of Proverbs is a collection of moral/philosophical maxims and connected poems of a wide range of subjects that provoke further thought or admonition on how to behave.

#### **1.10.1.1 Historical background**

The Old Testament contains thirty-nine (39) books which, according to the Jewish classification, are divided into three main classes namely: Law, the Prophets and the Writings (Schneider 2002). The Writings include: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes among others.. These were not finally accepted as being part of the Scripture until after the time of Christ. The writings were further divided into three groups with Proverbs, Psalms and Job forming the first group as known as wisdom literature. (Hinson1974).

This kind of writings, such as the book of Proverbs, is usually passed on, from one generation to the other orally. A close study of the present Hebrew text of the book of Proverbs would reveal that the primitive wording of the pithy sayings has experienced numerous alterations and modifications in the course of its translation. This fluid status is essentially a function of the mode of preservation, which is oral (Gigot 1911). Buttressing the place of orality, Hinson (1969:101) avers that:

The Hebrews possessed a number of wisdom-utterances that probably circulated at least partly in oral form prior to being collected and preserved in writing. These sayings enshrined certain truths gleaned from the experiences of life,... they ultimately reached back for their inspiration and vitality to the distinctive features of the Israelite faith.

Wisdom literature writings have always passed on from one generation to the other and similar writings have been found among the Egyptians, in Mesopotamia and Palestine, from very early times (Hinson 1974). Therefore, the presence of the crossover motif as applicable to some Egyptian and Assyrian nature in the book of Proverbs is not out of place.

#### **1.10.1.2 Authorship and date**

The authorship of the Book has continued to generate debate among scholars. (Whybray, 1994: 11-61; Fox, 2000: 326-330; Lenzi, 2006: 690). However, it is possible to identify four authors: Solomon, men of Hezekiah, Agur and Lemuel (Proverbs 1:1, 25:1; 30:1; 31:1). Chapter one of the book of Proverbs expressly states the author of most of the proverbs in the book when it says: "These are the proverbs of Solomon the son of David, King of Israel." On the strength of biblical sources, it is not out of place to say that Proverbs Chapters 1-24 were written by Solomon, who is acclaimed to have been the wisest man that ever lived and wrote over 3000 proverbs.

Some scholars have however argued that Solomon alone did not write all the proverbs accredited to him; that it is a contribution of many unknown authors. Some do not even acknowledge that he wrote any of the proverbs (Story, 1945: 319). The core strength of this argument is that wisdom literature was very common in the Middle East, the geographical area to which the Jewish people belong. Other scholars have pointed to the resemblance between the Syriac, Babylonian, Egyptian and Ugaritic wisdom literatures and the Biblical proverbs (Story, 1945: 319-321) which make them to believe that not one author wrote the proverbs. Indeed Bryce (1972: 145) and Fox (1997: 613) regard the book of Proverbs as an aspect of wisdom literature which was widespread in the ancient Near East – Egypt, Syria and Palestine. Lenzi (2006: 690), in examining the first nine chapters supposedly written by Solomon, observes that “these poetic lines do not show signs of originating from one author.” In the same way Fox (2000: 326-330) claims that those chapters are a series of reflections from several authors inserted into what is now chapters 1-9, probably at various times.

The Bible also shows that some of the proverbs, for instance, Chapters 25-29 – though supposedly proverbs of Solomon were actually collected by advisers of Hezekiah, King of Judah (Proverbs, 25:1). Hence, even though there is the possibility that these proverbs must have originated from Solomon, he probably did not write them down. It would seem that the advisers of Hezekiah were instrumental in the collection of these proverbs as part of the cultural and religious heritage of the Jewish people and some of the proverbs might just have been from unknown authors but were all attributed to Solomon. Chapter 30 is purported to have been written by Agur, son of Jakeh (Proverbs 30:1). Although, the Bible does not say much about this individual in terms of wisdom acquisition and demonstration in relation to Solomon,



his proverbs are however regarded as a prophecy which he prophesied to Ithiel and Ucal and were found worthy to be put in the Biblical book of Proverbs.

King Lemuel is said to have written the last chapter of the book, Chapter 31, and these proverbs are actually those which his mother taught him. The identity of this king is not clear neither is the level of his wisdom bank with which he ruled his kingdom. It is certainly not out of place to assume that the intention of the king was to share with others the wisdom taught to him by his mother. The implication of this latter possibility, however, is that a woman has directly contributed to the wisdom in the book of Proverbs. What is interesting about this last chapter is the devotion of 21 out of the 30 verses to the description of the virtuous woman. This actually shows the quality of wife desired by a mother for her son which she urged the son to be on the lookout for.

### **1.10.1.3 Composition**

The book is divided into three parts. Part one consists of Chapters 1-9 which contain an exhibition of wisdom as the highest good. According to Lenzi (2006: 690), this section is textually composite. It is made up of ten lectures or series of instructions which form the core. This must have accumulated several additions, the most important of which are the poems spoken by personified wisdom. Some scholars are of the view that this first part of the book embodies some of the latest materials in the book of Proverbs (Lenzi, 2006: 688) and constitute a composite unit. Many commentators have pointed to the content, form and style of these chapters which are similar. It has been argued that the chapters reflect a particular social setting, for instance exogamy, which is claimed to have originated in a historical period later than chapters 10-29, which presumably, constitute the core of the book (Lenzi, 2006: 688-

689). Fox (2000:48) has also argued that the style, form and tone of Chapters 1-9 are significantly different from the other parts of the book. Chapters 1-9 read essentially as an introduction to Chapters 10-29.

Nevertheless, some scholars have noted that the Book of Proverbs is unsystematic in its composition. It has been alleged that the collectors seem to have paid little attention to arrangement and must have been ignorant of scientific system of classification (Yuasa 1891: 147-153). Generally, three clusters have been identified. At the beginning and the end, the book is arranged into topical clusters while the middle consists of a random collection of individual units. Yuasa (1891: 148) explains this in the light of the view that “the spiritual idea rules over the artistic or aesthetic form”. While giving a critical appraisal of Proverbs 10-29, Hildebrandt (1988: 206) remarks on the widespread perceived confusion about the nature of these proverbs as “thrown together willy-nilly” without any conceptual or literary cohesion. To this, Oesterley (1929: 125) observes that “generally speaking, the proverbs are thrown together in a very haphazard fashion in this collection.” R. Gordon (1975: 49) expresses the same view when he states that “there is little continuity or progression” in those chapters, while Von Rad (1972: 113) expresses his annoyance at the “lack of order”. Some people see the sentences as independent and atomistic (McKane, 1970: 10, 413, 415). Others observe the lack of connection between verses (Yuasa, 1891: 147). In his own contribution, Bernard Lang (1986: 3) claims that “the Biblical book of Proverbs is an almost random collection of brief didactic discourses, poems, learned and pious sayings.” Van der Ploeg in Whybray (1966: 487) goes ahead to question the possibility of discovering a strict logical sequence of thought in any part of the book of Proverbs which he regards as having been written in a “primitive style”

in which the author wanders from one subject to another and back again without any regard for logical consistency.

Whybray (1966: 488) warns that the view that there seems to be no structure in the modern sense ought not to deter scholars from attempting a structured analysis. Hence, Fox (1997: 613-616) in tracing the composition history of Proverbs 1-9, describes two main strata – the ten lectures and the five interludes. The ten lectures are formulated as father-to-son instructions. Each lecture comprises an address to the audience – my son; an exhortation to hear and remember the teachings (e.g. Listen ... to your father's instructions; neglect not your mother's teachings [Proverbs 1:8]); and motivations which support the exhortations by extolling the excellence and the value of the exhortations to people who possess them (e.g. for these are a graceful garland for your head, and necklace for your throat" [Proverbs 1:9). Fox (1997:615) sees a considerable homogeneity in the structure and language of the lectures, particularly in the exhortations. This element, Fox opines, may be due to the fact that they were written by different authors and collected by a redactor. It is not also out of place to recognize other passages in the Book of Proverbs as belonging to the instruction (lecture) genre. These include: Proverbs 22:17-24:22 and 31:1-9 which are composed of couplets and quatrains that focus on a variety of topics with few thematic connections. Fox (1997: 615-616) therefore, concludes, that "we can determine that the proverbial instructions were not a highly uniform genre". In other words, if the unity of compilation in Proverbs 1-9 is ascribed to redaction, it must be assumed that the redactor searched out and assembled poems that expressed the same ideas in the same way, resulting in a literary unity produced by redaction rather than authorship.

In the same way, Lenzi (2006: 691) in his investigation of the composition of Proverbs 8:22-31 opines that this chapter seems to have been two sets of poems

juxtaposed by a redactor. This, according to him, can be discerned in the way Wisdom describes herself in an entirely different manner in Chapter 8:22-31. Chapter 8:1-21 makes many claims about Wisdom as the most important being. In verses 15-16, there is a clear indication that Wisdom is important to the rule of kings and princes. But one does not learn the origin of Wisdom and its relationship to God. From Chapter 8:22-30, Wisdom explains its origins in primeval times showing its antiquity and the need for people to listen to her and acquire her. Also, these verses explain the relationship of Wisdom to God. “The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his ways, the earliest of his acts from old. (8:22)”. “When he prepared the heavens, I was there.... (8: 27).” This shows the antiquity of Wisdom and its relationship with God. It claims to have been there with God and to have been a necessary instrument of creation. Whybray (2000, 72-76) is of the view that this text was a later compilation which was inserted in the Book of Proverbs to identify the wisdom presented therein as belonging explicitly to Yahweh. Hence, Wisdom claims to satisfy the intellectual longings of man since she knows the secrets of the world, having been present with Yahweh before its creation.

Still on the composition of the book of Proverbs, Hildebrandt (1988: 224) observes the existence of proverbial pairs and concludes that a “proverbial pair is a unit of composition by which proverbial collectors welded the atomistic proverbial sentences into larger units.” According to him, the fact that such compositional units were used suggests that the proverbial sentences should be examined from collectional as well as sentential perspectives. Having examined the book of Proverbs under semantics, syntax, and theme, Hildebrandt (1988: 224) attests to the cohesion, intricate beauty, and thematic interrelationship of the proverbs in the book of Proverbs. In the same vein, Fox (1997: 615) sees “a considerable homogeneity in the

structure and language of the lectures, particularly the exhortations.” Bryce (1972: 145) sees a literary unity at least in what he calls Wisdom ”books”.

Hinson (1974), on his part divides the book into eight parts thus:

1. Proverbs 1 – 9: The proverbs of Solomon: fairly long poems
2. Proverbs 10:1 – 22:16: The proverbs of Solomon: about 375 separate sayings with very little evidence of order.
3. Proverbs 22:17 – 24:22: The words of the wise: 30 sayings (Pro. 22:20) partly based on an Egyptian source.
4. Proverbs 24:23 – 34: Sayings of the wise.
5. Proverbs 25 – 29: Proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah copied.
6. Proverbs 30: The words of Agur, son of Jakeh.
7. Proverbs 31:1 – 9: The words of Lemuel, king of Massa.
8. Proverbs 31:10 – 31: A poem in which each line begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet in turn. (104 – 105)

Continuing his analysis of the source of each of the sections above, Hinson observes that *Sections 2 and 5* contain the kind of sayings that were likely to be known and used around the time of Solomon, and some of them may have been composed by the king himself... It is quite probable that the servants of King Hezekiah did collect and preserve the saying in section 5.

*Section 3* contains materials borrowed from foreign sources. Pro. 22:17 – 23:21 is clearly adapted from an Egypt book of wisdom called *The Instruction of Amem-em-Ope...* written around 1000B.C... Pro. 23:13 – 14 is probably adapted from *The instruction of Ahikar*, which describes life in Assyria in time of power.

*Section 4* is too brief to give us any idea of its origin.

*Sections 6 and 7* come from the writing belonging to a northern Arabian tribe who lived in Massa.

*Section 1* is probably the most recent part of the whole book. Its long well-constructed sentences are similar to those found in other literature from after the exile. (105). He concludes that in the second century B.C., when the whole book was translated into Greek, it had not yet reached its final form in Hebrew, and that the book may only have reached its final form by about 150B.C.

#### **1.10.1.4 Setting**

Coogan (2009) has argued, and strongly too, that it is possible that practical and reflective wisdom was transmitted in a house of learning or instruction. While this is suggestive of a school setting, other possibilities are not also out of place. For instance, the phrase ‘my son’ suggests a family setting. This is instructive because family plays an important role in the upbringing and education of children. Moreover, the presence of the name of Solomon at the beginning of the book is reflective of a royal/courtly setting.

#### **1.10.1.5 Form and style**

Proverbs is conventionally classified with the poetic books of the Bible. The nature of this book makes the division of its chapters rather arbitrary. These divisions, various in form and content, suggest that the book was formed by the combination of a number of booklets. According to Robertson (1986:576):

In Proverbs, no saying follows from the one before it and leads to the other after it in anything other than a purely sequential sense... Each saying is there on file, as it were, waiting to be relevant, and relevance depends upon matters extrinsic to the book itself.

Therefore, meaning is actualized when the reader selects a part of the book and applies it. Anyone seeking advice or directive from Proverbs on a particular subject will usually obtain a fairly straight-forward counsel. Nevertheless, this is not always the case. Robertson (1986) suggests that the reader of any collection of wise sayings must possess an antecedent wisdom, namely, “the wisdom to match situation with saying”.

#### **1.10.1.6 Theme**

The book of Proverbs contains practical advice on the way of life. It teaches that suffering follows wrong acts, and it regards a good life as the most rewarding and happy one possible. It also praises the qualities of obedience, humility, self-control, truthfulness, diligence, faithfulness, etc. It emphasizes the fear of the Lord as the beginning of knowledge (Hinson 1974).

#### **1.10.1.7 Audience**

The book of Proverbs consists largely of short, incisive statements employed to communicate behavioral, moral and spiritual truths. The purpose of the book is to give instruction to a specific class of young men. Harrison (1969:1011-1012) posits that:

In ancient Israel, it was customary for young children to be instructed within the family circle... In the upper-class families, the young men were given more specific schooling aimed at the development of character and the furthering of success in life... The concern of the book is predominantly with the youths of the upper classes, since they alone would be most likely to be able to afford the kind of excesses described in Proverbs and similar gnomic literature.

### **1.10.2 The Book of Ecclesiastes**

The book of Ecclesiastes is the 21<sup>st</sup> book of the Bible. It has 12 chapters and 222 verses. The English title of the book, Ecclesiastes, comes from the Septuagint translation of “Qoheleth” variously transliterated as kohelet, Qoheleth, koheles, or Coheleth. The English name derives from the Greek translation of the Hebrew title. The word *Qohelet* has several translations into English, including The Preacher. Giving the meaning of the Hebrew root (such as gather, assemble, convene) one might opt for the translation “speaker” (Hinson 1974). The book of Ecclesiastes has been styled “the Bible’s strangest book” (Crenshaw 1987). The literary genre is ambiguous, mixing prose with proverbial sayings, resulting in “a philosopher’s diary, pages from an artist’s notebook, a thinking aloud, a gathering of literary fragments published without plan” (Blank 1962). Why it was written and how it made its way into the Jewish canon is a historical and theological enigma. Equally enigmatic is the proper use of the book as Holy Scripture (Asa 2009).

#### **1.10.2.1 Historical background**

Schneider (2002) amplifies the Jewish division of the Old Testament into three classes and observes that the book of Ecclesiastes belongs to the third class – the writings. The writings are further divided into three groups, and Ecclesiastes belongs to the second group called ‘The Five scrolls’ i.e. the Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther (Hinson 1974). The reason why they belong to the same group may not be unconnected with the important role each of them plays in the synagogues in relation to one of the main festivals of the Jewish year. Ecclesiastes is read at the Feast of Booths. The title of this book is a strange name as it comes from the opening phrase of the book, ‘the word of the preacher’ (Eccl. 1:1). The Hebrew



word is “Qoheleth” which designates a person who is the official speaker of an assembly of people. It refers to the ‘Preacher’ or ‘Teacher’ (Graves 2000). In Hebrew, the title read “the words of Qoheleth, the son of David, king in Jerusalem” or simply “Qoheleth”. Jerome interpreted this in Latin by using the term *Concionator* or “speaker before an assembly”, and it was from this that the English concept of “Preacher” was derived (Harrison 1969).

#### **1.10.2.2 Authorship and date**

In Ecclesiastes 1:1, the Preacher is presented as “the son of David, king of Jerusalem”. This suggests Solomon as the writer. However, the book also contains evidence that the writer may not be Solomon (Hinson 1974). The Preacher speaks of “all who were over Jerusalem before me” (Eccl. 1:16; 2:9). Notwithstanding, no scholar disputes the fact that the author is a man; the subject always uses masculine nouns and even refers to his wife and women. Asa (2009) postulates that:

The author is commonly referred to by the Hebrew word Qoheleth (one who assembles), but the precise nuance of the word is uncertain and could be an office, a pen name, or an acronym. Despite the seemingly explicit identification of the author as Solomon (1:1), the writer was likely a sage in Jerusalem living around 350-250 B.C.E. (55)

He argues that the authorship for the ancients had more to do with authoritative tradition than literary origins. Because Ecclesiastes was accepted rapidly as the Jewish canon, but not universally, there was a communal recognition that the book preserved an authentic wisdom voice in the Solomonic tradition. Meade (1986) posits that the canonical decision to recognize Ecclesiastes as an authoritative wisdom in the tradition of Solomon is different from the literary question of actual authorship.

Thus “with the book of Qoheleth, we can see the full birth of the genre of canonical pseudepigrapha”.

Supporting the idea of Solomon’s authorship, Harrison (1969:1073) avers:

Since no immediate son of David except Solomon was king in Jerusalem, the term Qoheleth would appear to be a substitute for Solomon... Thus the Solomon of the book can be regarded not so much as a preacher but as the ideal, authoritative exponent of wisdom, a situation that is not entirely out of harmony with certain traditions connected with the historical Solomon.

Sharing the view of other scholars on the date, Harrison (1969) notes that the vast majority of modern scholars have assigned the work to a date between 280 and 200 B.C., while older commentators chose the period between 444 B.C. and 328 B.C. Some maintained that the author was an influential Jew who lived about 300 B.C., probably in southern Phoenicia, and whose orally transmitted aphorisms were collected after his death and put into written form in Phoenicia. Others state that the book can be dated quite satisfactorily about the time of Malachi. Wood (1996) articulates the great task in tracing the date in which the book received its present form, since there are no clear historical allusions to it. He suggests about 200B.C. Many internal inconsistencies were acceptable because of their attribution to Solomon, and to the orthodox statement in Eccl. 12: 12 – 14.

However, Graves (2000) observes that:

If we compare the language of Qoheleth with that of the earliest Prophetic document of the Pentateuch (J), we shall find that they stand at the two extremes of Hebrew linguistic development, the former representing the latest, and the latter the earliest. Under such

circumstances the Solomon authorship of Ecclesiastes is unthinkable... It must have been written before the Maccabean revolt broke out in 168 B.C., for there is no allusion to Antiochus IV and his oppression of the Jews.

### **1.10.2.3 Language**

The linguistic features of Ecclesiastes point to a period when Aramaic was exerting an influence upon spoken Hebrew. In fact, Ecclesiastes was written in Hebrew by an author who, like his contemporaries, was familiar with Aramaic and doubtless used it freely in everyday life (Harrison 1969). Talking about the language and source of Ecclesiastes, Hinson (1974) says that: "the language of the book is a very late form of Hebrew with many Aramaic words and constructions... It was probably written sometime between 250 and 200 B.C. when Aramaic has become widely known and widely used among the Jews."

Newsom (1995) avers that "This book that so trumpets pandemic ambiguity may itself have been written in a deliberately ambiguous style, not to create a riddle to be solved, but to reinforce the very message of ambiguity". Thus, paradox is the point, for beliefs about life and experiences of life do not always correlate. Perry (1993) posits that there are two voices in Ecclesiastes: Qoheleth's and the Presenter/Antagonist who talks back to him, which accounts for the dialogue between the pessimistic strain (Qoheleth) and its more orthodox contradictor (Presenter/Antagonist).

### **1.10.2.4 Theme**

Though the Deuteronomic theology informing the entire Hebrew Bible promises categorically that righteousness is rewarded and evil is punished, this all-or-

nothing position created cognitive dissonance for reflective persons such as Qoheleth (Asa 2009). In the often-quoted Eccl. 3:1 – 8, world history is represented as an endless repeated stream ordained by God, about which little or nothing can be done. Everything occurs when it should and must occur. These seasons bring order, solidity, and dependability of life. The Preacher emphasizes striving for the satisfaction of desires, for knowledge, pleasures; how to live out human life and many more. Furthermore, it is possible at first glance to interpret Ecclesiastes as depressing and dismal. The dismal worldview of the poet persona appears to be overwhelming. The book is instructively cynical and yet dispassionate in its treatment of life. The main theme is the vanity of leaning on wealth, fame, knowledge, power and other human accomplishments. The poet uses the meaningless of human endeavours to establish the relevance of God's wisdom and leadership.

The poetic persona makes use of several literary techniques to present his themes. It is significant to note the several use of the phrase "under the sun" referring to the point that all which is vanity occurs on the earth, and by implication, excludes everything heavenly. When the author writes that there is nothing under the sun (Eccl.1:9-14), it is indicative of the sin nature of man which will continue to span the generations. A striking theme in Ecclesiastes is that of the imminence of death. No matter the wealth attained, the accomplishment and successes, everything will be rendered useless by death.(Eccl. 8:8). Ecclesiastes 5:15-20 shows the link between ones death and birth; and just as new born babies come to the world with nothing, so will the old depart the world with nothing. Because death is imminent and inevitable, and that no material possession will be part of life after death, it becomes reasonable to live fearing God and keeping by his rules.

## 1.11 A literary analysis of the Bible

Language, a sound phenomenon, is a symbolic and graphical means of communication. Lehman (1976: 4) advances this by observing that language is a system for the communication of meaning through sound, Moulton (1974:4) corroborates both positions by viewing language as a wonderfully rich vehicle for communication. This communicative character of language extends to its social and cultural qualities. Language is a major instrument of socialisation. It is the process by which a person is, willy-nilly, moulded into conformity with the established system of the society into which s/he happens to be born (Fowler, 196:19). Franklin and Rodman (1978: 18) have observed that in some culture when certain words are used, one is required to counter them by “knocking on words”.

Echeruo (1978:1) gives credence to the cultural implication of literature and language when he observes that:

Literature is human utterance, formalized and structured. As utterance, literature is analogous to language itself in being in being based on a system of codes and registers and having an intrinsic grammar which in itself is part of a system of conventions in the society or the culture to which it belongs. Hence, we know a literature the way we know a language, first by recognising its internal characteristics and secondly, by understanding the significance or meaning which the speaker of the language attach to these characteristics.

Echeruo’s submission about how we appreciate language, and by extension, literature and culture, is very instructive. And like Garuba (1988:66) also notes, since most of us grow up within a human environment and are thereby socialised from childhood into a linguistic community, we tend to forget that language is not a natural phenomenon but only a system of signs given meaning by natural conventions of

“reading”. Once we have been socialised into a language, we internalise it to the extent that its structures interfere in varying degrees with our attempt to acquire or learn another language. Language is one example of how much culturally programmed we are as human beings.

It is important, at this point, to state also that the Bible contains many types of figurative language, whether in poetry, prose, gospel or epistle. Sometimes, the meaning is very clear but at other times, difficulties arise in understanding the precise meaning of certain passages, due to the differences in time and culture, and because of the non-familiarity with some of the types of literature and literary devices in the Bible. Beyond these general reasons for the use of literary devices, there are particular reasons for them. When they are encountered in a passage, it is sometimes helpful to consider the specific reasons why the writer chose to use a particular means of expression, in order to understand the passage. Some of the reasons for the use of literary devices or figurative language are part of the essence and general characteristics of literature itself which include the following:

- It presents descriptive truth, rather than propositional truth. Literature makes an appeal to a higher form of reality which transcends the mere adherence to facts which is expressed by history and journalism. Literature seeks to provide the individuals and communities which comprise a culture. They handle unreality which is not limited by the relatively unimportant question of whether it actually “happened” or not. Literature seeks to satisfy the condition of plausibility rather than that of facticity and in so doing, gains for itself the creative space within which the imaginative vision of the literary artist is allowed the free rein that it needs to flourish

- It is concrete. (Not just abstract or theoretical). Literature is concrete, but only within its own imaginative universe. It is not that events actually happen; it is enough for literature that those events are plausible, that they could have happened, given a set of circumstances such as those found in the literary text. In doing this, the literary artist seeks to establish timeless truth which is blurred by controversies over whether they are historically accurate or not. The agony and despair of an Oedipus, an Okonkwo, an Othello, are all the more real, regardless of whether those characters are fictional or factual. What is important is that they are real within the imaginative context of the literary text.
- It entails the compact presentation of ideas. In other words, literature does not seek to explain everything, even if that were possible, which it is not. Most literary texts offer a carefully portrayed slice of life, a carefully arranged summary of character situation and incidents, designed to convey significant perspectives on human life. Most literary artists adhere to the rule of “show, don’t tell” and allow character and incident to convey the significant idea of the literary work. Action and inaction, speech and silence, dialogue and monologue, are all carefully crafted to condense meaning. Symbol and image, theme and motif, are skillfully deployed to convey meaning in such a way as to make detailed explanation completely unnecessary.
- It is emotional and engaging. This is so because the literary artist has the freedom and the stylistic tools to stimulate the emotion and engagement of the recipient of his work. He has the wherewithal to engage the audience and reader’s sympathy by creating pathos, their scorn and contempt by creating bathos; their horror through the use of violence and brutality; their expurgation of emotion by resolution of events or catharsis. This is done to achieve different things. Those

aims may be didactic, in which the literary artist seeks to instruct his audience or readers. They may be aesthetic, in which the writer seeks to open the eyes of his audience or readers to beauty and good taste. It may be pragmatic, in seeking to make the readers or audience aware of certain realities of life. Sometimes, a literary text may seek all of these and others.

### **1.12            Limitation of study**

Estes (1995:416) has noted that a literary criticism of the Bible requires a combination of skills, and that to work intelligently on biblical texts, one must be comfortable with Hebrew and Greek. In other words, a complete reliance on translations will certainly narrow the critic's interpretative efficiency. What this also implies is that a successful literary incursion into the biblical discipline would necessitate a certain degree of familiarity with other relevant areas of knowledge such as theology, history and ancient cultures. Warshaw (1978: 33) has observed that the devotion to the sacredness of the biblical text has short-circuited the needed attention to a proper literary critique of the narrative. Ironically however, to develop an outstanding career in literary-biblical scholarship, there is the need to resist the risk of blindly following a narrow theological approach in the name of biblical analysis. Kugel (1981:218) pushes this argument further by observing that contrary to fears expressed by some scholars, for instance, that literary interpretation of the Bible amounts to treating the sacred text essentially as a human literary artifact, suitable only for teaching in public schools and universities, a literary study of the Bible is seen as a necessary remedy to the narrow agenda of traditional biblical scholarship.



Yet the challenges to a literary study of the Bible continue to boom. Lewis, (1950:4) has even gone further to argue that there is a sense in which ‘the Bible as literature’ does not exist. It is a collection of books so widely different in period, kind, language and aesthetic value that no common criticism can be passed on them. In writing these heterogeneous texts, the Church was not guided by literary principle, and the literary critic might regard their inclusion within the same text as theological and historical accident irrelevant to his own branch of study.

