I. Introduction

Hokma/sophia. The character of Lady Wisdom (ḥokmā in Hebrew/sophia in Greek) appears in the First Testament (FT) in Prov 1-9; Job 28; Eccles 1:1-10 and 24:1-22; Baruch 3:9-4:4; Sirach 1:6; 14-25; 24; 51; and Wisdom 6-10. In a conference dealing with the topic of "Trinity, Community, and Power" she seems to be an important biblical character to examine. There are several connections between Lady Wisdom (LW) and the topic of this conference that immediately come to mind. In the FT Lady Wisdom, or just Wisdom, is specifically identified with God's "holy spirit" (Wisdom 9:17, cf. 1:7; 7:7, 22). In the Second Testament (ST) Christ is identified with sophia (1 Cor 1:24, 30). A particular concern of some recent studies has been to show the influence of LW and the theology of wisdom on the early Christian communities' image of God and their interpretation of the person and ministry of Jesus, especially in the gospels.¹ In the contemporary context the character of LW has become a central focus of feminist biblical interpretation and feminist Christian theology and spirituality.

In light of these connections it seems appropriate to look at the character of LW in the biblical witness. However, I am not going to specifically address any of the connections named above. Instead I will examine the characterization of LW in the book of Proverbs deliberately framing that examination with questions that reflect the topic of this conference. In order to accomplish this I will take a primarily literary approach to the text and examine LW as one of the characters that appears in Proverbs.² By viewing LW


²Although Prov 1-9 is not usually identified as "narrative," because LW is presented as a personification this seems an appropriate approach. We can actually identify three main characters in Prov 1-9: the sage,
as a character who interacts with other characters we can ask questions about community and power. What is LW's relationship to humankind? What is her relationship to God? What are the dynamics of power in these relationships? What implications are there for how we might image the Trinity and our relationships with God and with each other?

Since I believe that context matters in interpretation let me also state the particular contexts that are the lenses through which I am reading Proverbs. The first context is that of being a feminist biblical scholar. The second is that of being a professor at a Quaker seminary that takes seriously the Quaker testimony of non-violence. The third context is that in which I am writing this paper, Jerusalem. These contexts will shape not only my reading of this biblical text but also my understanding of power and community.

II. Wisdom, the Sage, and Humankind

A. One of the primary images of the relationship between LW and the sage is that of husband/wife and lovers. This relationship is expressed in a number of ways.

First, it is expressed in language that makes explicit use of the terminology of love and marriage and contains erotic imagery. The youth is told by the sage to "get wisdom" and to "love" and to "embrace" her (4:5-8, cf. 4:13; 7:4). Just as one is to "find" (םש) the ביאייל (18:22; 31:10) one is also to "find" (םש) LW (3:13; 8:17, 35).

Another means of expressing the wife/lover role of LW is the parallel imagery that occurs in reference to Shulamite and her lover in the Song of Songs and in reference to LW and the sage in Proverbs. The motif of seeking and finding the beloved is present in both books (Songs 3:1; 5:6; Prov 8:17; 8:35) as is the terminology of referring to one's LW, and God. In Prov we have direct speech from LW as well as speech about her by the sage. We are also told about LW's actions and learn something of the relations and desires between LW and the sage as well as LW and God. These are all aspects of characterization in biblical narrative. Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, Narrative in the Hebrew Bible (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 2, 46-81.

The focus will be limited to Proverbs because of limitations of space. The same questions should also be asked of LW's appearance in the other FT books, as well as questions about how images of relationships and power change and reflect differing social contexts and issues.

The language becomes even more explicitly erotic in the Wisdom of Solomon. See Wis 6:12-16; 7:7-10; 8:2-6; 9:4-10.
wife/lover as "sister" (Songs 4:9-5:1; Prov 7:4). The infatuation between the lovers is clearly reciprocated (Songs 2:9; 5:4; Prov 8:34). It is also to her house that Shulamite and LW will retire with her lover (Songs 8:2; Prov 8:34; 9:1-6). The pursuit of wisdom in Proverbs certainly evokes an erotic relationship.

A third way the relationship of LW as wife/lover to her husband/lover the sage is developed is through the identification of LW with the 'ešet hayil in chap. 31. It seems clear that what the poet applies to 'ešet hayil in chap 31 has been said earlier in Proverbs of LW. Both are described as more precious than jewels (31:10; 3:15; 8:11) and both laugh (שָׁג) at the future (1:26; 31:25b). As mentioned above one is to "find" both the 'ešet hayil (18:22; 31:10) and LW (3:13; 8:17, 35). The description of the husband in 31:11 is reminiscent of what is urged of the student in 4:6, 8, 9. Just as the one who finds a wife obtains favor from YHWH (18:22), so does the one who finds LW (8:35). The security and peace promised by LW in 1:33 is aptly portrayed by the 'ešet hayil in 31:10-31. The portrait of LW inviting those who heed her to make their home with her in chapter 9 is completed by the portrait of the woman householder in chapter 31.