### **1.13 Definition of terms**

#### **Literariness.**

This is the sum of special linguistic and formal properties that distinguish literary texts from non-literary texts, The leading formalist, Roman Jakobson declared in 1919 that “The object of literary science is not literature but literariness”, that is, what makes a given work literary material. Rather than seek abstract qualities like imagination as the basis of literariness, the formalist sets out to define the observable devices by which literary texts, especially poems, foreground their own language., in meter, rhyme, and other patterns of sound and repetition . Literariness was understood in terms of defamiliarisation, as a series of deviation from “ordinary” language. It thus appears as a relation between difficult uses of language, in which the users are liable to shift according to changed contexts.

#### **The Bible as Literature**

In defining the concept of the Bible as Literature, it is important to consider the Bible like any other book, as a secular text and a product of the human mind. This position would naturally lead us to acknowledge the biblical text as a collection of writings produced by real people who lived in actual historical times. Like all other authors, these writers used the languages native to them and the literary forms then

available for self expression. In the process, they created materials that can be read and understood under the same conditions that apply to literature in general (cf. Gabel et al. 2006:1). In explaining the Bible as Literature, it should be clear that the Bible is fundamentally not different from the works of writers like William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens or even Ernest Hemmingway. While it is necessary to use the word literature in its broad sense, it is perhaps the narrower sense of the term that concerns us more in this context. The Bible is a combination of poetry, short and long stories, drama and essays. It is the analysis of the Bible from these parameters of creativity that situates the concept of the Bible as Literature.

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews relevant literature within the broad fields of literature and Bible as literature. It also discusses some existing biblical literature and indicates their usefulness to the present study.

#### 2.1 Defining Literature

Notable scholars have attempted to give a comprehensive definition of literature but such efforts have ended up producing more questions than answers. This perhaps explains why Ellis (1977:24) is wondering whether the question will ever be answered. Adams (1969:1) admits that the definition of literature is rather difficult as important as it may be, and observes that there is hardly any book that does. Hough (1966:9) believes that we all know what literature means even if we cannot articulate it in definitive terms. However, there have been quite a number of attempts at definition. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* explains literature as a general term which in default of a peak definition may stand for the best expression of the best thought reduced to writing. But then, this does not also say much. Hirsch (1978:56) defines literature as any text worthy to be taught to students by teachers of literature, when these texts are not being taught to students in other departments of a school or university. McFadden (1978:56) sees literature as a canon which consists of those works in language by which a community defines itself through the course of its history. It includes works which are primarily artistic and also those whose aesthetic qualities are only secondary. The self-defining activity of the community is conducted

in the light of such works, as its members have come to read them (or conceive them). Wellek (1978:20) posits that to speak sweepingly, one can say that in antiquity and in the Renaissance, literature or letters were understood to include all writing of quality without any pretence to permanence. The challenge of definition can also be seen within the context of alienation and identity crisis. Fashina (1994:45), for instance, has observed that one of the problems of African drama (and by extension, literature) lies in the alienation created by its crisis of identity. This crisis is partly predicated on its modal transition from oral to written, as well as the elusive nature of its definition. Added to this, is the European concept of drama and theatre being foisted on the African forms of verbal performance and ritual aesthetics. This is done with the view perhaps to disproving the erroneous European idea that Africa was a land void of culture, arts and aesthetic sensibility.

North and Webster (2009:9) argue that when we talk about literature, we are referring to texts that are “belletristic”. The word which comes from a French phrase *belles lettres* which literally means ‘beautiful letters’. In other words, literature consists of beautiful texts, those written or produced to be works of art or those we have come to value as works of art. It is possible to reason that one significant point in favour of the belletristic approach to literature is that it leads us to reflect on the centrality of beauty to human society. This approach naturally addresses the poser, what kind of thing makes a literary text beautiful? However, as plausible as a belletristic approach to the definition of literature may be, it has its own sore areas. North and Webster (2009: 10) have drawn attention to at least two of those challenges. The first is that of identifying a standard of beauty. The old expression ‘beauty is in the eye of the beholder’ suggests that each of us has a different standard for deciding what is beautiful, or that the perception of beauty can be affected by

many other factors. The other challenge is the notion that a text is only created to be artistic. This is a very limited definition. While a text cannot claim whether you love it only for its looks, its author might. Texts are not the products of random events. Rather they come into being as a result of the author's deliberate and careful work. They represent the author's attempt to tell us something about ourselves and the world in which we live. Texts may be intended to entertain us, to educate us, to influence our opinion, to move us to action. Sometimes, they accomplish any or all of these goals even without the author's conscious intention. If we simply think of a text as 'beautiful letters', we may fail to understand why the text affects us as it does, or even miss the message altogether.

While giving the literary discipline a rather descriptive outlook, Heerden et al (1997:1) observe that literature is an art form whose medium is language, oral and written. It differs from ordinary spoken or written language primarily in three ways, viz:

1. It is concentrated and meaningful, even when it sometimes denies meaning.  
In other words, literature is not only about ideas, but also about experiences. It communicates what it feels like to undergo an experience, whether physical or emotional.
2. Its purpose is not simply to explain, argue or make a point, but rather to give a sense of pleasure in the discovery of a new experience. For instance, a psychiatrist, in writing a case study, concentrates strictly on the fact. Though the doctor may give the reader an understanding of the patient, he or she does not attempt to make the reader feel what it is like to be that patient. In fact, the psychiatrist must strive to remain strictly objective as should the readers.

Writers of fiction, drama and poetry have a way of making the readers share the patient's experience and feel what it is like to be the patient.

3. It demands intense concentration from readers. What Mason and others are saying here is that in interpreting literature, readers may adopt the text-oriented, author-oriented or reader-oriented approach. Adopting a text-oriented approach, a reader may analyze a work of literature as complete in itself without relating it to the outside world. This kind of close analysis and attention to words and their context that the method requires can be very useful both in illuminating a literary material and in drawing attention to careful and critical reading. Author-oriented approach requires that a reader studies an author's life, time and culture to better understand the writer's work. This approach calls for research. The reader-oriented approach is realized with the understanding that each reader brings a unique set of experiences and expectation to literature. To the promoters and users of this approach, a work of literature is recreated each time it is read, that it is produced by the reading, perceiving, imaging mind of the reader and that consequently any reading of the work is valid.

Examining the literary concept from a multi-faceted nature, Ryken (1974:15-17) argues that literature does not, for example, discuss virtue but instead shows a virtuous person acting." Literature does not only present experience but interprets it. Literature is an interpretive presentation of experience in an artistic form." A working definition of literature then, is that it is an interpretive presentation in an artistic form. The approach of Sartre (2005:11) to the definition of literature is rather instructive. While placing literature within the operational contexts of history and society, he presents a definitive proposal for the phenomenology of reading. He then goes further

to present a fascinating illustration of how to write a history of literature that takes ideology and institutions into account. Three fundamental questions are central to Sartre's investigation of literature. These include: what is writing? Why write? For whom does one write? Essentially, the author chooses to discuss prose, instead of poetry. He posits that prose reflects accurately the external reality, whereas poetry is an end in itself. In prose, words signify, they describe men, situations and objects. In the case of poetry, the words are ends in themselves. While Sartre's watertight distinctions may not be entirely tenable, the differences are there. Although criticism of a poem must pay close attention to its structure of words and symbols, it is obvious that the reader enters the poem through word association and references which are linked, however, indirectly to everyday significant language. What appears to be critical to Sartre's understanding of the functions and dynamics of literature is that if it is properly utilised, literature can be a means of liberating the reader from the kind of alienation which develops in particular situation

Meyer (1997:1) pushes the discussion by admitting that understanding exactly what literature is has been truly challenging and that pinning down a definition has proven to be tedious. Quite often, one seems to be reduced to saying "I know it when I see it" or "Anything is literature if you want to read it that way". Perhaps in a bold attempt to find a solution to the challenge of defining literature, Meyer presents two different approaches. These are the critical approach and the prototype approach. While the critical approach entails the usual style of defining a word in English by providing a list of criteria which must be met, the prototype approach gives a unique dimension to the meaning of words which does not focus on a list of criteria that must be met, but on an established prototype. Working from the prototype approach to word meaning, Meyer tries to develop an answer to the question "What is Literature?"

by suggesting that prototypical literary works are: written texts, marked by careful use of language including features such as creative metaphors, well turned phrases, elegant syntax, rhyme, alliteration and meter, in a literary genre (poetry, prose fiction or drama), read aesthetically, intended by the author to be read aesthetically and contain many weak implications (are deliberately somewhat open in interpretation).

It should however, be noted that Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953) generally enjoys the credit for this approach. While it is true that he did not use the word “prototype” in the classic passage on this topic, he addresses the word “game” and argues that, instead of a list of criteria, there is the need to find a family resemblance:

Consider for example the proceedings that we call “games”. I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic Games and so on. What is common to them all... if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships and a whole series of them at that.-- The result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overall similarities sometimes similarities of detail. I can think of no better expression to characterise these similarities than “family Resemblances”, for the various resemblances of a family: build, temperament etc overlap and criss-cross in the same way--And I shall say: games form family. (Wittgenstein 1953 31-32).

## **2.2 The nature and functions of literature**

Adebayo (2010:6) explains “that the primary function of literature derives from its nature”. Therefore, a discussion of the nature of literature has implication for its functions. Literature is an art made realisable in imaginative expression or a special use of language. Mayhead (1979:8) observes that one of the important values possessed by literature is that it helps to preserve the precision and therefore the vitality of language. Egudu (1976: 14) has argued that whatever may be the analytical



tool of literature, deliberate ‘manipulation of language for aesthetic effect’ is its essence. The strategic place of language in literary experience cannot be overemphasised. Oyegoke (2009:2) while locating the literary dynamics within a linguistic framework observes that literature is the second cultural imperative after language. Literature, according to him, is born when language gives creative expression to experience. Literature is a by-product of language and is in many respects similarly characterised. It is a form of expression. It communicates, instructs and entertains. It opens vistas of human life and experience to an audience or reader. It serves to expand the limits of language. The great languages of history, it is important to observe, produced great literature which was an essential basis of their greatness. Literature is far more productive hatchery for new lexicographical, semantic, and grammatical linguistic additions than the conversational medium can afford language for its growth and expression. Wellek and Warren (1970: 22) push the discussion by holding the view that language is the material of literature as stone is of the sculpture, paint is of picture and sound is of music. Hence, according to them, it seems best to consider as literature only works in which the aesthetic function is dominant, while we can recognize that there are aesthetic elements such as style and composition in works which have non-aesthetic purpose such as scientific treatise, philosophical dissertation, political pamphlets and sermons to mention just a few.

While it is crucial to acknowledge that literature has other functions such as educating and correcting through satire, the fact still remains that its primary purpose is to be an aesthetically satisfying organization of words. Olusegun Oladipo (1993:5) observes that there exists a working “relationship between literature and philosophy from the perspective of ‘worldview’ and critical discourse”. He argues that

philosophy and literature are both social phenomena and forms of social consciousness. Social, not just in the sense that they are produced by people who are “beings-in-society”, but perhaps more importantly in two respects. First, even when philosophy and literature spring from the experience of an individual or treat very abstract matters, they still constitute a reflection in the phenomena of life (Here it should be noted that personal experience, the experience of the individual, is still human experience and human experience is essentially social – a product of our interaction, not just with nature but also with ourselves). Second, philosophy and literature are products of the intellectual and practical needs of society and the individuals and classes comprising it. Whichever tool of analysis we use in describing or assessing literature, its relevance cannot be a work for its own sake. It either tries to present an experience of human relevance or attempts to repackage or remodel the personality of the individual in society. In performing any of these roles, it is not out of place to agree with Oladipo that literature operates within “some context of ideas which provide an anchor point for the web of descriptions, facts, constructions and evaluations” which it contains(cf. 1993:7).

Eagleton (1976) has also argued that literature is nothing but ideology in a certain artistic form. In other words, the works of literature are essentially expressions of the ideologies of their time. Continuing the contextualization of literature within ideological framework, Fashina (2001, 11) posits that literature only exists as literature within an interpretative community, emphasising that it is not an object that has an actual existence in the world but an activity – a social practice –carried out by a select and authorized group. Literature, Fashina argues is “essentially an ideology, and literary meaning does not reside in the text but is the product of an ideological practice”. This phenomenon however, takes a central stage, as a humanist discipline

that is relevant to the society as an instrument of social justice.(cf. Fashina, 2001). Literature, Finnegan (2005:164-166) observes, has gone beyond its conventional perception of being a written text .Its significance extends to the domain of performance. And just as literature exists in performance, so does performance have a lot to say about literature and literary theory. To argue therefore, that literature exists only in text or that it “signifies textual manifestation of writing” is misrepresentative. (Wolfreys, Robbins, et al) is highly debatable. Widdowson (1999:15) does not appear to help matters as he defines literature as written works, by which he means works whose originating form and final point of reference is their existence as written textuality.

Sam Asein (1995, 7) examines literature within a social-ideological context and submits that whether a product of an individual’s creative imagination, critical intelligence or as the shared collective product of a state, literature manifests observable traits and relates in terms of its themes, total landscape and tendencies to the social, political, cultural and physical environment characteristic of its enabling state. By nature, literature is generally a highly manoeuvrable art form. It creates and posits possibilities for social order without necessarily fragmenting entities. Literature is an exportable commodity and has a trans-territorial status that lends its universal applicability. However, as Asein also observes, even in that trans-contextual state, literature maintains a distinctiveness which it does not, and cannot, negotiate or compromise. It creates its own myths and mytho-poetic hegemonies. It recognizes its own geography and negotiates its own space. Bamidele (2000:4) advances this argument by observing that literature shares basically the same sociological concerns. According to him, studies have revealed that literature, like sociology, is a discipline preeminently concerned with man’s social world, his adaptation to it, and his desire to

change it. The literary forms in prose, poetry or drama, attempt to recreate the social world of man's relation with his family, with politics, with the state in its economic or religious constructs. Literature delineates the role of man in the environment, as well as the conflicts and tension within groups and social classes. Literature and Sociology are therefore, technically speaking, best of friends, no matter the operational differences in their method of talking about society. Literature in its aesthetic form creates a fictional universe where there is a possible verification of reality at the experiential level of man living in a society. It is arguable that imaginative literature is a re-construction of the world seen from a particular point of view which we may refer to as the abstract idealism of the author or the hero. While the writer may be aware of the literary tradition, it is the unconscious re-working of experience fused with his definition of a situation and his own values that produce the fictional universe which the sociology of literature may be concerned to explore.

Oyin Ogunba (2006: 10) following David Cook (1971: 3) asserts that literature is one of the greatest teaching powers of the world. Indeed, nothing "teaches so well about the life, culture, worldview and mode of thought of a people, as a good creative/literary piece of work. Mbiti (1959) gives credence to this cultural value of literature when he submits that to know the literature of a people is to know them well and that it is the precipitation of their mentality, their custom, their habit, their hopes and ideas about life itself. It is therefore, amazing how much one gets to know, as Ogunba (2006: 11) also observes, about the Igbo by reading Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* or *Arrow of God*, about the Indians by going through R. K Narayam's *Waiting for the Mahatma* or about the now seemingly insoluble India Pakistani conflict by reading Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* or about the ordinary life of Trinadians by going through Naipaul's *The Mystic Masseur*. In each case, the details of the life

and thought of the people are laid out in a clear-cut, digestible manner. No philosophical, sociological or political treatise can teach one as well as a good creative piece. There are however, a few challenges to this position. Oyegoke (1995: 33), while addressing issues relating to the intricate nature of literary studies, has observed that although the study of African literature has come a long way since the missionary tracts and anthropological treatise first invited formal critical interest, few of the problems posed by literature have actually been resolved in a definitive way. While it may be in the nature of literature and its study to defy logic, there are certain kinds of problems in literature which demand specific answers on account of the relevance of culture -- of which literature is an important part.--to history and politics. The critical discord that has marked the study of African literature has been intensified by the nature of the literature itself and the peculiarity of the circumstances which have shaped it. The uniqueness of literature therefore, becomes very clear: whereas these other modes of instruction are often theoretical, generalized and schematized, a creative literary piece, on the other hand, goes to the ground level, focuses on individual action in all its telling details, and penetrates into one almost surreptitiously but firmly and remains with one permanently.

### **2.3 The practice of literary criticism**

While it is true that a major driving force for the reading of literature is pleasure or entertainment, it is not the overriding factor. Sooner than later, the reader begins to realize that he enjoys some things more than others, and some reading experiences are positively distasteful while others become more and more deeply absorbing. One way of explaining this would be to say that he begins to develop a taste for some things rather than for others. But this is even not the point. The real

issue is that he begins the process of discriminating, of appreciating, and of feeling the difference between what is really important, really first-class or what is trivial or easily dispensable. As the reader begins to gain experience in the art of discrimination, in comparing his discrimination with other people's, particularly more experienced people, and as he reflects upon his literary actions and discovers the principles or guidelines on which they are based, he comes towards a state of mind in which he feels a capacity for judgment, that is, for delivering an opinion about the rights and wrongs of a situation, an expression or a problem which other people may accept or agree to, which is not subsequently overturned and which forms the best basis for many kinds of practical actions (cf Moody (1979)). The critical reading of a work of literature is a demanding discipline. But then the beauty of literary appreciation and criticism lies in the fact the reader ultimately does not have anything to rely upon in making his choice but himself.

In order to appreciate literature and put it in its proper place in the critical enterprise, the reader or critic must understand the underlying theory that literature as well as other arts can best be thought of as a process of communication between the writer or the artist and his public. This understanding makes the critic to assess any piece of writing using two test-questions: Do we receive the impression that the particular poem or piece of prose effectively communicates what it sets out to do? Is the idea picture, character or situation communicated itself of any value to us? Neither of these questions can be answered easily or automatically. Each of them requires us to read carefully, reflect and compare impression received from one thing with those received from others. The essence of literary criticism among other things, on the thinking that the substance of a writer's achievement can only be strongly felt and assessed by responding to the way he uses words and that the capacity to make such a

response can be formed or greatly enhanced by a training in literary appreciation and criticism. The literary critic is the voice and to some extent defender of the creative enterprise. No literary work is great in itself. Every outstanding work of literature is so referred to by disciplined affirmation. In other words, while it is true that there are generally accepted codes for measuring good and bad, there is no peculiar intrinsic value placed on any work of art. What a literary critic does is give us, as completely as clearly as he can, his response to a writer, a play, a poem, a novel etc and so help us to a fuller enjoyment and understanding of the experience in and behind the writing.

Alternatively, the critic can also reveal, by examining a piece of writing in detail, the elements in the writing which combine to make its particular quality. The mature critic who is conscious of the fact that his account and evaluation of an author must depend on the actual words written by the author, supports his remarks and judgment with pieces (no matter how little) of examined text, the text out of which his conclusions come. To do anything contrary would be tantamount to biased assessment, which in itself is antithetical to the critical discipline. D.H. Lawrence (in Coombes 1993,8) has observed that literary criticism can be no more than a reasoned account of the feeling produced upon the critic by the book he is criticizing. Criticism is not exactly science. It is in the first place, very personal and second, it is concerned with values that science ignores. The critic judges a work of art by its effect on his emotion more than anything else. All the critical nuances about style and form and all the classifications and analytical tools of conventional assessment are products of the emotion. It therefore, follows that a critic must be able to feel the impact of a work of art in all its complexity and force. To do so, he must be a man of complexity himself. A man with a superficial and indolent nature will never come out with anything but paltry comment. Criticism is not only an examination of the context but also a tacit

investigation of the totality of the critic himself. Whatever comes out of the critic, either by way of what he says or commits to paper, is a faithful reflection of who he is. Besides, an artistically and emotionally mature man must also be a person of good faith. In other words, he should be courageous enough to admit what he feels as well as the flexibility to know what he feels. So it is possible for a critic to be brilliant and not honest, to be emotionally sound and yet manipulates feelings. A dependable critic must be emotionally alive, intellectually capable and skilful in basic logic, and morally upright.

F.R. Lewis' views on literary criticism (Coombes 1993: 9) are worthy of note. It is the business of the literary critic to analyze and judge works of literary art. He is basically concerned with the work in front of him as something that should contain within itself the reason it is so and not otherwise. The more experience of life together—he brings to bear on it, the better of course. The possibility of the critic being wary about how he exert extraneous knowledge on the author's intention cannot be ruled out because intentions are not particularly striking in arts, except as realized, and the test of realization are standard and can hardly be manipulated. They are applied in the operation of the critic's sensibility; they are a matter of his sense, derived from his literary experience of what the living thing feels like. While Hartman (1976) maintains that literary criticism is still as relevant as it has always been, Watson (1962) appears to respond to the issue of whether we should limit the role of criticism to descriptive or evaluative comments on works of art couched in a neutral style. To him, there are at least two other kinds of critical activity, legislative criticism, including books of rhetoric that claim to teach writers how to write, and theoretical criticism or literary aesthetics.



It is instructive at this point to place the relationship between the creative writer and the literary critic in proper perspective. In other words, as Izevbaye (1979: 25) has also explained, there are several ways in which criticism and the making of a literary work can be regarded as two sides of the same coin. In the first type of cooperation, the creative talent and the creative faculty co-exist in the same person and may be regarded as identical. It is this type of faculty which W.E. Abraham advanced as a foundation for modern African criticism by defining the Akan tradition of criticism as that in which the poet is also a critic. However there is also a sense in which criticism exists as a seemingly independent activity practised by more or less professional critics. Here, a division of labour takes place between the critic and the writer. Although in Africa, hostility has often broken out between a writer and his reviewer, review criticism remains part of the creative act. The influence of criticism on the final shape of the literary work is a strategic one because even in the published form, the literary product still depends largely on the work of criticism for establishing its importance or its place in the tradition. Criticism, as Izevbaye (1979: 26) observes, is often responsible for presenting the work to the public; it might reduce the esteem it already enjoys with the reading public or it might help build up a tradition by creating a taste for similar literature. It might bring out the importance of a work by discovering in it new meanings not noticed before by the public, and thus give the work a new form and a new importance, perhaps over and above what was originally intended or thought of by the author.

The fundamental questions a practical critic should pose to a work of art include the following: can I respond to a poem the way the writer wants me to respond? Can I in a way identify myself in the spirit in which it was written? In practice the compilation of these are infinitely various-- we

cannot tell beforehand just how we will have to respond, there can be no adequately previously learned formula to tell us, and we may have to do any number of things to find the answers. But with some points, these general questions must translate into more practical questions such as: what is gained by this effect? Does this detail seem successful? Does it relate meaningfully to a general effect? What precisely is the intention here? In other words, to discover where our real preferences lie often involves a searching, exacting appraisal of everything that makes up the total effect of a poem. A young critic when first asked to say what he thinks of a poem,, if he has read it curiously, usually falls into –“I like this” , “this appeals to me” and so on. But we have not really read a poem until we know what we like about it more fully than this. Reflecting on a poem, deciding just where we stand in relation to it and finding the right language to express ourselves about it are essential part of reading the poem. The work of art comes home to you when you respond newly to it realizing exactly what you like about it and having a vivid description of the work as part of the realization. If we are moved by the literature and the spirit of the criticism, we should be able to find a sharper, more strongly felt description, “I will like this”, and until we find a description that satisfies us, we know we have not finally grasped it. One basic question often asked about practical criticism as Cox and Dyson (1972: 12) have also observed is: why read a work of literature in this way? Is analyzing not hostile to the spirit of poetry? This poser has been expressed so often that pushing it aside would be unfair to any discourse. As intricate as these posers may be, it should be understood that in addition to misconceiving the nature of the practical criticism, they underestimate the poem they seem to defend. They also suggest that our pleasure in poetry is a subjective illusion which closeness to the poem cannot sustain. This is not so. In fact, a poem or a work of art that is in any degree successful enhances the

critic's careful attention. A great poem actually begins to take possession of the critic not immediately and at one bound, but gradually over an unpredictable period of time. An isolated phrase or a line or a sequence of lines will return to the critic with a great sense of fitness and familiarity and he begins to wonder where he heard such a thing as the poem comes anew to him with its fresh form and beauty. It is not really that the critic recalls his analysis step by step, but rather that the experience of the poem, its totality, its uniqueness captures the critic more powerfully than before. The criticism has done its work and the poem has proved all the stronger for it. Criticism includes a new sense of the poem's structure and the imagery, its tone and verbal delicacy, its precise effect.

Practical criticism seeks to achieve analytical precision. The criticism of a poem is not antithetical to literary enjoyment. It is not the substitution of an intellectual pleasure for an aesthetic pleasure or the diminishing of the poetic understanding to a dull routine. On the contrary, it is an opening up of the poem for what it can really be: a unique and fascinating experience, carefully provoked by its maker and fully available only to those with the patience as well as the sensibility to recreate. If the poem is a good poem, the criticism begins in pleasure and deepens that pleasure as it proceeds. It makes our pleasure more articulate and therefore more meaningful. Emotion is enriched and extended by the exercise of thought carefully. To discuss the criticism of literature in this manner is to defend it; but is it not careless criticism that should more obviously be on trial? We cannot be content to like literary work merely at random and to give it the compliment of not more than a passing glance; we cannot be content to take from a great poem, for example, only it, as though it were simply a confirmation of something we already knew. The great poem has the power to enrich and extend us, to make us something more than we were

before. In its essential greatness, it is unlike any other poem. But how is this uniqueness to reach us, unless we attend precisely and in very great detail to what it is? Every word in the literary parlance counts, every interplay of meter with rhythm, every modulation and nuance of tone. The creative writer has certainly been conscious of many effects he precisely intended, and this precision for us and for him is not the opposite of poetic experience. It is the means by which the poem is achieved. The creative writer surely needs the audience – the reader or the critic – to succeed. And the critic needs to cooperate by an active and impartial reading of what is in front of him. The literary product (poem) really begins to exist when a critic's mind and consciousness come alive. The literary critic is not just any kind of person. He is a special individual with awesome analytical abilities and a balanced disposition. He is a man who truly sees. He is not satisfied in reducing the work in front of him to a cliché or a commonplace; rather, he examines the product until its particular reality comes vividly to life. The rewards of such attention are very considerable, since in works like great poems the words themselves as well as the experience they convey are more alive more revealing and disturbing than they are in the context of everyday experience.

#### **2.4 A short review of relevant literature on Bible as literature**

Several studies have been carried out on Bible as literature. One of the outstanding researches in this category was carried out by Robert Alter. In two of his works, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981) and *The World of Biblical Literature* (1992), he argues, among other things, that the Hebrew Bible is a largely cohesive literary text to be read with an essentially literary telescope. In other words, there is a proposition that the readers of the Hebrew Bible including students of narrative will

be able to understand it more fully by developing an awareness of its narrative art. While he does not completely dismiss the historicity of the Bible, he sees it as secondary. It is the view of Alter that the authors of the Bible had a striking literary consciousness that modelled their overall perception of life. He goes further to argue that while the literary study of the Bible is gradually gathering momentum and that it promises to have far-reaching consequences on both literary and biblical scholarship, any modern attempt to look at the Bible from a literary perspective must grapple with two fundamental difficulties: the peculiar circumstances of the composition and evolution of biblical text and the peculiar aims, even the peculiar objects of representation, towards which the literary art of the Bible is directed. While these works are general in nature, the present study examines the Bible, and in particular, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, essentially from the stylistic and literary perspectives.