What are some of the implications of this role of LW as the sage's wife/lover? Let me suggest three possibilities. First, the connections between LW and the 'ešet hayil suggests that Wisdom is part and parcel of the domestic sphere. LW acts in domestic roles; she is a skilled householder. Like the 'ešet hayil, everyone is served, helped and ministered to by LW. As will be shown below, LW is also part and parcel of the public sphere. But it is finally to "her house" (9:1; 31:27) that the invitation is given to enter and to which she gives her attention. Since LW can be found in the domestic sphere, we can conclude that she is imminent and accessible to those who seek her.

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Second, the use of erotic imagery in these texts suggests qualities of affective
appeal, intimacy, union. Camp states, "The image of the lover has the capacity to draw
together the experiences of daily life and the experiences of faith. The love of Wisdom for
her lover is comparable to the mutual intimacy of the lovers in the Song of Songs. The
wisdom poet thus asks readers to draw on the most intense and personal of their
experiences in order to understand their proper relationship to Wisdom." If the proper
relationship between the sage and Wisdom is that of lover then, as Perdue states, what
links the sage and Wisdom are "the values of intimacy."

Third, "As lover, she is the object of the sage's passion. As wife, a relationship
with her is enduring." One of the emphases of these chapters is on the life-long and
enduring quality of the husband/wife relationship as well as the exclusive character of that
relationship.

B. LW is also portrayed as a teacher, sage, or counselor. As the wife/lover
image, the image of LW as a sage is developed in a number of ways. First, there are
explicit connections between LW, counsel and the sage. Just as wisdom and counsel are
attributed to the sage (5:1-2; 12:15; 19:20) LW is said to be counselor of kings and rulers
and that to her belongs all wisdom and counsel (1:25, 30; 8:1, 12, 14-16). LW's appeal
to her students/children is explicitly patterned after the role of the sage (8:32-36, cf 1:8,
15; 2:1; 3:1, 11, 21; 4:1, etc.). In examining 1:22-33 Lang argues that the characteristics

7Deutsch, 14.
8Camp, Wisdom and the Feminine, 111.
93.
10Deutsch, 19.
11An issue that needs to be further explored is that of the relationship of the husband/wife metaphor in
Proverbs with the same metaphor in the prophetic literature (Hos 1-3, Ezek 16, etc.). Camp, Wisdom and
the Feminine, 104-109, 266, 277-278, has done some study on this issue.
12Silvia Schroer, "Wise and Counseling Women in Ancient Israel: Literary and Historical Ideals of the
Personified hokma," in A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield:
of LW most closely resembles a teacher who instructs students in the city square and who uses the language and rhetoric of the teacher to motivate her students to listen and learn.\footnote{Bernhard Lang, \textit{Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: An Israelite Goddess Redefined} (NY: Pilgrim, 1986), 34-50.}

Also like the sage LW's role as teacher is a public role. In a study of the meaning of "street" (חִנָּל), "square" or "open spaces" (רְחוֹב) and "gate" (שָׁעָר) in 1:20-21, Lang concludes that these are the places that constitute the arena of public life.\footnote{LW occurs in similar public spaces in 8:2-3 and 9:3.} These are the places where a speaker may seek and find listeners. Thus as a speaker LW goes to where the people are. And she goes to the public places for what she teaches is meant to apply directly to public life. Indeed life in these places is precisely the kind of life that cannot be mastered without wisdom.\footnote{Lang, 22-50.} In addition to her appearance as a teacher in public places, Deutsch suggests that given the fact that sages often gathered disciples for instruction in their homes, the image of LW as householder (8:1-2; 9:3) is best understood in the context of her role as teacher. Her house would thus be the place of instruction.\footnote{Deutsch, p. 11.}

Second, LW assumes the role of counselor in a manner similar to how other literary women/wives are portrayed as wise and as counselors to kings and husbands.\footnote{Camp, \textit{Wisdom and the Feminine}, 90-97; Schroer, 71-74, 77-78.} In these literary portraits the wise woman, whether explicitly given that title or not, is the one who offers counsel and sage advice to her husband or to a king. So we have the wise woman of Tekoa advising David (2 Sam 14) and the wise woman of Abel-beth-maacah advising Joab (2 Sam 12:1-14). We also have Sarah, Rebekah, Manoah's wife, Michal, Bath Sheba, Jezebel, the woman of Shunem, Job's wife, and Zeresh all offering advice (some good and some bad) to their respective spouses. Thus, in a manner similar to these biblical women, the 'eset hayil opens her mouth with wisdom (possibly to her husband?) (31:26) and the sage who loves LW is to heed her "counsel" and sage advice. (1:23-25).
What are some implications of LW's role as teacher or counselor? First, just as Wisdom is at home in the domestic sphere, she is as equally at home in the public sphere. The street is also the place where LW can be found. LW lives in the world.