The conceptualisation of the Bible as literature by Briggs (1983) is rather enterprising. According to him, the categorisation of biblical literature falls strictly within the spectrum of poetry and prose, and while noting the challenges involved in technically drawing the line between poetry and prose, he quoted Laner as saying that:

Prose has its rhythms, its tunes and its tone-colors, like verse; and while the extreme forms of prose and verse are sufficiently unlike each other, there are such near grades of intermediate forms, that they may be said to run into each other, and any line claiming to be distinctive must necessarily be more or less arbitrary. (67)

As illuminating as the conceptualisation and categorisation of biblical literature may be, the work does not address the stylistic and literary character of the Bible as the current study does. Gabel et al (2006)'s work, as an introductory text, is a useful material. It examines the broad issues of how to read the Bible as literature and

some literary strategies that may be useful for the appreciation of the Bible. They observe, for instance, that reading the Bible as literature should not be uncomfortable for persons who hold the religious view (though it may seem a little strange at first and it places no demands upon the many persons who, for reasons of their own, take a sceptical or noncommittal view of the Bible). The Bible, according to them, is the common heritage of everybody, irrespective of various religious beliefs: and it should be studied to a point, without getting into religious controversy. The authors argue that the Bible, in some fundamental respects, is not different from the works of Shakespeare, Dickens and Bronte, stressing that literature in this sense, is viewed in its broadest perspective. There is however, a narrower sense of the term that encompasses what is known as *belles lettres* – poetry, short stories, novels, plays and essays. But even then, the Bible does contain this kind of material. In addition, the Bible contains genealogies, laws, letters, royal decrees, instructions, prayers, proverbial wisdom, prophetic messages, historical narratives, tribal lists, archival data, ritual regulations and other materials which are quite difficult to classify. Hawkins (2010) provides a useful insight for this present study by exploring the dual quality of the Bible as both secular and sacred text. While acknowledging that the Bible is both literature and the word of God, he, however, stresses the literariness of the Bible and argues for the urgent need to claim the Scriptures' literary status.. In responding to the question, how literary is the sacred text? Hawkins observes that “many of the Psalms are beautiful lyric poems and Jesus' parables in Luke are masterful short stories. One cannot deny the presence elsewhere in Scripture of narrative technique or rhetorical flourish, sometimes, of a high order”

It is note worthy that the 'Bible as Literature' movement sounded a death-knell for the future of the text. T.S Eliot, for instance, argued in 1935 that the

Scripture had been formative in Christian culture only because it had *not* been treated as a narrative or poetry but rather ‘as the report of the Word of God’: ‘the fact that men of letters now discuss it as “literature” probably indicates the *end* of its “literary” influence’ (Eliot 1953:33). For C.S Lewis in 1950, who took issue with the literary adulation of the KJB, the Bible was ‘so remorselessly and continuously sacred that it does not invite, it excludes or repels, the merely aesthetic approach. You can read it as literature only by a *tour de force*’ (Lewis 1962: 48-9).

Objection to the ‘Bible as Literature’ has by no means been limited to traditionalist Christians from an earlier moment in the twentieth century: James Kugel (1981: 304) in the concluding part of his work, *The idea of Biblical Poetry*, speaks in the voice of a Jewish ‘we’ that includes those, like himself, who shudder to hear the Biblical Joseph described as ‘one of the most believable you know actually now how it characters in Western literature’. For Kugel, Joseph cannot properly be taken as a character or the Bible placed on the same shelf with other pieces of literature: And as true as this may be for us, how much truer must it have been when his story was first set down? That initial narrative act, ‘Come gather around and let me spin a tale,’ is not the starting point of Biblical history. Its premise-‘Let me tell you what happened to Joseph-our-ancestor, let me tell you how things came to be as you know them actually to be now’- is significantly different. Not to speak of ‘Let me tell you how God saved us’ [or] ‘Let me tell you God’s teaching.’ (ibid.) Kugel certainly does not deny that the Bible has literary features worth nothing (although he takes issue with the whole notion of ‘Hebrew poetry’); he denies that ‘we’ can understand Scripture aright only as a work of literature rather than as what it present itself to be – God’s Word.

Bullinger's work (1898) entitled *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* is quite illuminating and helpful in its presentation of the various figurative expressions operational in the sacred text. Even though, the approach by the author is to give a general picture of how literary tools can be situated in the Bible, it has helped the present researcher to extend the frontiers of literary features in the selected texts. Poland Lynn's book, *Literary Criticism and Biblical Hermeneutics: A Critique of Formalist Approaches*, is very significant in its examination of the various critical possibilities of Formalism as they relate to the Bible. This work has helped in structuring the theoretical framework of the present research. However, while Lynn's treatment of critical approach is a general one, the current work applies the concept to specific Books of the Bible, namely, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*. The importance of David Norton's *A History of Bible as Literature* lies in the historical background given to the Bible. It has helped in the situation of King James Bible (which is the selected Version for this research) within the larger context of the Bible and the different ages of its development.

Also critical to the present study is Barthes (1987)' "The Struggle with The Angel: Textual Analysis of Genesis 32:22-32" published in the book, *Image, Music, and Text*. The analytical approach given to the narrative is a further proof of the literary and linguistic possibilities of biblical interpretation. Furthermore, Barthes' analytical position seems to be based on the fact that since there can be no originating anchor of meaning in the possible intentions of the author, there is the need to consider what other sources or meaning can be found in literature. His conclusion is that since meaning cannot come from the author, it must be actively created by the reader through a process of textual analysis. And this is exactly what he has done with the biblical text.



Though an essentially instructional material, Warshaw Thayer (1978) attempts an enlightening overview of the various literary approaches to the study of the Bible by categorizing the broad spectrum of biblical literature into four parts namely: Bible as Literature, Bible in Literature, Bible and Literature and Bible and its Contexts. In Bible as Literature, there is an attempt to explore the literary components of the Bible. Here the sacred book is viewed as a literary document. Bible in Literature is an approach that seeks to contextualise the Bible within a literary framework. What operates in this context, among others, is the filling-in of the Bible story with literary elements, the modernisation of the Bible story and the place of biblical allusions. While the Bible in Literature uses the Bible and Bible-related literature, the third approach, which is Bible and Literature, combines the Bible with secular literature that does not depend upon the Bible. In this approach, genre and theme play significant roles. The Bible and its Contexts approach is premised on the argument that an intelligent reading of any piece of literature requires knowledge of the meaning of the words at work, both denotatively and connotatively. The implication of this is that a certain degree of familiarity with the culture – within which the work was produced and to which it was originally addressed--is required. It is important to say that this work provides a good background for the current study.

Bewer (1962) views the Old Testament as a long literary process in which compilers and editors played a major role. While observing that there are differences of opinion on the part of critical scholars on the dates and composition of a few of the books, the study concludes that the chronological sequence of the books which literary criticism has established, differs greatly from their order in the Bible. It is possible in a survey of Hebrew literature such as this to explore all the engaging angles of the Old Testament research. K.K. Harrison (1969) in his main work,

*Introduction to the Old Testament* examines the fundamentals of Hebrew poetry, and in his general discussion of the poetical books itemises the problems associated with authorship and date. While the work is useful to the extent that it provides broad information about the literary possibilities of the Old Testament, its approach is essentially theological, and therefore, different from the focus of the present study. The work of Gottwald (1987) is commendable because it addresses primarily the question of whether the Bible can have a purely socio-literary approach or not. It observes that there are several methods and approaches to the study of the Bible which include the historical- critical approach, the confessional -religious approach and the socio-literary approach among others, and goes ahead to scrutinize the relationship between the Hebrew Bible and other literatures within the context of the various versions and translations of the Hebrew Bible. Morgan and Bartın (1988) and Wild seem to agree on the premise that whatever tool of analysis is used in approaching a biblical text, a literary interest is inseparable from an intelligent reading of the Bible.

Walter Wink (1990) uses the split brand theory to illustrate the significance of supporting critical study and personal encounter, and submits that the teacher of the Bible must himself pass through a process of transformation. While the study admits that literary and historical data are essential, it however stresses the need for the critical reader to decide when and to what extent they are applicable. It also explores the possible ways in which the different parts of the Bible can be harmonised into a united whole. The approach to biblical scholarship is essentially theological, which is not the focus of the present study. Rogan Morgan and John Barton (1988) observe that the task of biblical interpretation is easier to contend with than probing the controversial theology and scholarly arguments that it involves. While adding that

ancient Hebrew literature differs from the classics, they however stress that it was not inferior to them because it had its own rules and conventions which were not less sophisticated than those of Greek and Latin literature. There is, nevertheless, agreement on the fact that while the Hebrew Bible is seen as the product of the ingenuity of the Hebrew people, the genres of the Bible and its conventions are being analysed in the light of other ancient literature, and their literary categories. While the book attempts at an interpretation of the Bible, it does not however analyse the Bible literarily as this present study tries to do.

While giving the Bible a sociological interpretation, Wright (1960) observes that the Bible is the study of people who lived at a certain time and place and argues that with archaeological input and assistance, a better appreciation of the Bible can be enhanced when the original background to the biblical materials are recovered. The research proves that in the reconstruction of historical biblical times, periods well known from surviving written documents are discovered. Bolarinwa (2008) identifies some definitions of literature and notes that virtually all the features, types and forms of literature are employed in the writing of the sixty-six books of the Bible. He argues that though the stories in the Bible are ancient, they are of contemporary relevance. He goes further to observe that, like most literary works, the work is didactic, that is, it informs and entertains. The Bible, he explains, contains no errors; it is correct in whatever it asserts and concludes by stating that though the distinct personality of each writer is obvious, the content of the entire Bible exhibits a unity and design that betrays a single author. It is instructive to observe that this paper and the current study are similar to the extent that they both seek to draw out the relationship between literature and the Bible. However, the paper has a theological flavouring which this study tries to downplay.

Nell (1991) notes the limitations facing a non-theologian in the historicising of the Bible, and while citing the contribution of Paul-Emile Botta to the historical development of the Bible, places in context the impact of other scholars in awakening from ancient slumber, many events which have passed from being merely pious tales to becoming credible historical materials and concludes that no book in the whole history of mankind has had such a revolutionary influence, or has so decisively affected the development of the western world, or had such a world-wide effect as the Book of Books, the Bible. Today, it has been translated into 1120 languages dialects, and after 2000 years does not give any sign of having exhausted its dynamic progress. While the focus of this study is on the Bible as Literature, the book under review, examines the sacred text from the historical perspective, namely, the era and time, as well as specific dates as they relate to the Bible. Our assignment in the present study however, is to engage in an analysis of the literary aspects of the Bible, with particular reference to the Books of *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes*. The work of Daniel Estes (1995) entitled *The Hermeneutics of Biblical Lyric Poetry* is a very significant one because, while it explores different literary and critical approaches to the Bible, admits that there are several limitations and challenges in engaging in such a venture. R. Walter (1987) admits that the Bible has not received the same kind of scholarly attention given to historical and theological issues, but he however, adds that there has been some effort at literary interpretation of biblical texts. Rather than examine the book of Job from a dialectical point of view, Greenstein (2003) seeks to situate the linguistic possibilities of Job within the operational realm of poetics. In contextualising history, social setting and literature within the Deuteronomic School, Person (2002) expresses his uneasiness with the redaction-critical method as a basis for distinguishing the work of one from another and goes ahead to offer suggestions

for overcoming the dilemma. These include a link of text criticism with redaction criticism and the recognition of other literary activities by investigating scribal culture elsewhere in the ancient near East. He concludes by observing that Deuteronomic literature could have evolved gradually over a long period of time, even if no systematic revisions were made.

While situating life and the humanities within the context of biblical literature, Oyegoke (2006) recalls how modern psychoanalytic theory of literature borrowed the biblical Joseph's story to identify a human trait christened the Potiphar complex- a trope with which to read and understand human behaviour. The biblical Joseph's story speaks to many aspects of life's experience, for example the right kind of attitude to adopt in time of suffering is an uncomplaining one that trusts in God and keeps in mind that it is ultimately beneficial to be blameless. Apart from the vivid dreams, their interpretation, and actualization, the story throws light on the complexity of the human psyche as in: Genesis 39:6-16. Spangenberg (1998)'s critical approach to the study of literature and the Bible is within the framework of paradigm shift, noting that the intricate relationship between the Bible and modern literary theory is a systematic phase in the historical movement of biblical studies. He echoes the position of scholars of this critical shift that it is possible to study biblical literature in the same way we study general literature, and the analysis of biblical narratives can be given a purely literary approach. As illuminating as these contributions have been, the missing gaps are quite noticeable, particularly in the situating and detailed examination of the literary genres in the Bible, and the place of figurative language in biblical literature which are aspects of the focus of the present study.

Alan Dundes' work entitled *Holy Writ as Oral Lit: The Bible as Folklore* (1998) is a significant prelude to one very important characteristic of that genre's

scholarship and where it appears in the Judeo-Christian canon. This publication provides insight to basic oral-biblical issues such as the different versions of the Creation myth and of the "Ten" Commandments. It is also an intelligent response to the seemingly internal narrative discrepancies within the account of Noah and the Flood, locating them within the context of echoic duplicated narratives, a pattern widely seen in folklore throughout the world and readily conceptualized within the scholarship of that academic field. While introducing some well known examples of how such narratives work in obvious oral-delivery settings, the writer situates the pioneering efforts of Millman Parry and Alfred Lord within the domain of investigation---the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. Narrative intricacies are traced throughout the complex story lines of the sacred text via parallel citations. Quotations from the 1611 Authorized Version are extensive, and Dundes tends to let the echoic nature of those story lines speak for themselves rather than spend a lot of time conceptualizing his own theories or supporting them with external research. While the book is crucial in its exposition of the orally discursive nature of the Bible, its survey of the literature and comprehensive bibliography in the discipline is also outstanding.

Similarly, Biakolo (1987) explores the relations between folklore and literature in so far as the former deals with the phenomena of a verbal artistic nature. He goes ahead to examine the formal inquiry of orality and literacy as a distinct mode of communication. A fascinating aspect of Biakolo's thesis is the specification of the nature of the relationship between orality and writing, their values as mode of communication and as carriers of system of thought and social behavior. But perhaps more striking and relevant to the present research, particularly the section that focuses on the oral nature of the Bible, is the third chapter of Biakolo's thesis

styled: "Narrative Orality and Writing". This section, in addition to Gunkel (1964) and Culley (1969) provides a boost to an aspect of appreciation of the oral value of biblical studies. Quoting John 1:1 (which is *'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'*) as his text of reference, Biakolo argues:

If the gospel writer's word refers to utterance as we know it, it could not refer to all the written word, only to the spoken. For although no one knows when men first began to speak, the approximate date of men's commitment of utterance to writing is known. Not only is it known by comparison with human history in general, it is a very recent development...Speech as human utterance operates basically in the dimension of time. The Word as an oral event, has no lasting presence; it vanishes as soon as it is created.

82, 86.

Ong (1967:40) corroborates the fleeting nature of speech and words when he observes that "words come into being through time and exist only as they are going out of existence. When I pronounce the word 'reflect', by the time I get to 'flect' the 're' is gone and necessarily and irretrievably gone". The implication of all this is quite obvious: What writing makes possible is the commitment of sound (which exists in time) to space. In so doing, sight becomes the dominant sensation of utterance. The word becomes arrested, and its successive parts begin to have the illusion of simultaneous existence, so that our "re" won't disappear when "flect" comes along. In holding the word captive in space and thus transferring its noetic category from time to space, and its sensation from hearing to sight, writing imposes its own sense of order upon human discourse.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE BIBLE AS A SCHOLARLY TEXT

#### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the Bible as a scholarly text. It examines the evolution and critical dynamics of the Bible. The chapter also explores the various areas of convergence and divergence between literature, orality and the African cultural setting.

#### 3.1 The etymology of the Bible

The term “Bible” also called “the Holy Bible”, “the sacred book” or “scripture of Judaism and of Christianity” is derived through Latin from the Greek *biblia* or *books* the diminutive form of *Byblos*, the word for “papyrus” or paper which was exported from the ancient Phoenician port city of Biblos. By the time of the Middle Ages, the books of the Bible were considered a unified entity (Friedman, 1989). It is not out of place to observe, as Dake (1963) has also done, that the biblical use of the term “Bible” was initially applicable to the Old Testament but subsequently extended to imply the entire scripture. It should however be noted that the Bible of Judaism and the Bible of Christianity are technically different in some ways. The Jewish Bible is the Hebrew scripture, 39 books originally written in Hebrew, except for a few sections in Aramaic. The Christian Bible is in two parts, namely the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament. The Old Testament is structured in two slightly different forms by the two principal divisions of Christendom. The version of the Old Testament used by Roman Catholics is the Bible of Judaism plus seven other books. Some of the additional books were originally written in Greek as was the New



Testament. The version of the Old Testament used by Protestants is limited to the 39 Books of the Jewish Bible. The other books and additions to books are called the Apocrypha by Protestants and referred to as deuterocanonical books by Roman Catholics (cf. Schneider, 2002).

It should be noted that the Old Testament evolved over a period of time. In other words, not all the books of the Old Testament originated at the same time and in the same place. Rather, they are essentially a product of the Israelite belief system and culture over a thousand years. Various literary perspectives have their bearing on the books and their component parts in terms of their authorship and their literary and pre-literary history. Essentially, virtually all the books went through a long history of transmission and development before they were collected and canonised. It is also important to distinguish between traditional Jewish and Christian view in respect of the authorship and date of the books and their actual literary history as it has been reconstructed by modern scholarship from the evidence in the biblical books. While not presenting a detailed account of the literary history of the Old Testament as some of the facts are not known, the history is long and often complicated, and older conclusions are regularly revised with new evidence and methods. It is, however, plausible to note that for most Old Testament books, it was a long journey from the time the first words were spoken or written to the work in its final form. That journey involved many people, such as storytellers, authors, editors, listeners and readers.

At the core of many of the present literary works stand oral traditions. It should be noted that before the emergence of widespread literacy, texts were preserved in memory and performed or recited. These oral texts performed significantly the same roles that written texts played in literate contexts. Most of the stories in Genesis, for instance, circulated orally before they were written down.

Prophetic speeches, now encountered in written form, were first delivered orally. Virtually all the Psalms, whether originally written down or not, were composed to be sung or chanted aloud in worship. However, it may not be credible to conclude that oral transmission was the precursor of written literature and ceased once books came into being. In fact, oral traditions have existed side by side with written materials for centuries. Dasylva and Jegede (2005:39) take the argument further by observing that oral literary tradition although often described as belonging to non-literate society, transcends the boundaries of time and still exists side by side with written literature in most nations of the world. This naturally leads us to issues on translation and nearness to original text. It is true that all contemporary translators of the Bible attempt to recover and use the oldest text, presumably the one closest to the original. However, it is safe to note that no original copies or autographs exist, rather hundreds of different manuscripts contain numerous variant readings. Consequently every attempt to determine the best text of a given book or verse must be based on the meticulous work and informed judgement of scholars.

It is not out of place to make a statement on the literature of the Old Testament. It is possible to view this part of the Bible from the viewpoint of literature, in which case, the entire Old Testament can be seen as an anthology a collection of many different books. In other words, the Old Testament is by no means a unified book in terms of authorship, date of composition, or literary type. It is, instead, a veritable library. While the books of the Old Testament may be broadly identified as narratives, poetic works, prophetic works, law or apocalypses, most of these are broad categories that include various distinct types or genres of literature and oral tradition. It is instructive to note that most Old Testament books contain several literary genres. Exodus for instance, contains narrative, laws and poetry. Most prophetic books

include narratives and poetry in addition to prophetic genres. Because the New Testament was written in Greek, the story of the transmission of the text and the establishing of the canon sometimes neglect the early versions, some of which are older than the oldest extant Greek text. The rapid spread of Christianity beyond the regions where Greek prevailed necessitated translations into Syriac, Old Latin, Coptic, Gothic, Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopic and Arabic. Syriac and Latin versions existed as early as the 2nd century, and Coptic translations began to appear in the 3rd century. These early versions were in no way official translations but arose to meet regional needs in worship, preaching and teaching. The translations were therefore trapped in local dialects and often included only selected portions in the New Testament. During the 4th and 5th centuries, efforts were made to replace these regional versions with more standardised and widely accepted translations. As it is usually the case, the old versions slowly and painfully gave way to the new.

### **3.2 History of the Bible as literature: The King James Bible**

While locating the King James version of the Bible in literary history, Herklots (1954: 11) explains that the version of the Bible that gained popularity and acceptance during the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II was the King James Bible, stressing that the acceptability was a function of the fact that many of its words and phrases were so familiar that hearers imagined that it was the state's language that the Bible was written. The Authorized Version which dates from 1611 actually became the national Bible.. Norton (1993:XIII) has also argued that the reputation of "the king James Bible" is the central most fascinating element in a larger, longer, engrossing history, that is, the literary idea of the Bible as it has come into and developed in English culture. It is important to note that volume I of Norton's great work centres on

the various traditions that produced the King James Bible. The first five chapters of the first volume x-ray the attitude of Christians to the issue of biblical inspiration, the problem of translation and the relation of the Bible to classical literature. Norton addresses his mind to issues that are capable of evolving in the work of KJB translators. He notices areas of divergence between the linguistic “form” of scripture and “content” which enables the text to remain fluid and open, even in the original language text. The next three chapters (i.e. 6, 7, and 8) address the challenges encountered by the first generation of English interpreters. These scholars have had to prove the dependability of a deprived language English, for biblical interpretation. This brought into effect a tradition of simple biblical English that emerged almost exclusively from the Anglo-Saxon.

The main attention of Norton in chapter 9 is the tracing of the history of English translation before King James Bible. The author demonstrates that public discussion, provoked by a variety of English translations, brought out issues that could not be easily pushed aside by the KJB interpreters. This gives credence to the position of chapter 10 that the KJB translators were revisers working within the English tradition. In a bid to be accurate and clear, they produced a literal translation of literary merit without any deliberate literary intention. Volume 11 tells us how the King James Bible has fared despite the changing disposition to religion and literature in the modern period. In the first two chapters, there is a demonstration of the preference for Latinised English, and the tending to view poetry as the natural language of religion provoked the need for a revisiting of the Bible. The focus of literary criticism shifted from the classical emphasis on eloquence to the sublime. The power to move one’s emotions and sentiments also seemed to be a fresh platform for

criticism. The King James Bible, as the Bible read by most Englishmen in church and school, was admired for simplicity consistent with biblical sublimity.

It should be noted that Robert Lowth's work on biblical poetry elicited a further shift of critical opinion towards the KJB. The KJB's literal translation allowed the parallelism defined by Lowth to enter the experience of the English reader. The superiority of the KJB over other Versions became pronounced as propositions for the literary and religious excellence of King James Bible came to the limelight. The subsequent calls for its revision finally produced the revised version. Chapter 7 traces the rise of the Bible as literature. The author observes that the movement evolved partly from the efforts of the faithful to secure a place for the Bible in secular school. The Bible as religion appears as a subset of the larger spectrum of the Bible. The argument in chapter 8 is that there are limited students of the KJB as English literature. Norton has posited that current interest in the Bible as narrative literature results in a restatement of issues already addressed in earlier work on Hebrew poetry. The work of the two volumes appears to concentrate on this concern in chapter 9. Norton believes that most of the patterns of thought that have been observed continue to show themselves in the modern dress of the last hundred years (349), arguing that a study of the history of the English Bible could correct this problem because "modern critics have little sense of how much they are repeating past experiments; more than that, they have created a myth of their own that respectable criticism of the Bible is a modern literary invention" (357).

### 3.3 Dynamics of biblical criticism

It is arguable that the dynamics of biblical criticism actually begins with the acknowledgement of its varieties or different possibilities. Gabel et al (2005 381-382) have provided a clue to this submission by observing that while it is possible to use the critical tools of the Bible without studying them, a serious student of the Bible as Literature will need to examine the tool kit and discover what it contains and what different jobs, the different items in it will do. Just as in scientific inquiry, so also it is with biblical criticism: the result one obtains depends largely on the method used to obtain it. A brief excursion into some of the major modes of biblical criticism, as they have been developed over the years, will provide a robust framework for our discussion.

In source criticism, what is crucial in considering the text of analysis is to ask whether it embodies materials from more than one author or a group of authors, “the sources”. Source criticism does not concern itself with the history of that text as a document written down and copied and recopied with possible alterations, as textual criticism does. Instead, it asks where the text came from and the various link-points. Redaction criticism takes the matter up from there and look for evidence in the text of how the “redactor “ or “editor” took those sources and wove them into an intricate and flowing narrative. The seeming inability of the redactor to produce a seamless unity is the best evidence of his activity. In traditional criticism, there is the tendency to disregard the text, whatever school of thought it reflects or whatever its history of composition is believed to have been, and focus on distinct elements within it that may have had a prior existence in the culture of the people, as can be shown by the appearance of these elements (in whole or in part) in other literary texts. This suggests that they were part of what is usually referred to as “folklore”. Form criticism

considers a text as an independent story with a cast of characters and a problem that finds a solution at the end. Form criticism then goes on to ask why the story was written in the first place and what significance it may have had on the lives of people who read or told it and passed it along. Essentially like traditional criticism, archetypal criticism disregards the text itself in favour of these elements, but in this case, these elements are the so called archetypes, modes of human thought common to all minds especially in identical or at least similar images whose meaning comes, not from the intention of the particular author but from the nature of the human mind itself. It is important to state here that those modes of thought may well be unconscious. Archetypal critics seem to hold the view that the archetypal images are most effective when they are not consciously recognized by the reader and (probably) the author. Since they are basic they are few in number and find expression through images common in all cultures. The structuralist critic believes that there is no meaning inherent in any text, and neither do any of the elements in a piece of writing considered merely by it. The meaning of a word is created by the structure or context in which it appears.

Gabel et al (2005: 385) have noted that the term “postmodernism” arose in debates over theories of architecture soon after the Second World War., and influenced by thinkers like Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes, spread rapidly through the social sciences, humanities, art and beyond. While the approaches of postmodernist criticism vary widely, nearly all have emphasized the difficulty inherent in language and symbols, and have attempted to move the critical focus from a solid determinable and unchanging text to the actual reader (or to some place between text and reader) and to the social, cultural, historical and linguistic situation in which the reader finds himself. In essence, the

process of reading becomes the means by which meaning is made – if indeed it can be made at all. Due to the indeterminacy of any text, beyond the emphasis that post modern criticism places on close and careful reading, these theories have had less influence on readers of the Bible than on readers of general literature. Using a deconstructive approach, associated with Derrida, a reading of a text would claim that a portion of that text is constantly struggling against being a text at all. The issue is not just about conflicting passages in a text, the fact is that language is too complex to do what the author intends. Narrative criticism involves the application of rhetorical principles to stories. A significant human feature is the way we make sense of the world, culture and the self – by reading and telling stories about experience. Narrative theory is premised on the argument that because we think in beginnings, middle and ends, see acts as examples of good fortune and bad, view characters relating to one another and focus on cause and effect, life is a series of stories. In phenomenological criticism, as promulgated by Wolfgang Iser, the reader is engaged at every step with the text in the process of reading, attempting to make sense of words and their relations. The author, while planning, writing and revising, has in mind the ideal reader, just as the reader visualizes the ideal writer and even text. The author knows that he or she is writing, while the redactor and the reader know that they are editing, rearranging, reading or re-reading a text. The point at which the author, redactor and reader meet is where the text is created.

Generally speaking, biblical criticism entails the study and investigation of biblical writings that seek to make discerning and discriminating judgments about these writings. The term criticism is derived from the Greek word *krinō* which means “to judge”, to discern, or to be discriminating in making an evaluation or forming a judgment. It has come to refer to a form of inquiry whose purpose is to make



discriminating judgments about literary and artistic productions. Thus, we speak of literary criticism, art criticism, music criticism, or film criticism as disciplines or fields of inquiry whose purpose is to review productions in their respective areas in order to discuss and appraise their significant features and judge their lasting worth. Generally speaking, the questions asked in biblical criticism have to do with the preservation and transmission of the biblical text, including in what manuscripts the text has been preserved, their date, setting, and relationship to one another, and what the most reliable form of the text is; the origin and composition of the text, including when and where it originated, how, why, by whom, for whom, and in what circumstances it was produced, what influences were at work in its production, and what sources were used in its composition; and the message of the text as expressed in its language, including the meaning of the words as well as the way in which they are arranged in meaningful forms of expression.

In literary studies of biblical texts, there is usually ignorance of the intricacies of literary theory and the complexities of literary issues. De Klerk (1997: 1) has observed that the different schools of thought in biblical criticism have held tenaciously to their position. While exponent of the socio-historical approach to the Bible accuse the text centred (literary) school of not taking the text's socio-historical context (and textual history) seriously, of projecting the reader's frame of reference, into the text, the latter would reply that the former does not pay due respect to the biblical text as a literary unit in its own right but often focuses on the hypothetical materials from which the text was supposedly created – thereby treating the biblical texts as distorted historical documents and substitute for what had unfortunately been lost. Robertson (1977:15) in examining the literariness of the Bible distinguishes pure from applied literature. He argues that the way one approaches, defines and delimits

the work of the literary critic, proposes the nature of pure literatures, Also fascinating is the comparison of Euripides' tragedy *The Bacchae* and Exodus 1-15 treated literally as comedy. While it is difficult to agree with Robertson's contention that Exodus 1-15 excludes ambiguity and irony, his point is however, clear. To begin with, tragedy requires irony for its effect, where comedy, allowing it, does not require it. But it appears as if Robertson was saying at the end of the chapter that tragedy is of itself a more adult, more profound genre than comedy. This is strenuous to reconcile more so that it seems obvious that irony and ambiguity are in the given text. Longman (1987) surveys the methods used in the study of the Old Testament in such a way that it becomes clear how they are interrelated and what gains they are meant to achieve- to set Old Testament study against a wider background of literary criticism and to make a case for the pursuit of correct methods. However, Mouton (1896) believes that the Bible has been badly maltreated in his various translations with the consequence that the vast majority of those who read the Bible have never shaken off the medieval tendency to look upon it as a collection of isolated sentences, isolated texts, isolated verse, thereby degrading a sacred literature into a pious scrap-book (82). Despite the mutilation, he argues that those who would appreciate the Bible from a literary point of view must set aside the mistaken divisions and chapters and substitute it with a better system. This he attempts to do, in addition to describing the different literary forms found in the various books of the Bible. An oration, for instance, he maintains, must be immediately recognized as such, a sonnet must wear its own form and a drama must be exhibited as such to the eye.

### 3.4 Orality and the Bible

Language is an oral phenomenon and human beings communicate in countless ways, making use of all their senses of touch, taste, smell and especially sight as well as hearing. Language is central, not only to communication but thought itself and relates in an altogether special way in sound. Wherever human beings exist, they have a language and in every instance, a language that exists as spoken and heard in the world of sound. Despite the richness of gestures, elaborate sign languages are only substitutes for speech and dependent on the oral speech system. Language is so overwhelmingly oral that of all the many thousands of languages, possibly tens of thousands, spoken in the course of human history, very few have been committed to writing to a degree sufficient enough to have produced literature and many have never been written at all. It is still difficult to calculate how many languages have disappeared or been transmuted into other languages before writing came. Besides, hundreds of languages in active use are never written at all, and no one appears to have worked out an effective way of writing them. In other words, the basic orality of language remains permanent (cf Ong, 2002, Ewejobi, 2009:19).

It should be noted that while anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists have reported on fieldwork in oral societies, cultural historians have done a lot of research in prehistory, that is human existence before writing made verbalized record possible. Ong (2002) has noted as crucial, Ferdinand de Saussure's call for attention to the primacy of oral speech which underpins all verbal communication as well as to the persistent tendency to think of writing as the basic form of language. While noting that writing simultaneously has usefulness, shortcomings and dangers, it is also a kind of complement to oral speech, the sound of speech, and not necessarily as a transformer of verbalization. It should be observed however, that despite the attention

to the sound of speech, not much has been done to ways in which primary orality, the orality of cultures untouched by literacy contrast with literacy. While it is true that structuralists have analysed oral traditions in detail, not much has been done in contrasting them with written composition. It should be noted however, that there is a growing interest in applied linguistics and socio-linguistics to compare the dynamics of primary oral verbalization and those of written verbalization.

Olowookere (2009: 37-38) has attempted to apply some of the books of the Bible to the features of oral expression articulated by Walter Ong. He explains, for instance, that the refrain “for his mercy endureth for ever” in Psalm 136 stands as a mnemonic device and a formulaic styling to keep the thought flowing in the course of recitation as in:

1. *O give thanks unto the Lord: for he is good:  
For his mercy endureth for ever.*
2. *O give thanks unto the God of gods:  
For his mercy endureth for ever.*
3. *O give thanks to the Lord of lords:  
For his mercy endureth for ever.* (KJV)

Also, explaining how the oral cultures avoid complex “subordinate clauses”. Olowookere (2009:38) compares the King James Bible (KJV) with the New International Version (NIV) noting the basic additive pattern. as in:

Genesis 1:

1. *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*
2. *And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.*
3. *And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.*
4. *And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.*
5. *And God called the light Day and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.* (KJV 1611)

Genesis 1:

1. *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*
2. *Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*
3. *And God said “Let there be light; and there was light*
4. *God saw that the light was good; and he separated the light from the darkness.*
5. *God called the light “day” and the darkness he called “night”. And there was evening and there was morning, one day. (NIV 1973)*

It should be clearly observed that there is copious use of the additive “and” in the KJV than the NIV, and this function is a formula for remembering and structuring thoughts, because of the spontaneity in the nature of the delivery. The use of the conjunction “and” in the text helps to structure thoughts. The implication of this is that the oral text has a tendency towards pragmatics. Moreover, these additives suggest that for the first day of creation (verse 2), God’s activities were a continuous and uninterrupted process. Hence, the conjunction “and” is used here to stress or emphasize continuity and to introduce statements that continue or add weight to the first statement.

It is instructive to consider some of the ways in which the application of studies in oral tradition to biblical studies can encourage us to appreciate biblical texts in relation to their oral-aural contexts and how these oral-aural texts functioned in the ancient world. It is possible to observe that over the years biblical scholars have developed a much greater appreciation of the close relationship between oral and written texts. Robbins (1993:116) sees the close relationship arising from what he describes as the “rhetorical culture” of the ancient world, a culture based in the art of recitation. Rhetorical culture uses both written and oral languages as well as written and oral sources and traditions interactively. This is with the expectation that oral

traditions appear in written texts and written traditions are heard in oral texts. The distinction between the two in terms of content and structure is not blurred nor can any sequence of “first oral, then written” for instance, be discerned. In essence, rhetorical culture presupposes that the oral and the written text are intricately bound together in a dynamic relationship. The implication of this rhetorical and cultural insight, as Hearon (2004: 98) also observes, is profound. It counters any notion of a clear distinction between an oral phase and a written one in the transmission of the biblical text.

The other interpretative possibility, which is perhaps more disruptive to the canon of biblical scholarship, is the possibility that the relationship between the Gospel rests in performance rather than the written texts. Dunn (2000: 302) illustrates this performance-driven difference by explaining that “Mathew and Luke knew their (oral) versions of the story and drew on them primarily as well. Alternatively it could be that they followed Mark in oral mode as a storyteller would.” The possibility that the similarities between the Gospel rest not on literary dependence but on shared tradition transmitted as oral text offers an additional insight to biblical discourse. In other words, the oral-aural nature of the biblical texts underscores their existence in performance. They must be understood in terms of the interaction between a performer and an audience and the web of discourse and experience that binds together in a given place and time. This is somewhat taxing in itself for biblical scholars, because we can only appreciate the performer, audience and context described by the location through reconstructions based on elements of literary and material constructs. Furthermore, to understand a word as spoken is to recognize that it references an immediate social context described by the location of a performer, and audience in a specified space and time. Then there is the issue of performance itself.

Anne Wire (2002:4) believes that writing limits a story by recording only words, whereas storytelling depends for effective communication as much on the speaker's histrionics such as tone, gestures, pace, volume and embodiment of direct discourse as on the words spoken.

While articulating the seemingly injurious disposition of historical and form critical standpoints to oral and biblical studies, Kelber (2003: 40) notes that biblical texts are not only located in close affinity with speech, but that the form critical project has turned out to be largely misconceived. He therefore submits that orality studies challenge biblical scholarship to rethink fundamental concepts of the Western humanistic legacy such as text and intertextuality, reading, writing and composing, memory and imagination, speech and oral/scribal interfaces, author and tradition, adding that contemporary research in orality is anything but a mere embellishment of textual studies. Finnegan (2005:168) pursues the same line of thinking by holding the view that there is not just one relation between the "performed oral" and the "textual written" neither is there a clear distinction between them. She argues that writing can interact with oral performance in many different ways. Such possibilities of interaction include dictated transcription, performance score, memory cue, hearing aid, notes for a speech, printed version of a memorized poem, tool for helping audiences understand a performance as it develops, and script for recreating and remembering a past performance, among others. This multi-dimensional twist to the pursuit of oral-biblical scholarship makes Hearon's submission to the discourse significantly all-embracing. According to him:

What began some sixty years ago as an exploration of the oral tradition in the biblical text has brought us to a point where we now see our written remains as evidence of our oral-aural culture in which written and oral text and tradition were bound together in a dynamic

relationship. This offers us opportunities to see and hear our written text in new ways: as patterns of sound beat in the task of persuasion in particular social historical contexts where performer and audience entered the world of the text in order to give meaning and power to a way of life. (2004:103)

### **3.5 Literature, the Bible and the African cultural setting**

Williams (2006: 111) has observed that culture is the pattern of behavior that people living in social groups learn, create and share, and that it is a distinguishing factor that separates one human group from another. A people's culture includes their beliefs, rules of behaviour, language, rituals, arts, technology, styles of dressing and ways of producing and cooking food. In other words, culture encapsulates the religious, political and economic system of a given people. Culture is the study of all aspects of human life, past and present. It is instructive to note that people have culture essentially because of their desire to communicate with and understand symbols. Symbols allow people to develop complex thoughts and to exchange their thoughts with others.

However, it is important to state that the debate among scholars on the intricate relationship between literature, biblical hermeneutics and the African culture is not a recent one. Martey (1993, 44) and Manus (1996, 4) have asserted that an expression of the African cultural heritage, language and literature have certain implications for theological reflections in Africa. They argue that in any biblical passage, it is possible to find a message that addresses itself to an African audience, adding that African oral literary forms such as folklore, which is composed of traditional legends, beliefs, customs and fables, have functional relevance in the Bible. In biblical tradition, folk stories are short narratives with some etiological



significance of the history of Israel and her heroes which people could easily memorize and from which they invented aphoristic clichés uttered from time to time. On the significance of oral texts in Africa vis-à-vis biblical scholarship, Amewowo (1986) has argued that the African has in its culture an oral literature, history, folklore, etiology, poems, songs and talks, transmitting values which could and should have been used as pedagogical aids to introduce Africans to the literary genres of the Bible.

It is this contextualization of the biblical discourse within the framework of African cultural essence and application that J. S. Ukpong (1995) calls inculturation hermeneutics. This approach to biblical interpretation seeks to make the African, and for that matter, any socio-cultural context, the subject of interpretation. He argues further that to make a specific socio-cultural context the subject of interpretation means that the conceptual framework, its methodology and the personal import of the interpreter are consciously informed by the world view of, and the life experience, within that culture. In other words, literary and religious forms do not arise from and live in a vacuum. "Peoples' experiences shape what appears in their literature" Camp (1985:12). This perhaps explains why the relationship between religion, the bible, culture and society is as J. Oluponna (1991) puts it, is "obvious and imposing".

Scholars are also in agreement that the Bible is enmeshed in the society in which it is located. The politicians use it, the lawyers quote from it. Barrett (1991:10) notes that it is extremely difficult to state where religion begins and where it ends. Among the Yoruba for example, traditional medicine, as Buckley (1985:1) indicates, "is linked to religion". Fatokun (1995: 80) tries to see ways African traditional culture in chieftaincy titles has influenced attempts at indigenizing Christianity in Africa. What this amounts to is the fact that the African experience is crucial to an

understanding of biblical texts. W. Harden (2006) strongly believes that “the perceived gap between African culture and the western packaging of the Christian gospel necessitate reflection on the possibility of meaningful and enriching dialogue between facets of African culture and biblical texts. In interpreting the Bible across cultural lines therefore, it is important to ask some questions: is culture a thing created by God? Or is it entirely a human device? Is there anything in a people’s culture which can be said to be sacred? Is there any aspect of culture which may be considered essential to a people? What is the role of religion in culture? (cf Etuk U 2002:13).

Utuk (2002:18) has observed that when God created man, he endowed him with certain innate abilities, among them the ability to create a culture of it’s own. As Kraft (1979:103) also observes, “there is not now or ever has been a human being who is not totally immersed in and pervasively affected by some culture”. It is possible to argue that after God has created the first man and woman, the Bible account states that he put them in a garden to tend. Since such tending of the environment is not found among animals, it is arguable that God made man to a cultural and culture producing being. Virtually all the scholars who have undertaken to study the African religious consciousness have reached one conclusion, namely, that the idea of God, or rather of the Supreme Being, is not foreign to Africans. Geoffrey Parrinder (1976:399) believes that the earlier view that African religion was crudely fetishistic was a foreign impression that did not take into account African’s adoration of a Supreme Being..

### 3.6. Dialogue between African proverbs and the Book of Proverbs

Perhaps, one should begin by observing that virtually everywhere in Africa, proverbs are not rare. They are often short and popular among groups of people. While many of the proverbs are anonymous because the authors are not known, the tide has since turned. Orators, sages and oral poets are increasingly being credited with originating a proverb. Proverbs are at the heart of most cultures, they beautify words and contextualise linguistic materials within specific situations and circumstances. Ruth Finnegan (1970:390) presents her observations on proverbs rather poetically:

In many African countries a feeling for language, for imagery and for the expression of abstract ideas through compressed and allusive phraseology comes out particularly clearly in proverbs.

The socio-linguistic and traditional essence of a people enjoys significant flavouring with proverbial application. This also brings to light the contextual place of proverbs. Proverbs are appreciated in the social settings where they are easily used. According to Firth (1926: 134):

The essential thing about a proverb is its meaning. The meaning of a proverb is made clear only when side by side with the translation is given a full account of the accompanying social situation – the reason for its use, its effects, and its significance in speech.

Firth's point is that a clear meaning of a proverb can be appreciated when the social situation of its use is considered. Usuanlele (1991:6) defines proverbs as an

indomitable expression or quotation embodying some form of truth and wisdom used in speech to support or summarize points. And though some scholars ascribe shortness or brevity to the quality of proverbs, this does not obtain at all times. (cf. Ighile: 2007:130).

Asare (2005) notes that though proverbs may have many uses in African societies, they express an eternal truth. They may be a warning against foolish acts or a guide to good conduct. They may also bring special meanings to certain situations and may even solve particular problems. The relationship between proverbs and truth is an intricate one. In other words, whether proverbial expressions are true or false is not an easy position to take. Otakpo (1987:17), in a reaction to Crow, has argued that:

Crow believes as well as insists that proverbs are axioms and therefore are self-evident truth. If a person says that the truth of a proverb is self-evident, and means simply that the truth of a proverb is evident to him or her, we are being told more about the person than the proverb. On the other hand, if a person says that the truth of a proverb is self-evident from the nature of the proverb itself, we are being told little or nothing for experiential knowledge and evidence have little role to play. In which case, the talk of self-evidence is in need of more explanation.

In spite of the philosophical garment under which the discussion can be situated, the fact remains that some proverbs are so assertive and declarative both in nature, articulation and application that no one can be left in doubt as to their truthfulness and reliability.

Proverbs are, as Raji (1999:75) puts it, culture markers in that they tell in rather brief and intense terms so much about the history and psychology of the people and communities from which they emanate. In other words, proverbs are indicators of the

cultural essence of a people. Akporobaro (2001:105) while giving credence to the above observation, has also asserted that:

A collection of proverbs of a community or nation is in a real sense an ethnography of the people which if systematized can give a penetrating picture of the people's way of life, their philosophy, their moral truths and social value.

This is clearly not different from the observation of Odebunmi (2008). According to him, proverbs deal with issues that border on the values, norms, institutions and artifacts of a society across the whole gamut of the people's experiences. In addition, proverbs are clearly a functional genre of oral literature in particular and literature in general. The reason for this contextualisation of proverb within the oral literary experience is, as Oputa (1990) observes, because of the practice of many literary scholars as well as the figurative essence, functional indirectness and the metaphoricity of the proverb.-features that are characteristic but in no way exclusive isolates of literature. Boardi (1972: 183) argues that the general conception of proverbs in preliterate societies as having the distinctive and main function of teaching is too pragmatic and limiting and submits that the literary features of such proverbs which include the sharp wit, sarcasm, humour, rhetoric, and all the aesthetic and poetic value of the language cannot be ignored.

Taiwo (1976:32), corroborating Chinua Achebe in (Whiteley, 1964:viii), has observed that the importance of proverbs lies in their judicious application in literary works. To him:

They enable the speaker to give universal status to a special and particular incident as they are used to soften the harshness of words and make them more palatable. They are called in igbo “the palm wine with which words are eaten.

Proverbs constitute a vibrant aspect of the traditional communicative system of a people. Through proverbs, messages are passed across, recovered and adequate feedback given. They remain the artistic medium through a given people express their ideology, thoughts and value systems. Proverbs can be legitimately treated as autonomous statements with extensional meanings that can fit into various forms of human discourse. That this is so, is attested to by the fact that the rightness or wrongness of their application depends entirely on the interaction and blend between their application and the context in which they are applied.

It is important to point out that some of the African wise sayings and philosophical worldview correspond thematically and to some extent stylistically with the Solomonic proverbs. This is so because, as Anene-Boyle (2002, 17) also observes, proverbs and other philosophical sayings occur virtually everywhere. Suffice it to say that the correspondence being explained can go beyond philosophical worldview.

Examples of some correspondences:

African Proverb: Proverbs 3:5:	Those who lean on God never fall to the ground. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct thy paths.
African Proverb: Proverbs 18:2	The day a good wife is found, life has just begun. Whosoever findeth a wife findeth a good thing and obtaineth favour of the Lord
African Proverb: Proverbs 22:1:	A good name is better than wealth A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches.
African Proverb: Proverbs 13:20:	Show me your friends and I will describe who you are He that walketh with the wise will be wise, But a companion of fools shall be destroyed.

Healey and Sybertz (1996:13) have used the narrative metaphor to justify their emphasis on enculturation theology in Africa and to explain why the oral literature of African should be a part in an enculturation theology. According to them, the dialogue between African oral literature and biblical texts is part of an on-going African journey of inculturation and contextualization—rooting the gospel in local African cultures and societies. The guides on this journey are African proverbs, sayings, riddles and stories among others.. Healey and Sybertz also underscore the difference between Africanising Christianity and Christianizing Africa and argue that it is not a matter of taking the traditional customs of African culture and making the best ones fit into Christianity. It is not also of African cultural values being mediated through Western culture and thought pattern. Rather it is to start from the reality of the African context and see how the story of the gospel can become a heaven of it (cf Healey and Sybertz 1996:19). This dynamic relationship implies that an active dialogue involves a mutual two-way challenge and enrichment. The African culture challenges the Christian faith to be truly universal. This means being faithful to the gospel as good news to all people and all cultures. At the same time, the Christian faith challenges and illuminates African culture and tradition. While it is true that several scholars have continued to explore the existence of similarities between the Old Testament Book of Proverbs and some traditional African people, such similarities have been argued to have a popular social location of proverbs in ancient Israel and traditional Africa (cf. Nael, 1986, Mesanya, 2004). Kimilike (2002, 2006) believes that the existence of similar proverbs in particular has far-reaching theological consequence with regard to the social location of the Book of Proverbs for three reasons. Firstly it gives a further confirmation of the popular social performance contexts of the

proverbs in the Book of Proverbs (Gollas, 1993). Secondly, the popular line of thought opens a line for a methodological extension in the study in the Book of Proverbs. Heerden (2006:433-436) has contributed significantly to the discourse on the reflective quality of Africa on literature and the Bible by articulating the functional relationship between African cultural values and biblical texts. He observes that dialogue is not only about similarities and differences in wording imagery, content and so on but that these features are inherent in the proverbs and Bible texts themselves. While observing that the mere juxtaposition of Bible text and African proverbs already elicit a proverb meaning and therefore create space for dialogue, he argues that this dialogue only comes to life in real life situation. It is therefore important to draw attention to the African proverbs and biblical texts that affirm one other, those that have matching ideas and motifs, the African proverb that illustrate biblical passages, and biblical texts that share literary features. A few of such examples would suffice.

#### African Proverbs and Biblical texts affirming one other

African: People do not build a house on top of water.

Biblical: And everyone who hears the words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who builds his house on sand. (Matthew 7:26-27).

African: The one who loves is not afraid.

Biblical: There is no fear in love, but perfect love cast out fear, for fear has to do with punishment and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love (1John 4:18)

Biblical: For God has not given us the spirit of fear but of power, of love and of sound mind. (2Tim 1:7)



When an African Proverb and a Biblical text have matching ideas or motifs

African: One becomes a baby once.

Biblical: Nicodemus said to him, 'How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?

(John 3:4).

African: Do not wait for the visitor to ask for food before you oblige.

Biblical If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food and one of you says to them 'Go in peace, keep warm and eat fill' and yet you do not supply their body needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, it has no works, is dead. James (2:15-17)

When an African Proverb illustrates a Biblical passage

African; The left hand washes the right and vice versa

Biblical: The eye cannot say to the hand 'I have no need of you' nor again the head to the feet 'I have no need of you'. On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. (1 Corinthians 12:21-22)

When a Biblical passage illustrates an African Proverb

African; If God gives something, he gives life with it.

Biblical: The creation narrative of Genesis 1

African: You cannot escape God. You will meet him in foreign lands.

Biblical: The Jonah narrative

Africa: Do not say you are what you are not.

Biblical: The story of David and Goliath, especially 1 Samuel 17:38-39, 45-46, 48-49)

African Proverbs and biblical texts extend each other

a.) *An African Proverb extends a biblical text*

The following proverbs extend the biblical text.

- Whoever loves a child has an extended affection for the parents.
- You cannot love me and hate my dog.
- Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves the child. (1 John 5:1).
- You do not pursue a disobedient child into the devouring mouth of the tiger.
- So he [the prodigal son who admitted that he had sinned against heaven and before his father] set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. (Luke 15:20).

b.) A biblical text extends an African Proverb

- A cow cannot be spared instead of a man.
- For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. (John 3:16; cf. Romans 3:23-26).

African Proverbs and Biblical texts contradict one other

Sometimes, proverbs and biblical texts contradict one other. The following two examples are about favouritism and fatalism respectively.

- The antelope's back does not get wet.  
(The evil doings of an elder or important personality do not easily leak out.)  
And
- One who farms by the path does not plough a crooked farm.

(A wealthy person is never guilty)

While the Bible supports respect for the elderly and the noble (1 Timothy 5:1-2; 1 Peter 2:17), it teaches fair, just and equal treatment for all. (Acts 10:34; James 2:1-13)

- There is always blood in the head of a tsetse fly.

(This proverb can be used to caution people when dealing with a person known to have done some evil. This caution has been taken to suggest that people can never change from bad to good: once bad, always bad) the Bible has shown this view to be mistaken, for:

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! (2 Corinthians 5:17)

African Proverbs use or comment on the Bible

a.) An African proverb comments specifically on the Bible

- He who does not believe what the elders say, will not believe the sayings of the Book (the Bible); and he who does not believe the sayings of the Book will not believe what the Lord says.

b.) An African Proverb is based on a biblical text/motif

- He has a stick, but he is not Moses.

The Stick of Moses: Exodus 9:23; 10:13; 14:16; 17:5-6)

- The paradise of the poor man is the home of his Father-in-law.

The Paradise motif: Luke 23:43)

- The priest with whom God was angry sold his prayer book and bought a donkey

- The motif of a priest with whom God was angry: Amos 7:10-17)

## African proverbs and Biblical texts sharing literary features

A proverb and a biblical text may share the same stylistic features that pose certain interpretive challenges, for example the literary use of paradox.

- The hare says: “Walking slowly leads to death”. The chameleon says: ‘walking quickly leads to death’.
- Do not answer fools according to their folly, or you will be a fool yourself.
- Answer fools according to their folly, or they will be wise in their own eyes.

(Proverbs 26:4-5)

African proverbs commenting on situations (similar to those) in which the Bible is often used

Many proverbs comment on the kind of situation in which the Bible is often used (e.g. missionary situations).

- The old woman looks after the child to grow its teeth and the young one in turn looks after the old woman when she loses her teeth.

(This proverb has been used to point out that the ‘daughter churches’ of Africa at this point in time can offer the ailing “mother churches” of Europe support and advice.)

- A person jumps into a discussion or a situation with his/her long, uncombed hair.

(This proverb can be used with reference to the insensitive ways in which people sometimes confront others with the gospel.)

## CHAPTER FOUR

### LITERARY FEATURES, FORMS AND FUNCTIONS IN THE BIBLE

#### 4:0 Introduction

This chapter examines the literary content of the Bible by exploring some of the pronounced literary features, forms, genres and functions of the Bible. Every piece of writing is a kind of something (cf Gabel et al 2006:15). In other words, writing takes its place within a particular formal tradition and in itself exemplifies that tradition. This is no less true in biblical literature because the reader of the Bible will make sense of it as literature to the extent to which he is conversant with the literary forms. Though the Bible in a general sense is literature, its literary forms require particular consideration.

#### 4.1 Literary features of the Bible

The extent to which the Bible can be said to be a unique book is open to argument. In other words, the Bible's literary forms function in the same way that these forms function beyond the Bible. A story is a story, whether in the Bible or beyond it. A metaphor is a metaphor. Nonetheless, it is possible to make generalisations about characteristic literary features of the Bible, with no implication that these features do not exist elsewhere. The articulation, by L. Ryken and G. Ryken (2001 ii-iii), of some literary qualities or literary techniques often found in the Bible, generates engaging discussions.

##### 1. A unifying story line

Although the overall genre of the Bible is the anthology of individual books and passages, the Bible possesses a unity far beyond that of other literary anthologies. In

the Bible, the narrative is the story of salvation history — the events by which God worked out His plan to redeem humanity and the creation after they fell from original innocence. This story of salvation history focuses ultimately on the sacrifice and atonement of Christ on the cross and His resurrection from death. The unifying storyline of the Bible is a U-shaped story that moves from the creation of a perfect world, through the fall of that world into sin, then through fallen human history as it slowly and painfully makes its way toward consummation and arrives at the final destruction of evil and the eternal triumph of good.

## **2. The presence of a central character**

All stories have a central character or protagonist, and in the overarching story of the Bible, God is the Protagonist. He is the unifying presence from the beginning of the Bible to the end. All creatures interact with this central and ultimate Being. All events are related to Him. The story of human history unfolds within the broader story of what God does. The result is a sense of ultimacy that comes through as we read the pages of the Bible.

## **3. Religious orientation**

The subject of literature is human experience, and this is true of the Bible, too, but a distinctive feature of the Bible is that it overwhelmingly presents human experience in a religious and moral light. Events that other writers might treat in a purely human and natural light — sunrises, battles, a birth, a journey — are presented by the authors of the Bible within a moral or spiritual framework. Part of this moral and spiritual framework is the assumption of the biblical authors that a great conflict between good and evil is going on in our world and, further, that people are continually confronted with the need to choose between good and evil, between working for God's kingdom and going against God.

**4. A variety of genres and styles**

Every literary anthology of the Bible's magnitude displays a range of literary forms, but the Bible's range may well top them all. We need to be alert to this, because the religious uses to which we put the Bible can easily lull us into assuming that the Bible is all one type of writing. The list of individual forms, if we include such specific motifs as the homecoming story or trickster or love poem, keeps expanding. The variety that we find in the Bible stems partly from the large categories that converge — history, theology, and literature, for example, or prose and poetry, realism and fantasy, past and future, God and people.

**5. Preference for the concrete over the abstract**

While the New Testament contains a great deal of theological writing, the general preference of biblical authors is for concrete vocabulary. This is especially true of the Hebrew language of the Old Testament. In the Bible, God is portrayed as light and rock and thunder. Slander is a sharp knife. Living the godly life is like putting on a garment or suit of armor. Heaven is a landscape of jewels. To read the Bible well, we need to read with the “right side” of the brain — the part that is activated by sensory data.

**6. Realism**

The prophetic and apocalyptic parts of the Bible give us a steady diet of fantasy (flying scrolls, for example, and red horses), but the general tendency of the Bible is toward everyday realism. The Bible displays the flaws of even its best characters. Samson for instance, was not exonerated. Neither was Moses. Although the Bible does not delineate the sordid experiences of life in the extreme detail that modern literary realism does, it nonetheless covers the same real experiences, such as violence, murder, sexuality, death, suffering and famine. Of course, the Bible differs

from modern realism by showing us that there is a realism of grace as well as a realism of carnality. In other words, the Bible is not content to portray the degradation of a world that has fallen into sin without also portraying the redemptive possibilities of a world that has been visited by the grace of God and is destined for glory.

#### **7. Simplicity**

Although the Bible is certainly not devoid of examples of the high style, especially in the poetic parts, its overall orientation is toward the simple. The prevailing narrative style is plain, unembellished, matter-of-fact prose. Shakespeare's vocabulary is approximately twenty thousand words, Milton's thirteen thousand, and English translations of the Bible six thousand. Biblical writers often work with such simplified dichotomies as good and evil, light and darkness, heroes and villains. Of course, there is a simplicity that diminishes and a simplicity that enlarges. The simplicity of the Bible paradoxically produces an effect of majesty and authority.

#### **8. Preference for the brief unit**

Linked with this simplicity is a marked preference for the brief literary unit. Biblical poets tend to write brief lyrics, for example, not long narrative poems. Most long narratives in the Bible such as the story of Abraham or the Gospels are actually cycles of stories in which the individual episodes are briefer and more self-contained than what we find in a novel. The prophetic books are actually anthologies of self-contained oracles and snatches of narrative. Other familiar biblical genres reinforce this tendency toward simplicity — proverb or saying, parable, lists of individual commands or rules, summaries of what various kings did, occasional letters (epistles) in which the author responds to a list of questions that have been asked or a crisis that has arisen in a local church.



## **9. Elemental quality**

The Bible is a book of universal human experience. It is filled with experiences and images that are the common human lot in all places and times. The Bible embraces the commonplace and repeatedly shows ordinary people engaged in the customary activities of life — planting, building, baking, fighting, worrying, celebrating, praying. The world that biblical characters inhabit is likewise stripped and elemental, consisting of such natural settings as day and night, field and desert, sky and earth. Even occupations have an elemental quality — king, priest, shepherd, and homemaker, missionary.

## **10. Oral style**

Even though the Bible that we read is a written book, in its original form much of it existed orally. This is true because ancient cultures were predominantly oral cultures in which information circulated chiefly by word of mouth. The literary forms of the Bible show this rootedness in an oral culture. The prevalence of dialogue (directly quoted speeches) in the Bible is without parallel in literature generally until we come to the novel. Everywhere we turn in the Bible, we hear voices speaking and replying. The spare, unembellished narrative style of the Bible arises from the situation of oral circulation of the stories. Additionally, many of the non-narrative parts of the Bible show signs of oral speech — the prophetic discourses and oracles, the psalms (which were sung in temple worship), the epistles (which were read aloud in churches), and the Gospels (where the words of Jesus are a leading ingredient).

## **11. Aphoristic quality**

The Bible is the most aphoristic book of the Western world. It is filled with sayings that are part of the common storehouse of proverbs and idioms: “pride goes before destruction” (Prov. 16:18); seeing “eye to eye” (Isa. 52:8); a “house divided against

itself” (Matt. 12:25). This quality is present not only in the wisdom literature of the Bible but in all parts of the Bible and most notably in the sayings of Jesus.

## 12. The literature of confrontation

When we read Shakespeare or Dickens, we find ourselves moved to agreement or disagreement, but we do not ordinarily feel that we have been confronted by someone or something that requires us to make a choice. By contrast, when we assimilate the Bible we feel as though we have been personally confronted with something that requires a response. While this choice is ultimately for or against God, the ideas of the Bible, too, require us to believe or disbelieve them. The Bible displays a vivid consciousness of values — of the difference between good and evil — with the result that it is virtually impossible to remain neutral about the ideas that confront us as we read the Bible.

### 4.2 Forms and genres

Ryken and Ryken (2001) argue that there is no meaning without the form in which a piece of writing is expressed. In other words, when we read the Bible, literary considerations are not optional features to which we might attend only if we have an interest in literary matters. We need to pay attention to the *how* of a Bible passage as preliminary to understanding *what* is being said. It is not out of place to observe that many biblical writers have submerged their individuality into their chosen literary form. Even writers who speak out of personal feelings tend to disappear as persons. Psalms 22:1-2 is illustrative of this discourse:

*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?  
Why art thou so far from helping me  
And from the words of my roaring?*

*Oh my God, I cry in the day time but thou hearest not  
And in the night season, and am not silent*

Here the poetic persona must have written this out of a personal crisis, probably a serious sickness. But the author's feelings of estrangement and despair are nevertheless traditionally expressed utilizing a form known as the "lament". Lament Psalms follow a stereotyped pattern. The speakers make God empathize, describe their trouble and assert confidence in God, petition for help (i.e. offering a vow) and thanking God for a possible act of rescue.

Psalm 13 is another example:

1. *How long will thou forget me, O Lord? for ever?  
How long will thou hide thy face from me?*
2. *How long shall I take counsel in my soul?  
Having sorrow in my heart daily  
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?*
3. *Consider and hear me, O Lord, my God  
Lighten mine eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death*

The above poem, a less famous lament, offers in a rather small but strategic way a clear specimen of the form.

In examining the function of this form, it is crucial to observe, as Gabel et al (2006) have done, that most of the poems in the Book of Psalms were used in ceremonies at the Second Temple – either sung or chanted. The Bible is a mixture of genres, many of which are literary in nature. The major literary genres in the Bible are narrative or story, poetry and proverbs. The Bible is also profound in figurative language and rhetorical or artistic patterning. Other literary genres of note in the Bible include epic, tragedy, satire, pastoral, wedding poems of love and elegy (funeral poems). The focus of this work is the application of different literary tools in the interpretation of the Bible. A study of genres is crucial to any literary approach to the Bible because every genre has its own conventions, expectations and corresponding rules of interpretation. Conner and Malmin (1983, 10) argue that if the Bible must be

understood and placed in its proper perspective, its literary genres must first be determined. It is this literary task of determining genre(s) that sets the mood from which the entire work can be seen. In his location of the literary genres and figures of speech within the core spectrum of Biblical interpretation, Lawson (1992:20) observes that whole texts or passages can be written in a figurative sense, stressing that a good understanding of the linguistic possibilities of the Bible is critical to the appreciation of its aesthetics. Lawson explains further that a biblical story for instance, is a sequence of events, not a series of ideas. It is structured around a plot conflict, not a logical argument. It communicates by means of setting, character and events and not by propositions. Literary genres of the Bible require us to approach them in terms of the convention or procedure they possess. Literature uses distinctive resources of language. This is most evident in poetry. Poets for instance think in images and figures of speech. God is a shepherd, people are sheep, the tongue is a fire. It is fascinating how much of the Bible is poetic, especially books obviously dominated by literary qualities and materials such as Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Songs of Solomon and some of the prophets. The entire spectrum of figurative language is central to the consideration of the Bible as literature. Figurative language in the Bible includes metaphor, simile, symbolism, hyperbole, apostrophe, personification, paradox, pun and irony, to mention just a few. These resources of language, though not limited to poetry, pervade the entire Bible.

The importance of genre to biblical interpretation is that genres have their own methods of procedure and rules of interpretation. An awareness of genre should program our encounter with a text, alerting us to what we can expect to find. For example, the most prevalent of all literary forms is narrative or story. To make adequate sense of a story, we need to know that it consists of plot or action, setting,

and characters. These, in turn, constitute the basic grid through which we assimilate the story and talk about it. In view of how many literary genres are present in the Bible, it is obvious that the overall literary form of the Bible is the anthology. As an anthology, the Bible possesses the same kinds of unity that other anthologies exhibit: multiple authorship (approximately three dozen authors); diverse genres; a rationale for the assembling of this particular collection of materials (a unifying religious viewpoint and story of salvation history, as well as the fact that all the books except Luke and Acts were written by Jews); comprehensiveness; and an identifiable strategy of organization (a combination of historical chronology and groupings by genre). With belief in the inspiration of the Bible as a foundational premise, we can say that the Holy Spirit is the ultimate editor of the anthology that we know as the Bible. Literature is identifiable by its subject matter. It is differentiated from expository (informational) writing by the way in which it presents concrete human experience. Instead of stating abstract propositions, logical arguments, or bare facts, literature embodies what literary authors often call “the stuff of real life.” We can profitably think of biblical writing as existing on a continuum, with abstract propositional discourse on one end and concrete presentation of human experience on the other. The more thoroughly a piece of writing falls on the experiential end of the spectrum, the more literary it is. To illustrate, the command “you shall not murder” is an example of expository discourse. The story of Cain and Abel embodies the same truth in the form of characters in concrete settings performing physical and mental actions. Expository writing gives us the precept; literature gives us the example. “God’s provision extends to all of our life” is a thematic summary of Psalm 23; the psalm, however, eschews such abstraction and incarnates the truth about providence in a pastoral poem that images the daily routine of a shepherd and his sheep.

The subject of literature is human experience rendered as concretely as possible. The result is that it possesses a universal quality. Whereas history and the daily news tell us what *happened*, literature tells us what *happens*—what is true for all people in all places and times. A text can be both, but the literary dimension of a text resides in its embodiment of recognizable human experience. While we rightly think of the Bible as revelatory (God’s supernatural revelation of truth), the literary parts of the Bible are at the same time the human race’s testimony to its own experience. The goal of literature is to prompt a reader to share or relive an experience. The truth that literature imparts is not simply ideas that are true but *truthfulness to human experience*. The implication for interpretation is that Bible readers, teachers, and expositors need to be active in re-creating experiences in their imagination, identifying the recognizable human experiences in a text (thereby building bridges to life in the modern world), and resisting the impulse immediately to reduce a biblical passage to a set of theological ideas.

Also central to the literary form and genres are archetypes and motifs. An archetype is a plot motif (such as initiation or quest), character type (such as the villain or trickster), or image (such as light or water) that recurs throughout literature and life. The presence of archetypes in a text signals a literary quality. When we read literature, we are continuously aware of such archetypes as the temptation motif, the dangerous valley, or the hero, whereas with other types of writing we are rarely aware of archetypes. Archetypes are the building blocks of literature. Writers could not avoid them even if they tried. The Bible is the most complete repository of archetypes in the Western world, and this makes the Bible a universal and primeval book (reaching down to bedrock human experience). Awareness of archetypes helps us see the unity of the Bible (since we keep relating one instance of an archetype to other

instances), the connections between the Bible and other literature, and the connections between the Bible and life.

Literature uses distinctive resources of language that set it apart from ordinary expository discourse. The most obvious example is poetry. Poets speak a language of their own, consisting of images and figures of speech. The most important of the special resources of language that push a text into the category of literature include the following: imagery, metaphor, simile, symbol, allusion, irony, wordplay, hyperbole, apostrophe (direct address to someone or something absent as though present), personification, paradox, and pun. The most concentrated repository of such language in the Bible is the books that are poetic in their basic format — the prophetic books, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes (a book of prose poems), Song of Solomon, Revelation. But literary resources of language are not limited to the obviously poetic books of the Bible. They appear on virtually every page of the Bible beyond the poetic books—most obviously in the discourses of Jesus and in the Epistles, but also, though less pervasively, in the narratives of the Bible. A related literary phenomenon is rhetoric — arrangement of content in patterned ways and employment of conventional literary techniques or formulas. Parallelism of sentence elements, for example, is an instance of stylized rhetoric. Patterns of repetition — of words, phrases, or content units — are a distinguishing feature of the Bible. So are the aphoristic conciseness and memorability that continuously raise the Bible to a literary realm of eloquence far above everyday discourse. A specimen page from a New Testament epistle might include the presence of rhetorical questions, question-and-answer constructions, direct addresses to real or imaginary respondents, and repeated words or phrases within a passage, and we can depend on it that famous aphorisms will appear in abundance.

Literature is an art form in which beauty of expression, craftsmanship, and verbal virtuosity are valued as rewarding and as an enhancement of effective communication. The one writer of the Bible to state his philosophy of composition portrays himself as, among other things, a self-conscious stylist and wordsmith who arranged his material “with great care” and who “sought to find words of delight” (Eccles. 12:9–10). Surely our impression is that the other writers of the Bible did the same. The standard elements of artistic form include unity, theme-and-variation, pattern, design, progression, contrast, balance, recurrence, coherence, and symmetry. Authors cultivate artistry like this because it is important to their effect and intention. The Bible is an aesthetic as well as a utilitarian book, and we need to experience it as such, both for our understanding and for our enjoyment.

### **4.3 Literary forms in the Bible**

#### **Allegory**

Baldick (2004:15) defines allegory as a story or visual image with a second distinct meaning partially hidden behind its literal or visible meaning. The principal technique of allegory is personification whereby abstract qualities are given human shape. It can also be a prolonged metaphor in which the articulation of the principal subject or lesson is suppressed. Nathan’s story about the sheep told to David is a classic allegory of the Old Testament (2nd Samuel 12: 1-6). The homiletical discussions in Ecclesiastes 9:15, 16 provide another example of allegory. Here the characters in the biblical verse are interpreted in different ways. In the New Testament, Paul describes his analogy of the two women as an allegory. (Gal. 4:21-31).

#### **Catalogue Verse**



A catalogue verse is a verse that records the names of several persons, places or things in the form of a list (Baldick.35). It is common in epic poetry where the heroes involved in a battle are often enumerated, sometimes with accompanying description. Joshua 12 is an appendix which lists the kings which the children of Israel conquered. In some cases, a brief description is given. For example from verse 7-24:

*And these are the kings of the country which Joshua and the children of Israel smote on this side Jordan on the west, from Baalgad in the valley of Lebanon even unto the mount Halak, that goeth up to Seir; which Joshua gave unto the tribes of Israel for a possession according to their divisions;  
 In the mountains, and in the valleys, and in the plains and in the springs, and in the wilderness, and in the south country; the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites:  
 The king of Jericho, one; the king of Ai, which is beside Bethel, one;  
 The king of Jerusalem, one; the king of Hebron, one;  
 The king of Jarmuth, one; the king of Lachish, one;  
 The king of Eglon, one; the king of Gezer, one;  
 The king of Debir, one; the king of Geder, one;  
 The king of Hormah, one; the king of Arad, one;  
 The king of Libnah, one; the king of Adullam, one;  
 The king of Makkedah, one; the king of Bethel, one;  
 The king of Tappuah, one; the king of Hopher, one;  
 The king of Aphek, one; the king of Lasharon, one;  
 The king of Madon, one; the king of Hazor, one;  
 The king of Shimronmeron, one; the king of Achshaph, one;  
 The king of Taanach, one; the king of Megiddo, one;  
 The king of Kedesh, one; the king of Jokneam of Carmel, one;  
 The king of Dor in the coast of Dor, one; the king of the nations of Gilgal, one;  
 The king of Tirzah, one: all the kings thirty and one.*

### Dirge

Baldick (2004: 68) defines dirge as song of lamentation mourning for someone's death or a poem in the form of such a song and usually less elaborate than an elegy.

The Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes have indications of this form. For instance, there is a way in which Proverbs 16:19 and Ecclesiastes 12:4 blend to present an atmosphere of reflection as in:

*And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound  
of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of  
the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low*

In other words, if the merry voice of the singing girls is silent or low, then meditation or reflective song takes over. The Book of Lamentations, which deals with the desolation from the fall of Jerusalem, is also a ready example.

### Elegy

This is an elaborate formal lyric poem lamenting the death of a friend or public figure or reflecting seriously on a solemn subject (Baldick 2004:76). 2 Samuel 1 and Psalm 137 readily come to mind. While 2 Samuel 1 is a poem in which King David laments the death of Saul and his dear friend, Jonathan, Psalm 137 is a poem in which the children of Israel recall Jerusalem during their time of captivity in Babylon.

Verses 19, 20, 23, 26 and 27 are quite representative of David's lamentation:

*The beauty of Israel is slain upon the high places, how are the mighty fallen*

*Tell it not in Gat, publish it not in the streets of Askelon  
Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the  
uncircumcised triumph.*

*Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their eyes and in their  
death they were not divided  
They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions*

*I am distressed for thee my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been  
unto me  
Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love for women.*

*How are the mighty fallen and the weapons of war perished*

Psalm 137 is reproduced below as illustrative of elegy:

*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered  
Zion.*

*We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.*

*For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that  
wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.*

*How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land?  
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.  
If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not  
Jerusalem above my chief joy.  
Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it,  
rase it, even to the foundation thereof.  
O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth  
thee as thou hast served us.  
Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.*

### Epigram

An epigram is a short poem with a witty turn of thought or a wittily condensed expression in prose (Baldick: 83). Verses 19-27 of Proverbs 23 illustrate this literary expression:

*Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way.*

*Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh:*

*For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.*

*Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old.*

*Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.*

*The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him*

*Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice.*

*My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways*

*For a whore is a deep ditch; and a strange woman is a narrow pit.*

It is instructive to note that the poem verses above give advice and the effects of not obeying such.

### Epistle

Baldick (2004:84) defines the epistle as essentially a letter and as a literary form. The verse epistle is a poem in the form of a letter to a friend or patron in a familiar and

conversational style. It also applies to ancient writings of sacred character or of literary excellence. Jeremiah 29 is a letter sent by the prophet from Jerusalem to the remnants of the elders, priests, prophets, and people in Babylonian captivity: The first twelve verses are illustrative:

*Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem unto the residue of the elders which were carried away captives, and to the priests, and to the prophets, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon;*

*(After that Jeconiah the king, and the queen, and the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, and the carpenters, and the smiths, were departed from Jerusalem;)*

*By the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, (whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent unto Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon) saying,*

*Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon  
Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them;  
Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished.*

*And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.*

*For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed.*

*For they prophesy falsely unto you in my name: I have not sent them, saith the Lord*

*For thus saith the Lord, that after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.*

*For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.*

*Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you.*

## Essay

An essay is a literary composition on some special subject, analytical, expository, critical, or reflective and personal, commonly briefer and less complete and formal than a treatise. Ecclesiastes 5:10 to 6:11 is an essay by the preacher on the subject of the vanity of desire. As in any essay, the writer states his topic in the first paragraph and refers to it in his concluding paragraph:

*He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity.*

*When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?*

*The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.*

*There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.*

*But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand.*

*As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand*

*And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind?*

*All his days also he eateth in darkness, and he hath much sorrow and wrath with his sickness.*

*Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion. {It is good...: Heb. there is a good which is comely, etc} {all the days: Heb. the number of the days}.*

*Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God.*

*For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answered him in the joy of his heart.*

*There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men.*

*A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease.*

*If a man beget an hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also that he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he.*

*For He cometh in with vanity, and departed in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness.*

*Moreover he hath not seen the sun, nor known any thing: this hath more rest than the other.*

*Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place?*

*All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled. For what hath the wise more than the fool? what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living?*

*Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this is also vanity and vexation of spirit.*

*That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it is man: neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he.*

*Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better?*

**Hymn**

A hymn is a song that expresses praise or adoration. Psalm 33; Psalm 81 come to mind. In Psalm 33, the writer says:

*Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright.*

*Praise the Lord with harp: sing unto him with the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings.*

*Sing unto him a new song; play skilfully with a loud noise.*

*For the word of the Lord is right; and all his works are done in truth.*

*He loveth righteousness and judgment: the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.*

*By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.*

*He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap: he layeth up the depth in storehouses.*

*Let all the earth fear the Lord: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.*

*For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.*

*The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect.*

*The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.*

## Liturgy

A liturgy is a kind of prayer consisting of a long sequence of chanted supplication and response. It is also a collection of prescribed forms of public worship. An order of service can be found in Psalm 65. The first verse is praise; the second verse is prayer; the third verse is penitence; the fourth verse is aspiration and the fifth to the seventh verses are expressions of faith:

*Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion: and unto thee shall the vow be performed.*

*O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come*

*Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away.*

*Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.*

*By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation; who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea:*

*Which by his strength setteth fast the mountains; being girded with power:*

*Which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people*

## Lyric

This is a verse expressing the poet's personal emotions or sentiments. It is song-like, as distinguished from epic or dramatic. Psalm 23 is one of the most popular sacred

lyrics. It begins with a simple image of the shepherd and his flock, followed by a rapid succession of images.

### Maxim

A maxim is a brief statement of practical principle. It is synonymous with a proverb.

Ecclesiastes 4: 9, 13; 5:1, 8 are apt:

*Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.*

*Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished*

*Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.*

*If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they.*

### Proverb

This is a pithy saying, especially one condensing the wisdom of experience. There are many examples in the Book of Proverbs, one of which is 10:2. Others include Proverbs 25-29 and Ezekiel 12: 21-28.

### Register

This is an official record, the book containing it, or any entry therein. Nehemiah 12:1-26 is the register of the priests and Levites returning to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel. Ezra 8:1-14; Ezra 10:18-44 and Nehemiah 10:1-27 are other examples.

### Anthology of Disconnected Song

An anthology is a collection of choice or representative literary extracts. Being disconnected, these sayings are not consistent in theme with each other. It refers to numerous topics and is arranged in such forms as epigram, proverb, and sonnets of different lengths. Proverb 30 is a good example.



## Song

A song is a short poem, whether it is to be sung or not. It can also be classified as a lyric or a ballad. 2 Samuel 22 is the song that David spoke to God when he was delivered from his enemies. Exodus 15:2-18; Deuteronomy 31:14-32:43, Psalm 11; Psalm 18; Isaiah 54 and 55 Isaiah 60 are others.

## Satire

There is a sense in which satire can be said to be intricately linked with sarcasm. Satire is a literary work holding human vices and follies to ridicule or scorn. Illustrations abound in the selected texts. They include Proverbs chapters 8 and 9, Proverbs 11:22, Ecclesiastes 5:13-17 and Ecclesiastes 12:1-8. An examination of Mathew 23 also brings to light the satirical twist of Jesus Christ. His denunciation of the Pharisees is cutting and biting, caustic and humorous. He says: "Observe what they tell you but not what they do. They lift heavy burdens to put on others; they won't lift their fingers to relieve them". He derided their love for titles and status. In their inconstancy they strained out the gnats while swallowing camels. They washed the outside of the cup; instead of the inside. They whitewashed tombs of decay to hide reality. They honoured prophets while killing them. No doubt, this classic ridicule brought both embarrassed laughter and steaming anger from the listeners. However, Jesus limited such caustic satire to the hypocritical leaders instead of using it to embarrass innocent truth-seekers.

### 4.4 Figurative language

The Bible abounds in figurative expressions. The wonderful imagery of Scripture is derived from a wealth of human experience, the manners and customs of the ancient Near East, family and business life and the whole sphere of nature. While

literal meaning refers to the normal or customary usage of a word or expression, figurative meaning refers to a concept which is represented in terms of another.

It is important to acknowledge Bullinger's (1898) contribution to biblical figures of speech. A figure of speech, to him, relates to the form in which the words are used. It consists in the fact that a word or words are used out of their ordinary sense, or place, or manner, for the purpose of attracting our attention to what is thus said. A figure of speech is a legitimate departure from the laws of language, in order to emphasize what is said. Hence, in such figures we have the Holy Spirit's own marking, so to speak, of His own words. This peculiar form or unusual manner may not be true, or so true, to the literal meaning of the words; but it is more true to their real sense, and truer to truth. Figures are never used but for the sake of emphasis. They can never, therefore, be ignored. Ignorance of figures of speech has led to the grossest errors, which have been caused either from taking literally what is figurative, or from taking figuratively what is literal. In Gen. 3:14, 15 we have some of the earliest examples. By interpreting these figures literally as meaning "belly", "dust", "heel", "head", we lose the volumes of precious and mysterious truth which they convey and intensify. It is the truth which is literal, while the words employed are figurative.

#### **4.4.1 Figures of speech in the Bible**

##### **Hyperbole**

This literary tool involves a "deliberate exaggeration for a specific effect."

(Gabel, et al. 2006:21). In Proverbs 16:32 there is an ample illustration:

*He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.*

The mighty are the rich and powerful people in the society who can do anything at will. To compare an ordinary man who is able to control his anger to the mighty is an exaggeration. The act of taking over a city is a very tasking one. In biblical days, cities were fortified with thick walls and big gates which were well guarded like the city of Jericho. Even in modern-day warfare, conquering a city is a major task rarely accomplished by veteran general. In the same vein, the successful control of anger is compared to taking a city in warfare. This is obviously an exaggerated way of stressing the importance of controlling anger.

In 1 Kings 1: 40, readers are given the impression that the newly-anointed King Solomon was ushered home in procession “with pipes playing and loud rejoicing and shouts to split the earth.” Obviously, the earth did not split, neither was there a geological convulsion from such a cause. Taken at its face value, the statement is untrue. But then the essence of the literary use is obvious. The author is only saying that the rejoicing and noise were extremely great. Another clear use of hyperbole is in the covenant between God and the descendants of Abraham who will be “like the dust on the ground” (Gen 13:16) or as numerous as the stars of heaven and the grains of sand at the seashore. (Gen 22:17). Others include the following:

*“Every one could sling a stone at a hair’s breadth and not miss”*

(Judg. 20:16).

*“I am weary with my groaning; all night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears” (Ps. 6:6)*

*“Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck out of your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye?” (Matt. 7:4)*

*“And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25).*

## Irony

There are different ways of situating irony in the Bible. First is the direct or simple one which Gabel et al (2006:31) refers to as “the irony of language. That is, irony in which words are used, in a double-edged way”. Typically, the language may be complimentary or favourable on the surface, but it is intended to have the opposite effect. In Proverbs 25:16, we have a striking example:

*Hast thou found honey? Eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it.*

The proverb is really trying to discourage all forms of indulgence. Too much indulgence in food, drink, sex and other worldly pleasures will make one sick. When Elijah in 1Kings 18:27 suggests to the prophets of Baal that they “call louder” to get a response from their god, who has not manifested himself at the altar, Elijah’s words at a superficial level, indicate sympathy for their embarrassment. In fact, he is mocking them, and they know it. Other illustrations of this kind of irony include: “Come to Bethel and transgress, at Gilgal multiply transgression; bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days” (Amos 4:4-5). “Throw it to the potter--that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord for the potter” (Zech. 11:13). “For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise!” (2 Cor. 11:19).

## Dramatic Irony

Beyond the easily-noticeable ironies are the dramatic ones. In the book of Esther, for instance, having observed Haman’s plot to get rid of his enemy, Mordecai the Jew, by hanging him on a seventy-five-foot high gallows, we are then taken into king

Ahasuerus's bedchamber. There the king learns that (by providential accident) that Mordecai once saved his life from some traitors and was never recognized for his service. At that moment, Haman enters, planning to recommend the hanging of Mordecai. Before Haman can bring up this matter, the king asks "what is the right way to treat a man the king wishes to honour? (Esther 6:6). Supposing that the king must be referring to him (though we know better), Haman recommends a public display of royal favour whereupon the king tells him to "do everything you have just said to Mordecai the Jew" (Esther 6:10). With his pride crushed and his hatred of Mordecai even greater because he dares not mention it now to the king, Haman is forced to escort Mordecai in person through the ceremony of acclaim. From the vantage position of the audience, we are confronted with a man who destroys himself through ignorance and malice. That the king is unaware of the torment he has innocently caused his trusted adviser such pain is a further irony. The ironic cluster becomes very thick when Haman is hanged on the very gallows he built for Mordecai.

### Personification

In this literary form and strategy, Gabel et al (2006:31) explain it as an inanimate object or a group of persons such as a tribe or nation that is spoken of as though it was a single person or is given human attributes.

*"For whoso findeth me, findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord". Proverbs 8:35*

Here wisdom herself is speaking. She must be sought and found above every other thing else.

In Proverbs 8:1, we are being presented with a poser:

*"Doth not wisdom cry? And understanding put forth her voice?"*

In this context, we are shown the activities of wisdom and understanding who call out loud in the streets beseeching people to acquire wisdom and understanding. Wisdom and understanding have been given the human ability of voicing in human language and calling out on people.

Another example of personification from the Bible is:

*When Israel was a child I loved him  
and I called my son out of Egypt  
Hosea 11:1*

The content of the above makes it obvious that the nation of Israel is a man, and the reference of course is to the Exodus, not the individual of that name. Other examples include the following:

*“Destruction and Death say, ‘We have heard a report about it with our ears’”  
(Job 28:22).*

*“Does not wisdom cry out, and understanding lifts up her voice?” (Prov. 8:2).*

*“The field is wasted, the land mourns” (Joel 1:10).*

*“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things” (Matt. 6:34).*

Paradox

Baddick (2004:182: defines Paradox as “a statement or expression so surprisingly self contradictory as to provoke us into seeking another context in which it would be true”. It would seem illogical at the denotative level, but betrays its truth on a deep reflection as in Proverbs 30:25-27:

*“The ants are a people not strong, yet they  
prepare their meal in the summer”*

*“The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make their  
houses in the rocks”*

*“The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all  
of them in band”*

These animals have certain things in common: they are weak and have no king, yet they accomplish significantly. They are well organised, focused and hardworking. The ants gather food in summer and in winter, they do not go hungry. This is clearly an important strategy for general survival. But unfortunately, such focus and determination are not found among some human beings in organised societies, thereby leading to hunger and poverty. Conies are weak but they find the best places for their habitation. They climb high on the rocks, search and locate the best caves for their habitations where they are safe from their predators. The same goes for the locusts that though without a king, move in formations as soldiers do, and their attacks on farmers are as destructive as those of kings and their soldiers. So ants, conies and locusts accomplish great things which are not expected of weak human groups, not to talk of animals. This is surely a paradox. Other examples of paradox in the Bible include:

*“Except a man be born again, he cannot see  
the kingdom of God.” John 3; 3*

*“For whosoever will save his life will lose it  
and whoever will lose his life for my sake  
shall find it”. Mathew 16: 25*

Pun

This is a humorous use of words in such a way as to suggest different meaning and application. For example in Proverbs 11:6 the writer says:

*“The righteousness of the upright shall deliver  
them, but transgressors shall be taken in their  
own haughtiness.”*

Here there is a play on words based on similarity of sound but with divergent meaning. The word righteousness in the first line sounds like haughtiness in the second line with a different meaning altogether.

The same picture is portrayed in Proverbs 11:4:

*“Riches profit not the day of wrath, but  
Righteousness delivereth from death”*

Wrath in the first line sounds like death in the second line.

In Mathew 8:22, Jesus told his disciples to *“let the dead bury their dead”* Jesus also used this device in Mathew 16:18 when he said: *You are Peter (which means rock) and upon this rock I will build my church.* Peter’s play on words is pronounced in 1Peter3: 1 when he says: *“Likewise ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands, that if any obey not in word they also may without the word, be won by the conversation of the wives.”*

Simile

This is an explicit comparison of two unlike things using the words “as” or “like.” For example in Proverbs 25:14:

*“Whoso boasted himself of false gift is like  
Clouds and wind without rain*

To boast of false gift means here to pontificate over expertise in some profession, or to have some spiritual gift. If such a person is called to perform, he will be unable to do so. All this show of pride or boasting is compared to cloud or wind and his lack of performance in the absence of rain. Hence he is like cloud and wind without rain.

Another example of simile is in Proverbs 4:18:

*“For the path of the just is as a shining light  
that shineth more and more unto the perfect  
day.*



Here the path of the just is compared to the shining light using “as”. The shining light in this context represents the sun that begins to shine early in the morning and reaches its zenith in the day-the perfect day. This means that the lifestyle of the just will continue to shine as a good example to others until they emulate him.

Other random examples include the following: “So the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a hut in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city” (Isa. 1:8).”All we like sheep have gone astray” (Isa. 53:6).”For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap” (Mal. 3:2).”For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matt. 24:27).”Behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves” (Luke 10:3).

#### Metaphor

Gabel et al (2006: 23) have observed that metaphor is a device that is probably as old as language itself. The mechanism is simple: A word that is literal in the contexts within which it is usually found is taken out of those contexts and used in a context of some other kind. In other words, metaphor involves a direct or implied comparison of two unlike things. For instance: Proverbs 23:27 “For a whore is a deep ditch and a strange woman is a pit” The whore is directly compared to a deep ditch and a strange woman to a narrow pit without using the conventional mode of comparison. These two places are not good locations to find oneself and the youth is warned against them.

In the same way Proverbs 3:18 states: “She is a tree of life for them that lay hold upon her...”. This verse is comparing wisdom with the tree of life and instead of using “as” or “like” it gives wisdom the tribute of tree of life.

Other random examples from the entire Bible include: “The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer” (2 Sam. 22:3). “We are His people and the sheep of His

pasture” (Ps. 100:3).” “And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear my voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:16).” “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35).”I am the light of the world” (John 8:12).”I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture” (John 10:9).” “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11).” “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25).”I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).” “I am the true vine, and My father is the vinedresser” (John 15:1).

### Metonymy

This is a figure of speech that replaces the name of one thing, object or concept with the name of something else closely associated with it (Baddick 2004:154). For example: “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them” (Luke 16:29). This is a metonymy, because “Moses and the prophets” stand for the “writings of Moses and the prophets.” “There is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith” (Rom. 3:30). In this metonymy, “circumcision” and “uncircumcision” is another way of saying “Jew” and “Gentile.” “Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and the entire region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan” (Matt. 3:5-6). It was not the city of Jerusalem that moved, but the people who lived in it.

### Synecdoche

In a synecdoche, something is referred to indirectly either by naming only some part or constituent of it (as in “hand” for “manual labour”) or by naming some comprehensive entity of which it is a part (Baldick 2004:254). The selected texts are replete with this literary figure: Examples include Proverbs 1:16, 3:23, 15:31;

Ecclesiastes 7:5, 10:1, 28 and 12: 13-14. Other illustrations can be found in “All flesh had corrupted their way on the earth” (Gen. 6:12). “Flesh” is used for the entire people. “And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry’” (Luke 12:19). Soul is used for the whole person. “For God so loved the world” (John 3:16). “World” is used for the people in the world. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16). “All Scripture” is used for “every part of Scripture.”

In the Book of Proverbs, this literary expression is pronounced. In Proverbs 27:10, it states:

*“Hell and destruction are never full, so the eyes of man are never satisfied.”*

Here we see the eyes of man being used to represent man who is never satisfied. In an extended form, the eyes of man represent human beings in general.

Another example is found in Proverbs 10:31 which states the following:

*“The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom but the forward tongue shall be cut out.”*

Here the mouth is used to represent the just man who is a man of wisdom and his speech is full of wisdom. The tongue is used to represent the foolish man who talks foolishly. His referred to as the “forward tongue” and “shall be cut out”. It is clear however, that it is the foolish man who shall be cut but not his tongue.

#### Apostrophe

Baldick (2004: 170) defines apostrophe as a rhetorical figure in which the speaker addresses a dead or absent person as or an abstraction or inanimate object. Examples abound in the selected texts and indeed the Bible: Proverbs 7 and Ecclesiastes 12:1-7. Others include: “Then he cried out against the altar by the word of the Lord, and said, ‘O altar, altar!’” (1 Kings 13:2). “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth!” (Isa. 1:2).

“Open your doors, O Lebanon, that fire may devour your cedars. Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen” (Zech. 11:2). “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!” (Matt. 23:37).

### Euphemism

A euphemistic figure substitutes an inoffensive or agreeable expression for one that may offend or suggest something distasteful as in the following: Proverbs 30:20, 31:6 and Ecclesiastes 3:1-2, 12:1-7. Other examples are: “You shall go to your fathers in peace” (Gen. 15:15), a euphemism for death. “Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul would soon have settled in silence” (Ps. 94:17), a euphemism for death and burial. “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up” (John 11:11), a euphemism for death and resurrection”. “From which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place” (Acts 1:25), a euphemism for hell.

### Litotes

Litotes involves belittling or the use of a negative statement to affirm a truth. “After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom do you pursue? A dead dog? A flea?” (1 Sam. 24:14). “Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the balance; look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing” (Isa. 40:15). “And they brought the young man in alive, and they were not a little comforted” (Acts 20:12). “I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city” (Acts 21:39).

### Repetition

In this literary device, emphasis is gained by a number of techniques that repeat the same word, phrase, or sentence. Note for instance that since the proverbs in the Book of Proverbs were originally in oral form, it has various forms of repetition The ideas

are repeated in various chapters and verses. There are also lexical repetitions. A few examples of repetition of ideas in different verses are given below:

*“Take his garment that is surety for a stranger,  
and take a pledge for him for a strange woman (20:16)*

*“Take his garment that is surety for a stranger,  
and take a pledge of him for a strange woman (27:13).*

*“Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little  
folding of the hands in sleep (24:33)*

*“Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little  
folding of the hands in sleep (6;10)*

#### Climax

This figure lists a series of actions or qualities and repeats each one. Examples are numerous in the Bible: “What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten; what the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten; and what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten” (Joel 1:4; cf. 1:3) “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it” (John 1:4-5). “And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint” (Rom. 5:3-5). “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love” (2Pet.1:5, 7).

## Ellipsis

Ellipsis is the omission from a sentence of a word or words that would be required for complete clarity but which can usually be understood from the context. Examples include: Proverbs 16:10, 18:22, 19:14 and Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, 5:1-7. Other illustrations include “And Saul had a concubine, whose name [was] Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah. So [Ishbosheth] said to Abner, ‘Why have you gone in to my father’s concubine?’” (2 Sam. 3:7). The words “was” and “Ishbosheth” are italicized in the translation because they are not in the Hebrew text. They were added to complete the sense of the passage. “Uzzah put out [his hand] to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled” (2 Sam. 6:6). “His hand” must be supplied to complete the thought. “He will not always strive [with us], nor will He keep [His anger] forever” (Ps. 103:9). “For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be [in the likeness] of [His] resurrection” (Rom. 6:5).

## Zeugma

In this figure, a word modifies two or more words but strictly refers to only one of them. One or more words must be supplied to complete the thought.

*“I have surely visited you and [seen] what is done to you in Egypt”*  
(Exod. 3:16). *“Forbidding to marry, [and commanding] to abstain from foods”*  
(1 Tim. 4:3). *“Forbidding” only applies to marriage, and “commanding” must be supplied.*

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ANALYSIS OF TEXT

#### 5.0 Introduction

To be analysed in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are the literary features, figurative expressions, stylistic resources, rhetorical devices, imagery, recurrent patterns and other literary forms, strategies and genres. Attention is focused on the general literary characteristics and the use of figures of expression, thereby foregrounding the literary and stylistic content of biblical text.

#### 5.1 Framework for analysis

To analyse the data, the literary stylistic approach, from the perspective of formalism and new criticism, is used to arrive at the central thought of the selected texts. The figurative and stylistic language of the texts is examined, paying attention to the form and structure of the materials being analysed. The formalist literary theory stresses the autonomy of the work itself, and consequently, the relative unimportance of extra-literary considerations. New criticism, and to some extent, formalism, stresses close reading of the text and views the work of literature as an aesthetic object, independent of historical content. Fapohunda (2005:67) has argued that “a literary analysis of a text often involves a discussion of the literary tools and literary parameters in a literary piece”. Therefore, the literary analysis of the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes must address figures of expression, creative use of language, stylistic resources, rhetorical devices, imagery and other literary forms and strategies in the texts.

## 5.2 The poetry of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes

Hinson (1990) and Lawson (1992) agree that most of the proverbs in the Book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are written in poetic form. They are short sayings, expressing wisdom for everyday use, reflections and observation. The purpose of the book of Proverbs is stated in Proverbs 1:2-6

- 1) *The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel;*
- 2) *To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding;*
- 3) *To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity;*  
*{equity: Heb. equities}*
- 4) *To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.*  
*{discretion: or, advisement} Pr 9:4*
- 5) *A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: Pr 9:9*
- 6) *To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings. {the interpretation: or, an eloquent speech}*

A proverb is a concise, memorable statement of truth. Some of the proverbs are phrased as straightforward declarative “sayings,” while others are phrased as imperative exhortations. It is important to observe that several themes of contemporary spirituality are prominent in the proverbs, for instance, themes of discernment, choice making, and finding God in all things. Many areas of moral philosophy also given expression include issues on moral absolutes, rightness or wrongness of an action and the blessedness of life. Such issues, it should be noted are important in different cultures (cf. Clifford 1995).



Proverbs help us to become virtuous; they are handy in approaching suffering and coming out of it. The lessons derived help the reader to accept people with their differences, and are instructive in addressing family issues. While Coker (2009: 24) believes that proverbs serve as charter of social and ethical norms, Mphande (2007) holds the view that proverbs touch on all conditions of life such as wealth and poverty, health and sickness, joy and sorrow. There are proverbs which speak about, and to, all manner of people: kings and citizens, nobles and slaves, women and men, children and adults, and so on. And even though differences abound across context, cultures and ages, for instance, between an agricultural versus an industrial economy, an essentially oral versus a literate society, a family-centred view of the human person versus a more individualistic viewpoint, the relevance of the Book of Proverbs remains timeless.

Additionally, the book of Proverbs is a creative compendium. The implication of this is the need to be conscious of the dynamics of interpretation. It is important to observe that parallelism, which is the verse form of this poetic blend, is a significant part of the book of Proverbs. It consists of two-line units that require the second line to complete the thought of the first, by way of repetition, contrast, or comparison. Other techniques include analogy: “the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life,” (Proverbs 11:30), the brief portrait, such as the portrait of the drunkard (in Proverbs 23:29-35), and numerical listings, such as the list of four mysterious things (in Proverbs 30:18-19). Finkbeiner (1995:1) has observed that the thematic arrangement and structuring of Proverbs 28 and 29 have been an area of thematic dispute. While some propose that the thematic arrangements take place around the royal court setting, others disagree (cf. Bruce 1985:238). He however submits that Proverbs 28 and 29 are addressed to kingly prospects within the court setting and that these

chapters are skillfully arranged around themes pertinent to royalty. What is crucial about Finkbeiner's contribution is the situation of his discourse within the general poetic spectrum of the entire book of Proverbs. He also observes that the majority of the parallelisms used in the passage in focus are complementary. Of the parallelism that is complementary, 32 verses are antithetical while four are comparative. The use of antithetical parallelism is in distinct contrast to the "comparisons" and "single sentences" of chapters 26 and 27 (cf. Crawford 1954: x).

### **5.3 Major stylistic resources in the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes**

Stylistics, as Crystal (1999:323) states, is the study of any situationally distinctive use of language, and of choice made by individuals, and social groups in their usage in all linguistic domains. It would be of great benefit if our awareness and sensitivities are awakened to the literary, aesthetics, creative and rhetorical uses of language in the work. In this analysis therefore, the main focus will be on issues of text interpretation. In a significant sense, a stylistic interrogation or analysis is a way in which a work is interpreted or understood. The role of the reader-analyst in contemporary criticism is well drawn. The reader/critic/text relationship as a process of stylistic analysis often regarded as "affective" stylistics stresses the place of reading as an experiential process. Abram's (1980: 50) description of the activity of reading a text is illuminating. He explains that:

A literary work is converted into an activity on the stage of the reader's mind and what in standard critical analysis had been features of the work itself—including plot character, style and structure are described as an evolving temporal process...

The meanings of a text are the “production” or “creation” of the individual reader (critic).

A stylistic consciousness and appreciation of the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes will naturally bring to light the depth of creativity present in them. C.M. Bowra (1962:20) has observed that when words are made to conform to a particular tone or pattern, they provide one of the most elemental forms of poetry known to us; they are reduced to a deliberate order made to fulfil a function quite different from that of common talk. Many expressions in the selected texts possess registers and stylistic resources which mark them out from ordinary talk. The language of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes has strong poetic qualities manifested in the economy and patterning of words. In analyzing the books therefore, it is necessary to first recognize the importance of appropriate choice of words and the further choice of the ways of arranging words.

### 5.3.1 Examples of some stylistic features in the selected Books

#### Repetition

A prominent stylistic feature of the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes is repetition. Repetition, as Olatunji (1984) points out, can be lexico-structural, lexical or semantic. Lexico-structural repetition is either full or partial. Full repetition involves the repetition of a sentence structure, as well as all the lexical items occurring in it, as in:

*Vanity of vanities....*

*Vanity of vanities*

*Eccle. 1:1*

Partial lexico- structural repetition involves a repetition of the structure with a variation of one or more lexical items. It is this type of repetition, or in another sense, parallel structure, that involves what Bamgbose (1982:82) calls “lexical matching”.

As can be observed from the illustrations given above, full repetition is used to emphasize and intensify the theme of the repeated sentences. Through reiteration, the reader is able to pay attention to the content of the sentences repeated, or the target of the sentences is made conscious of the desire of the persona or the poet.

### Parallelism

This is a device in which a part or a whole statement is balanced against the other. There is a musical and poetic effect to this kind of balancing. This intent for equilibrium reveals a sort of wholeness in the process of composition. It shows, as Okpewho (1990, 30) puts it, a level of architectural skill in the art of composition. Bamgbose (1969) defines parallelism as involving a juxtaposition of sentences having a similar structure, a matching of at least two lexical items, a comparison between the juxtaposed sentences, and a central idea expressed through a complementary statement in the sentence. While this conceptual interpretation can be clearly and easily appreciated within the framework of semantic parallelism, the factors of comparison and juxtaposition also indicate possibility of cross parallelism. It is possible to divide, at least broadly, parallelism into two: namely cross parallelism and semantic parallelism.

### Cross Parallelism

Cross parallelism is basically a repetitive device anchored on structuralism. Ideas are repeated in a parallel structure as a way of emphasizing something. While the words are shifted in permutation, the semantic value of the statement remains the same as in:

*Length of days is in her right hand;  
and in her left hand riches and honour.*

Prov. 3:16

This is a kind of cross parallelism where ideas are repeated in a parallel structure as a way of emphasizing the virtues of wisdom. Though the words are

shifted in permutation, the semantic value of the statement remains the same. The message here is that wisdom offers long life as well as wealth and honour.

### Synonymous Parallelism

*When a wicked man dieth, his expectation shall perish  
And the hope of the unjust men perisheth* Prov. 11:7

In this form of parallelism, the thought of the first line is repeated in different words in the next line(s). In other words, while the wicked person takes the same denotational implication with that of the unjust, a void expectation is synonymous with a dashed hope.

*In the way of righteousness is life  
And in the pathway thereof there is no death* Prov. 12:28

The expression that is repeated in the second line is essentially the thought in the first line. In other words, life is synonymous with absence of death.

*That which is crooked cannot be made straight  
And that which is wanting cannot be numbered* Eccl. 1:15

What we have in the second line is fundamentally the same thought expressed in the first line. Just as you cannot straighten the crooked, so also you cannot number the wanting

*When goods increase,  
they increase that eat them.* Eccl. 5:11

The two phrases/lines have the same grammatical format, forming a pattern. The second phrase/line is to balance the thought of the first phrase/line with the repetitive use of the word “increase”. Apart from the emphasis on increase, parallelism here enhances the musicality of the statement.

*That which is crooked cannot be made straight  
And that which is wanting cannot be numbered* Eccl. 1:15

### Antithetic Parallelism

*A soft answer turns away wrath,  
But a harsh word stirs up anger* Prov. 15:1.

In this case, the thought of the first line is sharply contrasted in the next line(s). Put another way, the opposite of a soft answer is a harsh word.

*A wise son maketh a glad father  
But a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother* Prov. 10:1

Here the wisdom of one son is sharply contrasted with the foolishness of another.

*The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright  
But the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness* Prov. 15:2

In this example, the tongue of the wise is placed in opposite direction to the mouth of fools.

*A wholesome tongue is a tree of life  
But perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit* Prov. 15:4

In other words, a wholesome tongue and that of a perverse woman are at variance with each other.

### Synthetic Parallelism

*Keep thine heart with all diligence  
For out of it are the issues of life* Prov. 4:23

Here, the thought of the first line is added to or developed in the next line. In the second line, the poetic persona stresses that the issues of life emanate from the heart, hence the crucial need to guard it jealously.

### Introverted Parallelism

*My son if thine heart be wise  
My heart shall rejoice, even mine  
Yea, my reins shall rejoice  
When thy lips speak right things* Prov. 23:15-16

This is an example of parallelism that balances sets of lines. For example, the first and fourth lines on the one hand, and the other, the second and third lines.

### Emblematic Parallelism

*As cold water to a weary soul,  
So is good news from a far country* Prov. 25:25

Here, the first line elevates the literal statement in the second line by the use of a figurative image. The image of cold water to thirsty person figuratively adds weight to the idea of good news coming from a far country.

*As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout  
So is a fair woman without discretion* Prov. 11:22.

The figurative image of a jewel of gold in a swine's snout is used to amplify the sense or meaning conveyed in the second line.

### Comparative Parallelism

*A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in picture of silver.  
As an earring of gold and an ornament of fire gold  
So is a wise reprove upon an obedient ear.* Prov. 25:11-12.

Here, the second line and the third reinforce the first through comparison.

## 5.4 Creative and rhetorical use of language in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes

Oyeleye (2004:176) has observed that literary critics often distinguish between the various ways in which words can be manipulated to produce imaginative and creative effects. The most common of these are called figures of expression. The creative use of language in literature is usually analysed on the basis of, among other things, the figures of speech which involve, as Holman (1976:224) puts it, "the various uses of language which depart from customary order or significance in order to achieve special effects or meanings". Let us now analyse the two selected books of the Bible in the light of the above proposition.

### 5.4.1 The Book of Proverbs

#### Personification

*Wisdom crieth without;  
she uttereth her voice in the streets:* Prov. 1:20

Voicing, a human characteristic feature, is here bestowed on wisdom, an abstract noun, as well as the third person pronoun/She. By attributing to it human qualities such as crying and voicing, the persona shows how fundamental wisdom is to human beings. And the bestowing of the feminine role on wisdom is to foreground the place of productivity in the phenomenon of wisdom.

#### Simile

*She is like a merchant's ships...* Prov. 31:14

Here, a virtuous woman is compared to commercial ships that are involved in importing and exporting activities. This statement shows how industrious a good wife can be. Her readiness to go to any length in caring and fending for her family is a function of her virtue and sacrificial lifestyle.

#### Metaphor

*The name of the Lord is a strong tower...* Prov. 18:10

In this illustration, God's name is being creatively compared to a bulwark. This is to stress the protection that is believed to be facilitated by God's name. The function of this metaphor here is to elicit or provoke trust and confidence in God.

*The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life* Prov. 11:30

The function of this metaphor is to articulate the timeless value that the righteous exhibits. In other words, the characteristics of the God-fearing individual are evergreen.

*The tongue of the wise is health* Prov. 12:18



This is a creative way of comparing wise sayings with medication. Through this figurative expression, the persona succeeds in heightening the centrality of wise statements to a healthy lifestyle.

#### Catachresis

*He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool  
But whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered* Prov. 28:26

This expression is related to metaphor but of a more direct kind. A fool is one who is self indulgent and overrates himself. The wise one is sure of safety.

#### Apostrophe

*My son, forget not my law...* Prov. 3:1

The poetic persona here addresses his son, who is not present, as if he is available at the scene. This is to show how the poet longs for the presence of his son

*Rejoice, o young man, in thy youth...* Prov. 11:9

The poet addresses a young man as if present in the place of the action. Here, the poetic persona utters this statement by reminiscing on youthful days and at the same time cautioning the young man on what lies ahead. The function of the apostrophe in this context is to advise the youth on purposeful lifestyle.

#### Paradox

*There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is  
that withholdeth than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.* Pro. 11:24

These two statements seem impossible or unlikely but with a second and careful look, it is probably true. The idea here is that by being generous (scattering), you can become rich (increase); while being greedy (withholding) can make one poor (poverty).

*Answer not a fool according to his folly  
Lest thou also be like unto him  
Answer a fool according to his folly  
Lest he be wise in his own conceit* Prov: 26 4-5

At first this statement appears contradictory, but it is not. It is a dilemma of some sort though. What the poet is saying is that when it comes to answering fools, one may not win because they are fools and there is no cure for foolishness. So it is unwise to argue with a fool at his own level. But it is good sometimes to refute the fool lest his foolishness appears to be endorsed.

### Hyperbole

*For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb,  
and her mouth is smoother than oil.* Prov. 5:3

Here, an immoral woman is said to possess sweet words that easily persuade. Her deceitful utterances are eloquent, aimed at enticing man. The poet's conscious exaggeration of comparing her lips with a honeycomb and her mouth with oil is to heighten the effect of the message. It is however, not meant to be taken literally.

*A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city* Prov.18:19

In order to paint a graphic picture of the difficulty likely to be encountered in reconciling with a relation or a close one, the persona compares it to overpowering a strong city. This is a clear case of exaggeration. And the effect is a striking one.

### Metonymy

*She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace:  
a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.* Pro. 4:9

Ornament and crown are indicative of royalty and kingship. The poetic persona believes that wisdom can attract glory, glamour and kingship. The function of "ornament" and "crown" is to give a sense of royalty, which the words represent, to the phenomenon of wisdom.

*A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband* Prov. 12:4

In other words, a virtuous woman gives glory and dignity to her husband.

#### Rhetorical Question

*And why wilt thou, my son be ravished  
With a strange woman  
And embrace the bosom of a stranger?* Prov. 5:20

Here the poet is stressing the need for marital fidelity. The questions are intended to bring to the fore the nothingness of sexual rascality. They are not, strictly speaking, answerable posers.

*Doth not wisdom cry?  
And understanding put forth her voice?* Prov.8:1

This figurative expression is really instructive. The poetic persona is stressing the undeniable influence and relevance of wisdom and understanding. The poet does not need an answer. He is actually saying that no one can sincerely ignore the significant impact of these two qualities.

*Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous;  
But who is able to stand before envy?* Pro. 27:4

This is an apparently leading question in which the poetic persona subtly presents his poser as if expecting to get the anticipated response. The message here is simple: if wrath is cruel and anger is outrageous, then envy would be most deadly. Through a persuasive way, the poetic persona is able to achieve his purpose. The function of this figurative expression is to emphasize the dire implications of envy in comparison to wrath and anger.

Who can find a virtuous woman? Prov. 31:10

The persona in this verse tries to evoke a feeling of desire for something so rare and precious. It does not require an answer.

*Who hath ascended up into heaven or descended?  
Who hath gathered the wind in his hand?  
Who hath bound the waters in a garment?  
Who hath established all the ends of the earth?*

*What is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?*

Prov. 30:4

Here, the poetic persona asked five different questions, one after the other, without waiting for the first to be answered before asking the next. It should be noted that all the questions have the same answer - God. All these questions arise basically for emphasis. The function is to establish the awesomeness, greatness, might and eternal supremacy of the Godhead; the creator of the ends of the earth.

Euphemism

*Drink waters out of thine own cisterns  
And running waters out of thine own well.* Prov. 5; 15

The poetic persona tries to soften the hard reality of the truth. Instead of being categorical on issues of infidelity, he deliberately expresses it in a mild and cloudy way. The function of this literary tool is to encourage faithfulness; after all, harsh words in most cases never yield the desired fruits.

Irony

*Stolen waters are sweet,  
and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.* Prov. 9:17

This is humorous; a straightforward statement is undermined by its context, which gives it a somewhat complex significance. How can stolen waters be sweet and what pleasantness can be derived from bread eaten in secret? This is a verbal irony in which the poetic persona is saying the opposite of what he actually means. What is really being expressed is that marital unfaithfulness may look harmless and safe at the initial stage, but the ultimate implications are deadly. A careful reflection would indicate what the poet actually intends to communicate. Irony here functions as a restoring and a corrective device.

## Pun

*When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid:  
yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet.* Prov. 3:24

There is a play on the words “lie” and “sleep”. The repetitive use of the word “lie” gives a certain degree of musical effect to the statement. What the poetic persona is actually saying is that there is sweetness and safety in sleeping. The function of this pun, apart from its musical effect, is that it gives a certain degree of emphasis on the phenomenon of sleep.

## Anaphora

*Who hath ascended up into heaven or descended?  
Who hath gathered the wind in his hand?  
Who hath bound the waters in a garment?  
Who hath established all the ends of the earth?...* Prov. 30:4

There is a repetitive use of the same words at the beginning of each line. The anaphoric element “who hath” at the beginning of each line of the verse has different implications. Anaphora here functions as a musical rhetorical device in appreciation of the personality of God.

## Alliteration

*Whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved...* Prov. 28:18

The repetitive use of the consonant sound /w/ at the beginning of two words on the same line is essentially for rhythmic effect.

## Riddle Sonnet

*Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contention?  
Who hath babbling? Who hath wounds without cause?  
Who hath redness of eyes?* Prov. 23: 29

*They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine* Prov. 23:30

*Look not thou upon the wine when it is red  
When it giveth its colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright* Prov. 23: 31

*At the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder* Prov. 23:32

*Thine eyes shall behold strange women and thine heart  
Shall utter perverse things* Prov. 23: 33

*Thou shall be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea  
Or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast* Prov. 23: 34

The above riddle is truly indicative of a puzzling question. Verse 29 poses the question; verse 30 gives the answer, verse 31 offers advice and verses 32-34 state the symptoms of the malady.

#### Sarcasm

*As a dog returneth to his own vomit  
So a fool returneth to his folly* Prov. 26:11

This is a form of irony that is deliberately intended to mock or ridicule a fool.

#### Tautology

*Unto you, O men; I call and my  
voice is to the sons of man*

This is a clear example of tautology. It is an obvious repetition of the same idea in a slightly different phrase. Calling out to all men is more or less the same with being heard by sons of man. Besides, sons of man actually refer to men.

### 5.4.2 The Book of Ecclesiastes

#### Personification

*The sun also riseth, and the sun goeth down,  
and hasteth to his place where he arose.* Eccl. 1:5

“The sun” here depicts human quality of movement – rising, going and running. The third person pronoun “he/his” is an anaphoric reference to the sun. In other words, the ascribing of the masculine role to the sun is to heighten the quality of the message and

present the sun as male with the potential to dominate. The hastening of the sun back to where it began is to give emotional strength to the endless circle of life struggles.

#### Simile

*The words of the wise are as goads  
and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies...* Eccl. 12:11

The sayings of the wise are in this context juxtaposed with the sticks used by the shepherds in guiding and directing flock. Also portrayed is the firmness exerted in driving nails into wood. Both items mentioned; (goads and nails), are corrective instruments to effecting obedience and adherence to instructions. In other words, there is the need to adhere to the words of wisdom, no matter the inconvenience.

#### Metaphor

*For wisdom is a defense, and money is a defense...* Eccl. 7:12

Wisdom and money are compared with defence. Defence is synonymous with protection, and this is what wisdom and money can offer. Here, the poetic persona changes the applications of words without changing the meaning; thus the statement is a departure from the norm.

#### Litotes or Meiosis

*Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing.* Eccl. 8:5

Instead of affirming directly that the obedience to law and order will protect the doer, the poetic persona chooses to use litotes in the expression by stating the negative, in reverse order, that the lack of protection and punishment are the evils of disobedience to the law. Therefore, to encourage obedience, the gravity of the offence is hereby portrayed.

#### Irony

*I have seen servants upon horses  
and princes walking as servants upon the earth.* Eccl. 10:7

Here, reality is recognised as being different from its masking appearance. In a normal situation, it is expected that the princes should be on horses' backs while the servants walk; but here, the reverse is the case. There seems to be a form of role reconstruction or a reversal of fortune. This particular irony is a situational one, showing a change in the situations and of the princes and servants.

#### Paradox

*Sorrow is better than laughter...* Eccl. 7:3

Everyone naturally prefers and desires laughter to sorrow. It is therefore absurd to call for sorrow instead of laughter. But then, there is a fundamental truth in this seemingly irreconcilable statement. In moments of sorrow, there is the tendency for solemn reflection. Such a stoic and philosophical approach carries a lot of strength than moments of bogus merriment. The idea here is to show the advantage(s) in clearly disadvantaged situations.

#### Hyperbole

*And I find more bitter than death the woman,  
whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands.* Eccl. 7:26

While death is generally acknowledged to be the most bitter experience that mankind can encounter, the poetic persona seems to be saying that a bad woman is worse than it. The mindset of an evil woman cannot be ascertained, nor can her evil devices be placed in proper contexts. This statement possesses an emotional truth which is amplified by the use of conscious exaggeration for effect.

#### Antithesis

*Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless,  
the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.*

Eccl. 9:16



The first statement here contrasts with the second. The first lauds wisdom, while the second downplays it. Here, wisdom is given an edge over strength; however, it (wisdom) becomes useless and unappreciated when possessed by the wrong person.

#### Alliteration

*...that God might manifest them...* Eccl. 3:18

The repetitive use of the bilabial sound /m/ at the beginning of two words next to each other on the same line in this statement is essentially to place emphasis on the sound, and rhythm. It is also significant in the portrayal of the mood and meaning of the sentence.

#### Pun

*And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him;  
and a three fold cord is not quickly broken.* Eccl. 4:12

Humour is achieved here with emphasis on “one”, “two” and “three”. The writer contrives an ambiguity by playing on these words. From the statement, if one prevails against an opponent, why the need for two or three? On the other hand, the poetic persona is simply saying that if “one” loses against an opposition, “two” may confront the opposition and with “three” there will definitely be an outright success.

#### Anaphora

*A time to be born, and a time to die  
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted  
A time to kill, and a time to heal  
a time to break down, and a time to build up.* Eccl. 3:2-3

The repetitive use of the phrase “a time to” at the beginning of successive lines of the statement is rhythmical and it helps in relaxing the tense mood of the message. The emphasis is on appreciating the meaningful use of time.

#### Symbolism

*Again, if two lie together, then they have heat:  
but how can one be warm alone?* Eccl. 4:11

The symbolic message conveyed in this statement is that of the union of a male and a female; stressing the advantage of being married and the disadvantage of remaining single. Without the application of diagrams, the poetic persona conveys an instructive message using symbolic expressions. The use of symbolism here advances the presentation of a subtly pornographic message in an implicit way.

### Euphemism

*Then shall dust return to the earth as it was:  
and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.* Ecccl. 12:7

To avoid bluntness, the writer evades a direct statement on death and substitutes it with an indirect phrase. The phrases “dust to earth” and “spirit to God” allude to death. In this way, the harshness and the shock that normally go with the reality of permanent loss are lessened. The purpose of this statement is to show the uselessness of most youthful desires.

### Ellipsis

*A wise man's heart is at his right hand;  
but a fool's heart at his left.* Ecccl. 10:2

The missing word in this statement is “hand”. A close scrutiny of this expression would reveal that there is an indirect reference to the fool’s heart at his left hand, despite the omission of the word “hand”. The poetic persona decides to stop where he did and allows the reader to fill in the missing word. Apart from saving time and space, ellipsis facilitates the reader’s understanding of the message, through the ability to supply the missing word.

### Aphorism

*A good name is better than precious ointment* Eccle.7:1

*Wisdom is better than strength* Eccle.9:16

The above illustrations are indicative of much wisdom condensed in few poetic words.

#### Epitrope

*Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.*

Eccle 11:9

Here the poetic persona tasks the ability of the reader to supply the meaning of the expression being conveyed. And as characteristic of this figurative expression, it is biting in its irony, rather than flattering in its deference. There is also a subtle admission of what is wrong in order to correct it.

#### Tautology

*He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver  
Nor he that loveth abundance with increase.* Eccl. 5:10

*A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be  
And what shall be after him, who can tell him?* Eccl. 10:14

These are clear cases of tautological expressions aimed at stressing the importance of the words repeated. The first illustration stresses the place of silver, while the second emphasizes man and his limitation in futuristic pronouncements.

#### Hypophora

*For what hath man for all his labour and of the vexation of his heart,  
wherein, he hath laboured under the sun? For all his days (are) sorrows, and  
his travail, grief: yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night.  
This also is vanity.* Eccl. 2:22-23

In this example, one or more questions are raised at the outset of the sentence and the poet proceeds to provide answers to them.

#### Sonnet

*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days  
come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no  
pleasure in them;*

*While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened,  
nor the clouds return after the rain:*

*In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong  
men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are  
few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, {the  
grinders...: or, the grinders fail, because they grind little}*

*And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the  
grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all  
the daughters of musick shall be brought low;*

*Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be  
in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper  
shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long  
home, and the mourners go about the streets:*

*Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the  
pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.*

*Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall  
return unto God who gave it. Eccle. 12:1-7*

Even though a sonnet is conventionally a poem of fourteen lines classified as being either Italian or Shakespearean, another significant explanation of a sonnet is that of a short poem. This latter definition describes appropriately the sonnet in this context.

#### Dramatic Monologue in Ecclesiastes

*And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom  
concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore  
travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised  
therewith.*

*14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and,  
behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit*

*15 That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that  
which is wanting cannot be numbered.*

*16 I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come  
to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that  
have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience  
of wisdom and knowledge.*

*17 And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.*

*18 For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.* Eccl. 1:12-2:26

This is essentially a poem written as a soliloquy or a story performed by one person.

Here, the preacher is speaking, but to no audience in particular.

## 5.5 Allegory in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes

*Now there was found in it a poor wise man,  
And he by his wisdom delivered the city;  
Yet no man remembered that same poor man.*

Eccl. 9:15

This text, characteristic of allegories, is essentially a narrative in which the agent and actions are contrived, not only to make sense of them, but also to signify secondary meanings and implications. The persona in this creative piece can be interpreted in several allegorical ways. From the standpoint of historical allegory, the verse can be situated within the context of Israel in Egypt, while from the viewpoint of ethical allegory it is possible to analyse it in the light of the relationship between the good and the evil inclinations in man. It is also an allegory of Christ, who, though put on the garb of poverty for the sake of mankind, was not appreciated by the people He suffered for.

*Better is little with the fear of the Lord  
than great treasure and trouble therewith.  
Better is dinner of herbs where love is  
than a stalled ox and hatred therewith....  
The way of the slothful man is as an hedge of  
thorns but the way of the righteous is made plain.....  
Folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom but  
a man of understanding walketh uprightly*

Prov.15:16, 17, 19, 21.

The principal technique of allegory is personification, whereby abstract qualities are given human shape. It is possible for an allegory to be conceived as a metaphor that is

extended into a structured system. In this allegorical text, there is a continuous parallel between two (or more) levels of meaning in a story so that its persons and events correspond to their equivalents in a system of ideas or a chain of events external to the tale.

## 5.6 Major themes in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes

### 5.6.1 The family

The Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes address issues of relationship in the family and the dynamic interaction between the various stakeholders. Family-related matters such as the one between the husband and the wife are numerous in the texts. A few of such include Proverbs 6:32; 11:16; 12:4, Eccl. 3:18-21. Among them, Proverbs 18:22 seems to be very striking:

*“Whosoever findeth a wife findeth a good thing and obtaineth favour of the Lord.”*

This is an exhortation and encouragement to young men to marry. The institution of marriage and God’s favour are stressed, thereby making relationship very desirable. Proverbs 14:1 is also profound in its articulation of the mystery of the family union between the husband and wife. According to the poetic persona:

*“Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.”*

This is a call to endurance in the marital home whatever the condition. It shows that it is the wife’s endurance that will keep the home going. The “Book of Proverbs” admonishes women to be virtuous for “A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones” (Proverbs 12:4).

Proverbs 6:32 however cautions the husband on the issue of adultery “But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding; he that doeth it

destroyeth his own *soul*.” Also instructive on the issue of marital fidelity is Proverbs 5:15-17. “*Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. Let thine fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets. Let them only be thine own and not strangers with thee.*” These verses do not mean real water. They are metaphoric expressions on the phenomenon of sex and sexual discipline. . In other words, why share your love with others apart from your wife? Why spill the waters of your spring on the streets, having sex with just anyone? You should reserve it for yourselves. The book advises on sexual relationship between husband and wife. Proverbs 5: 19-20 advises: “Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breast satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love. And why wilt thou, my son be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger?” Though the “Book of Proverbs” is replete with warnings against adultery and all forms of illicit sex; with call to beware of the strange woman (Proverbs 7:4-5) it seems the practice was common in Hebrew society since Solomon, the supposed author of the majority of the proverbs in the “Book of Proverbs” was the greatest known culprit.

In order to help husbands have good understanding of their wives, some proverbs with general information about the nature of women, especially their propensity to quarrel, are available. These include Proverbs 11:22; 19:13; 21:9; 25:24. The relationship between parents and children, which comes under the broad social theme are well represented in the following verses: Proverbs 10:1; 15:20; 17:25; 19:26; 20:20; 23:24; 17:24; 19:13; 28:7 and Eccl. 4:12, 5:14.. The youths are encouraged to lead a good life so as to bring joy to their families as contrary behaviour will ultimately bring shame. According to Proverbs 23:24, “The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice and he that begetteth a wise child shall have a joy of

him.” But “A foolish son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her that bare him.” As a warning to children on their relationship with their parents Proverbs 20:20 comes out strong with a punishment. “Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness.” Parents are also exhorted not to spear the rod in the upbringing of their young ones.

The symbiotic relationship and interdependence between the elderly and the young ones are given expression in different ways in Proverbs 20:29; 17:6; 20:7; 13:22, Eccl. 11:7-10, 12:1. Specifically, in Proverbs 20:29, there is a symbiotic relationship between the elderly and the youths for “The glory of young men is their strength and the beauty of old men is the grey head.” This implies that while the old men depend on the youths for their strength, the young men equally rely on the elderly for good advice and leadership. Also the elderly should show good examples and leave good inheritance for the youths, for “the just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him.” This thematic point advances generational responsibility on the part of the youths as well as the elderly.

Central to this theme is the regulation of the relationship between siblings. Warning against quarrels between siblings, Proverbs 18:19 contends that “A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a strong castle.” Since it is difficult to make peace between siblings, it is better not to start a conflict. Also the value of siblings relationship is shown in Proverbs 17:17 where it is stated that “A friend loveth at all times but a brother is born for adversity.” This shows that with a good brother, one can expect help in difficult times. Generally within the family the Proverbs encourage love among its members because “Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins” (10:12).



Another type of family relationship which some proverbs try to regulate is the one between master and servant. Servants are given encouragement to serve their masters diligently for such attracts reward. Hence Proverbs 27:18 says, “Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured.” And “A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame, and shall have apart of the inheritance among the brethren” (Proverbs 17:2). Likewise the master is encouraged to treat his servant as a son since “He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child shall have him become his son at the length.

### **5.6.2 The state, law and justice**

Central to the state is the relationship between the king and the people. This biblical text addresses the nature of kingship and the power of the king. These are documented in Proverbs 25:2, 3; 16:15; 19:12; 20:26. Expressing the unlimited powers of the king, Proverbs 16:15 declares, “In the light of the king’s countenance is life; and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain.” In the same vein Proverbs 16:14 declares that “the wrath of a king is as messengers of death: but a wise man will pacify it.” The king is advised to have good counsellors for “Where no counsel is, the people fall but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.” This means that if many good people put their heads together they will help the king to solve the problems of the nation. Though the king might have absolute power and can dispense favour as he likes, Proverbs 16:12 warns that “It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness.” This means that if a king is wicked, he will surely be removed by the people. This has happened recently in Tunisia and Egypt where the people’s revolution led to the tumbling of regimes. So this warning has timeless significance to the rulers. However in the end God directs

the affairs of nations and their kings for “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will” (Proverbs 21:1). The king is also encouraged to get rid of evil men for “A wise king scattereth the wicked, and brings the wheel over them.” In Nigeria such evil men as kidnappers and embezzlers of public funds should be brought before the law and convicted.

In the relationship between the king and his subjects, proverbs also play significant roles. Some of the proverbs related to the relationship between the king and his subject are found in Proverbs 25:4, 5; 29:12; 14:35, 20:2, 16:13, 14; and 22:11. Since a lot of intrigues in the kings courts always lead to the overthrow of kings, Proverbs 25: 4-5 warn, “Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the refiner. Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness”. For subjects who like to sing praises of kings and go to their courts seeking attention and favours, Proverbs 25: 6-7 counsel as follows: “Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men: For better it is that it be said unto thee, come up hither; then that thou shouldst be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen”. This means that to be sent away or downgraded by the king is a public disgrace which people should guard against. To encourage service to the nation and king Proverbs 14:35 states that: “The king’s favour is towards a wise servant: but his wrath is against him that causeth shame.” The “Book of Proverbs” also admonishes the king to be just especially to the poor for “The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established forever” (Proverbs 29:14). This shows that there is a divine reward for kings who give justice especially to the poor.

Furthermore the kings are warned of the evils of bribery and corruption which could destroy a country because “The king by judgment establishes the land: but he

that receiveth gifts overthroweth it” (Proverbs 29:4). The king is also thought about warn the kings about the expected behaviour of men and how a king should react; they teach the princes and nobles princely behaviours such as being fair and not telling lies (Proverbs 17:7). Proverbs teach the king about the nature of war and when and how to make war (Proverbs 24:6; 21:22, 31; 20:18). Nevertheless, the king is warned that even though he is well prepared for war to protect his kingdom, safety is only assured by God for “The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety is the Lord” (Proverbs 21:32).

The “Book of Proverbs” also encourages the bureaucrats and institutional administrators to be fair to the people and to “Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do so” (3:27). If rulers and workers were able to keep to these rules as suggested in the “Book of Proverbs”, then there would be peace, tranquility, justice and development.

On law, God is acknowledged as the law giver and the best judge (Proverbs 21:30; 16:10; 21:1; 29:6, Eccl. 12:14). Since kings were taught to possess divine rights, the proverbs in the “Book of Proverbs” try to explain to them the divine laws which accompany their throne. According to Proverbs 20:28, “Mercy and truth preserve the king: and his throne is upholden by mercy.” Also according to Proverbs 16:12 “It is abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness.” Another aspect of the theme of justice is that which concerns the king as a judge. A king who is a good judge would search for evidence for “It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of the king to search out the matter.” Such a king would easily identify those giving false witnesses. According to Proverbs 20:8, “A king seateth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes.”

Apart from the king, the judges are given good advice against judging falsely because “He that justifieth the wicked and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord.” Ecclesiastes 8:13 goes further to say that “it shall not be well with the wicked neither shall he prolong his days which are as a shadow because he feareth not the Lord”. The judges are warned against pervasion of justice, partiality and bribery and corruption (Proverbs: 24:24; 28:21; 18:5; 17:23; Eccl. 8:11). On the dangers of injustice or delayed justice, Ecclesiastes puts it this way: “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil”(8:11). The “Book of Proverbs” discusses the consequences of the rule of law on citizenship in Proverbs 29:2 which says that “when the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.” Indeed, the “Book of Proverbs” gives insight into the greatness of a nation which it says depends on righteousness i.e. equality before the law, justice to all, no bribery and corruption, dedication to service for according to Proverbs 14:34 “Righteousness exalts a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.” Indeed the case of Nigeria, where there seems to be no rule of law, no dedication to service, no justice, where bribery and corruption reign supreme, has shown that even with riches freely endowed by God, a nation without righteousness is indeed a reproach and will wallow in poverty until the rulers and the people change their ways.

Still on matters of law and justice, the “Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes” give practical counsel against false witnessing. According Proverbs 21:28, “A false witness shall perish: but the man that heareth speaketh constantly. Ecclesiastes 5:6 says “Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin: neither say thou before an angel that it was an error, wherefore should God be angry at thy voice and destroy the works of thy hands? There is also warning against surety ship (Proverbs 6:1-5; 11:15;

17:18; 22:26). Since people have the propensity to default on their financial responsibilities, this is a very sensible advice for according to Proverbs 11:15, “He that surety for a stranger shall smart for it: and he that hateth surety ship is sure.”

There is counsel on particular laws such as weight and measures (28:1; 20:10; 16:11). Cautioning on usury and unjust gain, the “Book of Proverbs” has this to say: “He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor” (28:8). This means that those who exploit others will lose their wealth and so they should desist from it. There are several warnings against the oppression of the poor (29:13; 14:31; 17:5). Particularly Proverbs 17:5 warns that “Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker: and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished.” There is a reward for those who help the poor as according to Proverbs 19:17 “He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord: and that which he hath given will he pay him again.”

To everyone on the point of law, the “Book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes” persuade: “He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his soul; but he that despiseth his ways shall die.” This means that as long as citizens keep to the laws of the land, they will have no problems; they will not come into conflict with the law and will have no need to go to prison or be condemned to death. In Ecclesiastes 11:9, the poet says : “ Rejoice O young man in thy youth and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the days of thine heart and in the sight of thine eyes but know thou that for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment”. This means that in all situations, there is the need to be conscious of the eventual judgment of God.

### 5.6.3 Economy

Economic issues include wealth, human desire for wealth, acquisition of wealth and how to use wealth in a way pleasing to God. The books also address labour, diligence, slothfulness and evils of laziness. Wealth is seen as a product of wisdom (Prov.8:18) and righteousness (Prov. 15:6; 11:28.). It is also a product of diligence (Prov. 10:4; 12:24; 21:25, Eccl.2:18, 4:3-6, 5:9.). It is a product of knowledge (Prov. 20:15). Wealth can give power because “A rich man’s wealth is his strong city: the destruction of the poor is their poverty.”(Prov. 10:15). Nevertheless, the rich are warned not to trust in their wealth because “He that trusteth in his riches shall fall; but the righteous shall flourish as a branch” (Prov. 13:28, Eccl.5:10). However, a good name is priced above wealth for “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold” (Prov. 22:1). In the same way wisdom is valued more than wealth – “How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver.” Perhaps this is because a man of wisdom can easily get wealth and will know how to use it. Also it means that the rich man should seek and utilise his wealth in a good way so as to receive the blessings of God. (Eccl.6:2, 7:19).

The texts exalt diligence because “The fool foldeth his hands together and eateth his own flesh” (Eccl. 4:5) and “Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase” (Prov. 12:11; 21:6). Diligence leads to wealth and good life while laziness leads to hunger, poverty, slavery, and death (Prov. 12:24; 12:27.). There is also a thematic searchlight on investment and the place of agriculture: planting, harvesting, taking care of the flocks all of which would ensure food and wealth (Prov. 27:23; 28:19; 10:5, Eccl. 3:2, 19, 10:17.). On the other hand, the lazy man would wallow in poverty and will have to beg in vain for according to

Prov. 20:4 “The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest and have nothing.”

#### **5.6.4 Education**

One of the greatest themes in the “Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes” is education for which the books use the words wisdom and learning. The instruction in wisdom and understanding is the stated aim of the books. The Old Testament uses the word “wisdom” to refer to any educated discipline or skillful performance (Hahn, 1998). It is used to express successful military leadership (Isaiah 10:13); to describe skill in turning goat’s hair into cloth (Exodus 35:26); to describe word for the skill required to tailor cloth into clothing. In Exodus 31:1-5 the word wisdom is used several times for metalworking, stonemasonry and carpentry skills. In Deuteronomy 34:9 Joshua is described as full of the spirit of wisdom which seems to mean that he possessed the skills, gifts, and knowledge to become the political leader of Israel. So wisdom would mean in present parlance education.

The idea of education in the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes encompasses all aspects of life. Wisdom and understanding are regarded as central to meaningful existence hence Proverbs 4:5 encourages the youth to “Get wisdom, get understanding ...” while 4:7 repeats emphatically that “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: with all thy getting, get understanding.” The twin of wisdom and understanding are so important for successful living that Proverbs 19:8 emphasizes that “He that geteth wisdom loveth his own soul: he that keepeth understanding shall find good.” Wisdom brings honour, wealth, greatness, happy life, long life and indeed life itself (Prov.3: 13-18). In the same way the “Book of Proverbs” encourages the acquisition of knowledge for “He that hat knowledge spareth his words: and a man

of understanding is of excellent spirit” (17:27). Moreover, “a wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth in strength” (24:5). This implies that getting education is important for self and societal development.

In Ecclesiastes, this theme is also very striking. Education or wisdom is portrayed as being positive and negative. It is short lived. (Eccl. 2:12, 4:13-16, 9:13-16). Wisdom is the cause of much grief (Eccl.1:18). Positively however, “Better is a poor and wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished” Eccl. 4:13. Wisdom can also bring success (10:10), strength (7:19) and joy (8:1) to the one who possesses it. Nevertheless, wisdom is still crafted in vanity.(2:15).

Folly is despised. In Ecclesiastes 2:13, the writer says “ wisdom excelleth folly as far as light excellent darkness. In Prov. 11:29 the poet writes: for “... the fool shall be servant to the wise of heart” and “The wise shall inherit glory while shame shall be the promotion of fools” (3:35). The trio of wisdom, understanding and knowledge lead to desired success in live for as stated in Proverbs 24:3-4, “Through wisdom is a house builded; and by understanding it is established: And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches.”

Another aspect of education addressed concerns human speech in which there is counsel on the power of human speech to cause conflict, resolve conflict, lead to respect by others, to self destruction and death (Prov. 4:24; 16:24; 12:19; 10:32, Eccl 5:3, 6, 12:4, ). According to Proverbs 15:1, “Soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.” Indeed, life and death is seen to dwell in the power of speech because “A wholesome tongue is a tree of life but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit” (15:4). It warns that “Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruits thereof.” Related to this is Proverbs 13:3 which admonishes that “He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that



openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.” So the proverbs admonish to be careful about and watch our utterances as it can lead us into big trouble.

The Books also teach discipline (13:24; 17:10; 19:18; 22:6; 22:15, Eccl. 7:5, 13, 11:6, 12:13). Indeed, it is through discipline that one gets instruction to become wise and have understanding. According to Proverbs 23:14, children should be admonished if they go out of the right path and to parents it advises: “Thou shall beat him with rod and deliver his soul from hell.” Hence it could be understood that discipline keeps the youth out of trouble, helps them to get wisdom, keeps them alive and spares them from the pangs of destruction.

#### **5.6.5 Relationship between God and man**

The “Book of Proverbs” opens in Chapter 1:7 with an affirmation that: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” This means that to get knowledge one must fear God. Indeed, the fear of God would not allow one to engage in any behaviour that is unacceptable to God because “by mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil” (Prov.16:6). Ecclesiastes takes this further by saying that God does what he chooses to do with man so that man would fear him. “I know that whatsoever God doeth it shall be forever, nothing can be put to it nor anything taken from it and God doeth it, should that men fear before him”.( Eccl. 3:14). God is also omniscience; therefore, there is no hiding place for wrongdoing because “The eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding the evil and the good” (Prov.15:3). God knows the heart of men/women and he is able to intervene in their affairs (Prov. 16:1-2; 16:9; 20:24). It is instructive to also note that certain things delight God and if we want to

get his favour we have to do what pleases him and not what is abominable to him (Prov. 11:20; 15:9).

The selected texts explain the nature of man and his relationship with God. In Ecclesiastes chapter 5:2, there is a graphic connection between man and God. The poet says: "Be not rash with thy mouth and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God: for God is in heaven and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few". In other words, in the exercise of man's freedom or liberality, there is the need to be conscious connection. Because man is a finite being and has a propensity not to want to do the will of God, Proverbs 14:12 warns that: "There is a way that seemeth right to a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death." Man should undertake reconciliation and restitution and should put his trust in God not in man (Prov.29:25; 25:26). While there may be need for sacrifice, the best thing is to do justice to people because "To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice" (21:3). Also Proverbs 15:8 states that: "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is his delight." If one does justice and is upright, he will be blessed and he will be "... of a merry heart and hath a continual feast" (15:15). Such a man shall receive blessings from God while the wicked will be punished (10:6; 26:2). Man should pray to God for "The Lord is far from the wicked but he heareth the prayer of the righteous" (15:29). Man should then put his faith on God and let him direct all his affairs because there is an encouragement for us to: "commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established" (Prov.16:3). It is important to lean on God because he controls all the circumstances of men because " In the day of prosperity, be joyful, but in the day of adversity, consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him". Eccl. 7:14. Man should fear God for "In the fear

of the Lord is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge” (Prov.14:26). If man should keep his own side of the bargain, God will also keep his own side of the bargain. Indeed, the fear of the Lord is really the beginning of wisdom and wisdom comes with rewards – wealth, health and long life.

#### **5.6.6 Thematic areas of convergence and divergence**

Proverbs and Ecclesiastes agree on the limitations of wisdom in guaranteeing success. The book of Proverbs repeatedly warns against the assumption that one truly can ‘master life’ through wisdom. Seeth thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him (26:12). Proverbs 1:5 teaches that wisdom is never complete; one always can enhance, broaden, or deepen one’s wisdom. Consequently, incomplete wisdom cannot be completely effective in accomplishing its goal. Furthermore, wisdom cannot guarantee one adequate understanding. It is even possible for Wisdom’s counsel to fall on deaf ears (1:29-30). In essentially the same line of thinking, Ecclesiastes acknowledges that wisdom and knowledge do not necessarily guarantee success (‘I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all,’ 9:11) and can, instead, bring sorrow and grief (1:18). Wisdom can be despised and ignored (9:15-16). Wisdom may assist one in understanding the present but cannot discern the future (3:22; 6:12; 7:14; 8:7; 9:1, 12; 10:14;). In other words, the depth of wisdom necessary to solve all of life’s conundrums is beyond human reach (7:23-24). To pretend to be wise will lead only to a rude awakening of one’s foolishness and eventual destruction. (Ecclesiastes 7:16).

The two books being studied also correspond or converge on the issue of divine sovereignty and inscrutability as primary factors facilitating or hindering human success, acknowledging that God himself is the bestower of wisdom (Pr. 2:6; Ec. 2:26). Furthermore, according to Proverbs, it is not human skill but rather 'the blessing of the Lord [which] maketh rich and add no sorrow' (Pr. 10:22). People can search out matters through their wisdom, but God can conceal them (25:2). God's sovereignty is not in question at all. After all, 'The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; as the rivers of water, he turneth it whithersoever he pleases' (Proverbs 21:1; 19:21; 20:24; 21:31); 'The Lord works out everything for his own ends—even the wicked for a day of disaster' (16:4, *cf.* 16:1, 3, 9, 33). Ecclesiastes affirms that God can grant or withhold the ability to enjoy life's good things (Eccl. 2:25-26; 5:19; 6:2). What he has made crooked, no one can straighten. He makes both the pleasant as well as the unpleasant days (7:13-14) and determines the exact length of one's life (8:15). Ecclesiastes 9:1 sums it up well: 'For all this, I consider in my heart, even to declare all this, that the righteous and the wise, and their works are in the hand of God, no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them. It is instructive to note however, that while the two books affirm God's absolute sovereignty and humanity's utter dependence on him, the specific perspective of each book differs. Due to the particular aspects of human experience which are being emphasized, there is no intrinsic justification for viewing one book's portrayal of God as more negative than that of the other.

Another area of agreement and subtle divergence is on the concept of wisdom. In Prov. 3:13 the man who finds wisdom is considered blessed. Moreover, '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). In Proverbs, humans are seen as capable of having insights into the creation and of acting in accordance with it. This is not exactly so in Ecclesiastes, where wisdom fails to lead to blessing. On the contrary: ‘Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind. For with much wisdom comes more sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief’ (Eccles. 1: 17-18). Thus the problem in Ecclesiastes is that although God ‘has made everything beautiful in its time,’ humanity cannot fathom what God does. (Eccl.3:10-11) How then should life be lived? The Preacher’s answer is clear. We must receive what God gives in the way of good gifts and enjoy them as long as they last: ‘It is good and proper for a man to eat and drink and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labour.’

At this point, it is not out of place to observe that the two selected wisdom books are concerned with the human condition; they are not accounts of historical persons but tales of everyman. Though they were generated by a particular culture at a particular point in history, they do not refer to historical events or persons and are therefore not linked to the story of the salvation of Israel. The attribution of Ecclesiastes to the wise King Solomon must not be understood as a historical definition but as a claim for the book’s depth of insight. Nor should the description of Job as a rich man from the land of Uz be read geographically but rather as what might best be described as literary information.

The above shows that in exploring the thematic unity of the selected texts, there are also possibilities of divergence and distinctiveness. While Proverbs 13:4 for instance, stresses the importance of diligence as in “The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.”, Ecclesiastes 2:22-23 challenges this by wondering whether this is always so: “For what hath man of all his

labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity". Proverbs 8:11 extols wisdom: "For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it" while Ecclesiastes 2:15 questions its value: "15 Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity". Proverbs 10:6 says that justice is melted out to the righteous and the wicked: "Blessings are upon the head of the just: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked" while Ecclesiastes 8:14 observes that this is not always the case: "There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity".

Again, the two books substantially agree on the relative value of wisdom and righteousness. The Book of Proverbs understands that the world of the wise and the righteous is also populated by fools, the wicked, the lazy, the gossips, the adulteresses, and the perverse. In such a world, it is essential to embrace Wisdom, for 'discretion shall preserve thee, and understanding shall keep thee' (2:11), keeping thee on 'the path of the righteous' (2:20). Although Proverbs 10-15, in particular, presents the benefits of being wise and righteous, especially in contrast to the consequences of being foolish and wicked, recent wisdom research indicates that the seemingly glowing promises in this section cannot be taken at face value. Proverbs 10:3 claims that 'the Lord does not let the righteous go hungry but he thwarts the craving of the wicked' but then clarifies what this may involve in 10:4-5: 'Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth. He who gathers crops in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son.' Similarly, 10:24

claims that 'what the wicked dreads will overtake him; what the righteous desire will be granted', but 10:25 clarifies that 'when the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm forever', implying that the righteous also must first weather the same storm that destroys the wicked. Ecclesiastes clearly acknowledges the value of wisdom: 'I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness. The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in darkness' (2:13-14). However, both the fool and the wise will die and be forgotten (2:15-16). Though a righteous man can perish despite (or even because of) his righteousness, while a wicked man lives long despite his wickedness (7:15, cf. 8:14), Qoheleth does not advocate moral anarchy for he remains firm in his convictions that it ultimately will not go well for the wicked because they do not fear God (8:12-13). Proverbs and Ecclesiastes correspond on the ground that wisdom and righteousness are valuable but concede that these are not only imperfectly attainable by humans but are also unable to guarantee success or protection from the difficulties of life.

Sheppard and Wilson have argued that the concluding part of Ecclesiastes (12:9-14) have some thematic implications. First of all, far from contesting the contents of the rest of the book as Fox:(1968:86-103) and Longman(1984:5-9) have indicated, these verses, in a significant way, 'thematize' the book, making it explicit the all-embracing place of sacred wisdom and obedience. More importantly, by referring to many proverbs' and the 'words of the wise', terms also occurring in Proverbs 1:6, as being 'given by one shepherd' (vv. 9,11), and warning against any additional writings (v. 12), the author of these verses asserts that Ecclesiastes and Proverbs together form an authoritative but exclusive wisdom corpus.(cf. Wilson:1984:176-177).

Generally therefore, the two wisdom books contain the same high thrust of divine justice. There is no God-binding mechanistic principle. The wisdom philosophy of divine retribution is not dissimilar to that which is illustrated repeatedly in Israel's historical narratives: divine justice, in deliverance and punishment, often delayed and tempered by grace. Although there clearly are genuine differences between the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes in their particular emphases on the prospects and problems of success and suffering, they agree on the fundamental issues of wisdom and righteousness, sovereignty, divine justice, among other. In other words, while the selected texts represent distinct generic options for communicating wisdom, it is misleading to characterize these books as containing contradictory wisdom philosophy.

#### **5.7 Imagery in the selected texts**

The Hebrew word *hebel*, which is often rendered as 'meaninglessness' or 'emptiness' appears about seventy times in the Old Testament, roughly half of them, being in Ecclesiastes, making it a clear motif in the Book. (cf. Nelson (2010:281). It is difficult to transcribe *hebel* in a single word. The original meaning is probably 'a gust of wind', but by extension, it can be used in the context of fleeting, hard to grasp, transient, worthless, absurd, vanity and emptiness. undertaken within certain parameters. Applying the image of a gust of a wind, *hebel* to the whole of Ecclesiastes as a metaphor serves to summarize the main ideas in the book. In its totality the structure of Ecclesiastes supports interpretation. In both the first and the last chapters we find the distinctive '*Hebel*... Everything is hebel' (Eccles. 1:2. 12:8). But what is the subject that can be summarized in the image of the gust of wind? The main thought in the book is that man does not control his own existence just as he cannot



control the wind. Wisdom, which according to proverbs is a means by which to see life and manage it, leads according to Ecclesiastes, only to pain (Eccles. 1:18). The wealth which should be a consequence of the wise man's conduct has come to the preacher but has proved to have no durability. Both the fools and the wise man must die and give up their riches. And this too is *hebel* (Eccles. 2). The fact that death is the conclusion to every human life forces the Preacher to maintain that man is therefore like the animals (Eccles. 3). Similarly, the repression of society, the prevalence of justice, and human mutual envy lead the Preacher to think of a gust of wind (Eccles. 4). In chapter after chapter these motifs are varied, but heaviest of all to bear is the pain that man cannot see through life: 'I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the heart of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from the beginning to end' (Eccles. 3:10-11).

It is against this background that the conflicting statement about the enjoyment of life and the pleasure it gives makes sense not as negations of a basically pessimistic attitude to life but a necessary supplement. For the Preacher is an observer who collects his experiences, and for that very reason he must give up the attempt to create a synthesis, since his own experiences prove that just as evil happens, so does good and both come from God (Eccles. 3: 12-13). He must therefore encourage his readers to enjoy the good things they are given and in the brief time they are allotted. Ecclesiastes must be read as a collection of observations that reflect the reality which is the human lot, and because life is like a gust of wind which comes and goes and which no one can grasp or control, so the Preacher can only advise his readers to be present in the moment. The Preacher has experienced not only injustice and death but also the following: 'Then I realized [saw] that it is good and proper for a man to eat

and drink, and to find him- for this is his lot. Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work- this is a gift of God' (Eccles. 5: 17-18). Here the Preacher is not creating a new system but guiding his fortune and misfortune. These are the conditions 'under the sun' where man lives.

Taking our starting-point in the central metaphor enables us to make sense of the apparently contradictory statements in Ecclesiastes. If, moreover, we employ an intertextual approach, we could say that Ecclesiastes is very much in dialogue with the view of wisdom found in Proverbs. If the Preacher did not have positive wisdom as part of his spiritual baggage, the clash between experience and the transmitted tradition would not have been so painful. And without a teaching that urged the link between guilt and fate, the 'gust of wind' would not have been so fitting a metaphor for Ecclesiastes.

It is possible to observe, as Nelson K. (2010: 257) has also done, that most wisdom literature takes the form of poetry, and therefore one of its most important characteristics is its imagery. With the aid of metaphors, similes, parables, and allegories, readers are invited into an active interpretation of the given proposition in order to see the world in a new way. The abundance of images containing an immense potential of significance and meaning, whereby different parts can be activated in different situations. The openness of the text therefore adds to its relevance in new situations where it is open for reinterpretation.

The word 'imagery' is used specifically of pictorial language, be it metaphor, simile, parable or allegory. Common to these forms is that they simultaneously denote something valid and something invalid. When a king is compared with a Lion, the reference is not to the number of Paws or colour of fur but rather to certain skills and

behavioural patterns of lions, as in proverbs: 'A king's wrath is like the roar of a lion; he who angers him forfeits his life' (Prov. 20:2). In brief, while all the potential meanings of a statement are relevant literally (*conjunctive use*) only a few are relevant when the statement is understood metaphorically (*disjunctive use*) (Nielsen 1989: 30). The reader's active role in the interpretation of the image-laden texts, is worthy of note. It must also be pointed out that the various forms of content in which the image appears and the particular culture of discourse play a significant role. In its broadest sense, the context might be said to act as linesman to the language play of the imagery.

In the Book of Ecclesiastes are the imagery of eating, toil, sleep and the cycle of nature. There is adequate reference to the city, the temple seat of power, wealth, religion, social relationship and work place. In Ecclesiastes 12: 3-6, there are metaphor clusters which paint a picture of senility and death as in:

*In the day when the keeper of the house shall tremble  
And the strong men shall bow themselves  
And the grinders cease because they are few  
And those that look out of the window be darkened*

*And the door shall be shut in the streets  
When the sound of the grinding is low  
And he shall rise up in the voice of the bird,  
And all the daughters of musik shall be brought low*

*Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high  
And fears shall be in the way and the almond tree shall flourish  
And the grasshopper shall be a burden  
And desire shall fail because man goeth to his long home  
And the mourners go about the streets*

*Or ever the silver cord be loosed  
or the golden bowl be broken  
or the wheel broken at the cistern  
Or the pitcher be broken at the fountain*

Also very striking is agricultural imagery. In Proverbs 22:8, the poet says:

*He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity*

This use of agricultural imagery is to describe the realities of life. The central thought of the poet is quite glaring--we reap what we sow. Our actions are always a kind of planting. More often than not, we sow seed that will mature in the course of life. This imagery helps the reader to know that this connection of cause and effect is a natural one. Just as we cannot reap yam after planting corn, we also cannot reap peace after sowing chaos.

Imagery is used in literature to paint a mental picture with lasting impressions. Imagery can be used to appeal to all the senses (Iwachukwu1999:65) including hearing, taste, touch, smell and sight. It contributes to creating a sense of real experience and helps the reader to be an active participant in the text. In the “Book of Proverbs” the quest for wisdom calls for the whole being. A lot of mention is made of eyes, mouth, lips, ears, heart, tongue, head, belly, liver, hand and feet. Though there are other images which reflect the socio-cultural and geographical context of the “Book of Proverbs” most of the images have to do with body parts. This makes the proverbs in the “Book of Proverbs” easily understood and imaginable to the readers. Such proverbs with body part imagery include the following:

*“For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head,  
and chains about thy neck.” (1:8)*

*“My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain  
thy foot from their path.” (1:15)*

*“Because I have called and ye refused; I have stretched  
out my hand, and no man regarded.” (1:24)*

*“When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge  
is pleasant unto thy soul; ....” (2:10)*

*“Be not wise in thine own eyes: ...” (3:7)*

*“Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look  
straight before thee.” (4:25)*

*“And thou mourn at last when they flesh and body are consumed, ....” (5:11)*

*“Till a dart strike through his liver; ...” (7:23)*

*“Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart.” (7:3)*

*“Blessings are upon the head of the just: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.” (10:7)*

*“The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright; but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness.” (15:2)*

*“The lips of a strange woman drops as a honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil” (5:3)*

*“She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.” (4:9)*

*“As an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear.” (25:12)*

*“Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood: so the forcing of the wrath bringeth forth strife.” (30:33)*

In these proverbs it can be seen that almost all body parts are represented. This makes the proverbs easily understood by the readers.

Also there are imagery associated with the climatic conditions and geography of the area such as weather, clouds, winter, summer, the vegetation etc as expressed in:

*Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain. (Prov. 25:14)*

*“As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him...” (Prov. 25:13)*

*“It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman.” (Prov. 21:19)*

*I went by the field of the slothful and the vineyard of the man void of understanding; (Prov. 24:30)*

*A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike (27:15)*

*As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honour is not seemly for a fool. (Prov. 26:1)*

*The sun also ariseth and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.*

*The wind goeth toward the south and turneth about unto the north: it whirleth about continually and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. (Eccl. 1:5-5).*

*To every thing there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven. (Eccl. 3:1).*

*A time to be born, and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted. (Eccl. 3:2).*

*Cast thy bread upon the waters; for thou shalt find it after many days. (Eccl. 11:1).*

All these images show the geographical, climatic conditions and the agricultural endeavours in the context of the writing. Vineyard reminds us that the used to grow grapes for the making of wine. Braying of wheat is an economic activity carried out to process wheat; meaning that they grew wheat in the area and used to engage in the difficult process of braying it. These kinds of images may not be clear to people who may not know the geographical, climatic conditions and economic activities so described.

Images of wealth are also many in the “Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes” as shown in the following:

*“So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine” (Prov. 3:10)*

*“Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man’s friend by hearty counsel” (Prov. 27:10)*

*“A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.” (Prov. 22:1)*

*“She is like a merchants’ ship; she bringeth her food from afar.” (Prov. 31:14)*

*“He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase, this is also vanity” (Eccl. 5:10)*

People can easily imagine the wealth associated with a full barn or store, wine bursting out of wine presses, ointment and perfumes, silver and gold and rich textile materials.

Also the “Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes” is replete with animal images including:

*“A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool’s back.” (Prov.26:3)*

*“The slothful man sayeth, there is a lion on the way: a lion in the streets.” (Prov. 26:13)*

*“The eyes that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out and the young eagle shall eat it.” (Prov. 30:17)*

*“The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in summer;” (Prov. 30:25)*

*“The conies are but a feeble folk, yet they make their houses in the rocks;” (Prov. 30:26)*

*“I have seen servants upon horses and princes walking as servants upon the earth. .(Eccl. 10:7).*

These animal images are easily experienced by the readers. Birds of prey, ants, locusts, horses, ass, lions etc are well known animals which readers can identify with.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

#### 6.0 Summary

The two sections in this chapter are the conclusion and recommendations. The conclusion is essentially a summary highlighting the educational and socio-cultural relevance of the research findings and the possible contributions of the study to literary, biblical and cultural scholarship. The recommendations are suggestions put forward towards adopting a multi-disciplinary approach to biblical and literary studies. The section on recommendation also directs future research endeavours to areas that can be improved on.

#### 6.1 Research Findings

One of the findings from this study is that the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes draw upon a knowledge of philosophy, history, orature, sociology and culture. In other words, there is a multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary significance of the study. An understanding of the dynamics of history, orality, philosophy, sociology and culture, is required for a deep-rooted appreciation of the multi-faceted nature of the selected texts. Besides, a literary stylistic approach is an effective way of making the Proverbs and Ecclesiastes meaningful to their users and also establishing the credibility and relevance of literary biblical studies as different from doctrinal biblical studies. In essence, this approach illuminates the aesthetic and rhetorical qualities of the selected books and shows how they can be applied in contexts that are independent of religious sentiments.

The development of a literary concept such as Bible as literature, Formalism and New Criticism, enables us to look at the Bible from the perspective of its literary



elements. To begin with, this concept philosophises or problematises the sacred text. This takes us naturally to a scientific platform. Moreover, this critical tool, which emphasises close reading and the autonomy of the work itself, is a boost to literary appreciation. However, unlike the position of Russian Formalism, it was observed that the Bible like literature in general, does not have a clear-cut identity. Literature is meant to look inwardly, but several works of literature borrow concepts from the Bible. Instead of emphasising the Bible solely as a sacred text, this study enables us to acknowledge it as a literary text with literary features. It is observed that the Bible, to a great extent, is linked with literature, and that the literary study of the Bible promises to have far-reaching consequences on both literary and biblical scholarship. The Bible has a lot of literary features. Such characteristics include the presence of figurative language, the central character, and the oral quality among others. Besides, Investigations reveal that the King James Version of the Bible is a largely cohesive text to be read with an essentially literary telescope.

There are numerous challenges facing a literary investigation of the Bible. A literary approach to the Bible is a tedious task because of its diverse interpretative dimensions and also due to the mixed nature of biblical writings. It was observed that at least three impulses and three corresponding types of material exist side by side in the Bible: a didactic or theological impulse to teach religious truth, the historical impulse to record or interpret historical events and the aesthetic impulse to recreate experiences. This combination of religious documentary and literary interest in the Bible has made the literary study of the Bible different from the study of other literature. Unlike other writings that tend towards abstraction, what literature does is to re-create an experience as tangibly as possible. Literature takes human experience rather than abstract thought as the subject and puts a reader through an experience

instead of appealing primarily to a group of ideas. The truth that literature presents is the truthfulness to human experience. Biblical writing as a whole exists in a continuum along the lines of the expository and the literary or between proposition and image (including character and events). But the literary impulse to incarnate meanings -- to image experience probably dominates. There are recurrent patterns in the theme, imagery and structure of the selected texts. Proverbs and Ecclesiastes share similar thematic concerns and employ largely the same structural patterns and imagery. The books share the themes of justice, wisdom, economy, life, death, God and man and the imagery of nature, wealth, animal and agriculture, among others. The figurative devices employed advance the persuasiveness of the style. The findings of this study also show that the Bible borrows several concepts from literature. Profound among them are the figures of speech. The entire Bible makes elaborate use of them. Some of the striking ones include simile, metaphor, irony, personification, pun, etc. The study shows that these devices strengthen the style of the selected texts.

Literature, as a genre in itself, has distinctive characteristics that make a literary approach to the Bible a worthwhile scholarly venture. Interest in the Bible as Literature- even as *sacred* literature- is largely confined to the secular academy, where form is studied more closely than content. At the same time that the Bible draws on specialised readership, a general fascination with literature *about* the Bible is also increasing, at least in the Western world. One thinks of best sellers, *The Bible Code* (1997) and *The DaVinci Code* (2003), which are essentially biblical mystery stories..

Contrary to fears expressed by some scholars, for instance, that literary interpretation of the Bible amounts to treating the sacred text essentially as a human literary artifact, suitable only for teaching in public schools and universities, and

nothing else, a literary study of the Bible is seen as a necessary remedy to the narrow agenda of traditional biblical scholarship. It involves a paradigm shift in interpretation, replacing the traditional critical methods that excavate the text for its sources—a move towards a literary analysis and away from a historical analysis. There is also a rather complicated interplay between ‘literature’ and ‘sacred text’ At present, academics explore the literary quality of the Bible, religious leaders and politicians proclaim its principles, novelists use it to launch their own stories, film makers make it into box-office hits and pop-singers mine it for their lyrics. It remains to be seen what its future will be- either as a human classic or as a divine revelation. It is quite obvious however, that more possibilities of the sacred text are in the pipeline.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

The study has implications for scholars and teachers of literature, religion and culture, who are strategic, not only in situating literary studies within the context of moral instruction, but also in locating biblical values within literary texts. From the study, it is possible to observe that there are many uses to which the Bible can be put. These include the economic, theological, philosophical, literary, linguistic and sociological. A multi-disciplinary approach is central to the realization of this objective. As a way of strengthening the value of biblical education, students of the humanities should be encouraged to take Bible Knowledge as a course of study at the secondary and post-secondary levels.

There is the need to explore the possibility of situating literary studies within the context of moral instruction. Teachers of literature should show more interest in the relationship between moral instruction and literary studies. The study proves the capacity of the Bible to withstand sustained investigation from perspectives that are

not overtly religious. The implication of this is that it raises the possibility that other religious texts within and outside Christianity can be subjected to similar investigations which can enhance a deeper understanding of them. Just as the study shows that a religious text can be examined from non-religious perspectives, so does it give rise to the possibility of the opposite, that is, for non-religious texts to be examined from specifically religious perspectives. Thus, the study points the way towards modes of interpretation that would focus on the religious and moral content of literary texts, with a view to seeing the way in which such perspectives interact with modernity.

All stakeholders should draw attention to the fact that literature and religion are crucial parts of the culture of a given people. There is therefore the need for a reawakening of the cultural heritage of contemporary Nigerian society. Gone are the days when parents sit their children under the moonlight and tell them stories rich in proverbs and philosophy. This traditional exposure contributed greatly to the moral upbringing of the younger ones. Literature, Philosophy, Sociology and Bible teachers should work closely together with publishers to come out with textbooks that will be mutually complementary of the four disciplines. The study should be replicated using theories that are background-friendly. In other words, a theoretical framework that is reflective of the socio-historical basis of texts can be of additional significance to the data collection and analysis. Further research can also be done in the area of correspondence between biblical texts and their counterparts in traditional settings. Such detailed interaction has implications for the future of literary, biblical, cultural, and indeed, humanistic studies. There is growing assumption that the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are not strictly vital parts of the Bible. There is therefore the need for publishers and educationists to organise workshops aimed at sensitising

the populace, not only on their centrality to the Bible, but also on their literary qualities.

### 6.3 Conclusion

The research extends the frontiers of extrinsic literary criticism. Without ignoring their essentially religious contexts, the study shows the conscious literary framework that shapes meaning and interpretation in Ecclesiastes, and intensifies their degree of literary appreciation. The use of the literary perspective enables the two books to be viewed against the socio-cultural background of the society, from which they emerged, thereby providing a more rounded appreciation of their contents.

The study provides ample information on research into biblical literature and cultural scholarship. The result of the study should therefore provide feedback to curriculum developers and educationists at different levels. It should also increase awareness and involvement of college and university teachers who are directly involved in the dissemination of knowledge.

The result of the study shows that while the Bible is fundamentally a devotional, and by implication, a sacred book, it has sufficient artistic materials to justify its appreciation as a literary masterpiece. The study of the Bible is worthwhile, not only for its religious or spiritual value but as a veritable compendium of literature. Indeed, many great writers of the past have patterned their works after the Bible. Among such writers are Chaucer in *Canterbury Tales*, Bunyan in *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Byron in *The Holy War*. The results indicate that a multi-disciplinary approach to the study of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes in particular, and the Old Testament and indeed the Bible in general, will significantly increase the value and universal applicability of the Bible. The study which was encouraged by modern concepts of biblical literature, the Bible as literature, formalism and new criticism,

undertake an elaborate literature review which supports the study's contribution to multi-disciplinary research.

#### **6.4 Suggestion for further studies**

The present study has essentially focused on the literary and stylistic analysis of the Bible, with particular attention given to Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Though comprehensive, the study cannot be said to be exhaustive as there are still other aspects of literary investigations to be carried out. Such studies may use more flexible, culture-sensitive and contemporary theoretical tools in establishing the relationship between literature and religion. Further studies should also explore how culture can effectively interact with literature and the Bible. Besides, the focus of this work is essentially on two books of the Bible. There are still 64 other books to explore from different angles. Indeed, biblical literature is a life-long academic field.

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