Second, there is also a universalizing process at work here. Since Wisdom can be found in the public arena suggests that Wisdom is not just for kings, or the learned, or Yahwists, or even men, but will seek out and make herself available to anyone who needs her. In fact, in contrast with the monarchy where YHWH counsels the king alone, in Proverbs LW counsels all kings and rulers. She is a universal counselor for she is a teacher to all who seek her (9:1-6).

Finally, Schroer concludes, "Because Israel acknowledged the existence of literary and historical counseling women, personified Wisdom can assume this role and her religious-historical effect can be acknowledged. . . . Wisdom personified as a counseling woman was an essential element of the feminine image in ancient Israel."¹⁸ In other words, there is significance in the fact that ḫokma is characterized as a female counselor.

III. Wisdom and YHWH

To explore the question of the relationship between YHWH and LW we must look primarily to Proverbs 3:19-20 and 8:22-31.

A. 3:19-20: This poem begins with a saying that those who have found "wisdom" (Ḥokmā) and those who continue to obtain "understanding" (ṭebūnah) will be called "happy" or "blessed" (3:13). The poem continues with a hymn of praise to Wisdom that includes within it a list of the rewards for those who find Wisdom. Finding Wisdom leads to satisfaction, long life, riches, glory, well-being, and peace (3:14-18). Then in verse 19, the paired nouns ḫokmā and ṭebūnah are repeated. Here they are the means by which YHWH creates and fashions the universe connecting "wisdom" and "understanding" not just with the sage, but with the created order. At the same time three verbs, all of which

¹⁸ Schroer, 78; my emphasis.
are associated with YHWH's creation of the cosmos, occur in rapid sequence: yāsad, kān, and bāqa.19 In addition to these three verbs there are numerous inter textual allusions to the creation stories in Genesis 1-2. There is the reference to "earth" and "heavens" which echoes Gen 1:1. The splitting of the "deeps" (tēhōmōt) is suggestive of both the "deep" (tēhōm) of the primeval world (Gen 1:2) as well as the division of the waters (Gen 1:6-7). Finally, the "clouds of dust" that continue "to drip dew" hint at the mists that arise from the earth to water the dry land (Gen 2:6). The connection of ḫōkmā and tēbûnah with all of these references to YHWH's act of creation work together to emphasize, as Perdue says, "that the tradition that leads to life, well-being, riches, and honor is grounded in the structures of the cosmos itself.20

What does it mean that Wisdom is grounded in the structure of the cosmos itself? One clue to that meaning is in the use of the preposition bē. Its use here is instrumental. "By means of" wisdom, YHWH founded the earth. And "by means of" understanding, YHWH established the heavens. When the instrumental use of bē is added to these particular verbs associated with creation, what we have, as Perdue states, is the metaphor of God as the builder/architect who lays the stable and secure foundations of a building prior to the erection of the columns and the walls. He suggests that in this image of the divine architect, Wisdom is the skill, plan, and knowledge God uses to secure and order the cosmos.21 I think there are several ways to understand this metaphor: that Wisdom is the blueprint or pattern that YHWH uses to fashion the universe, that Wisdom is the tool by which YHWH builds the cosmos, or that Wisdom is the actual building material which YHWH uses to create the heavens and the earth.

What does all of this suggest about the relationship between Wisdom and YHWH? First, this poem claims that Wisdom is as ancient as creation itself. As will be made

20 Perdue, 82.
21 Ibid., 83; cf. Lang, 78.
explicit in Prov 8, Wisdom is there, with YHWH, at the very beginning. Second, Wisdom is fundamental to YHWH’s creation of the cosmos. This suggests a universal dimension to LW. As part and parcel of the heavens and earth, she cannot be bound by geography, or nationality, or ethnic identity, or religious affiliation, or level of education just as a beautiful sunset is there for all to see. And her intimate identification with creation also suggests an immanent quality to LW. As the means of creation LW can be located in or on the earth. Proverbs also suggests that LW is immanent in the sages’ teaching since she can be acquired through the work of attending to the sages’ instruction. Therefore, Wisdom is by her nature accessible to all since the study and love of wisdom and the study and love of the cosmos are one and the same.

B. 8:22-31: In terms of the issue of the relationship between LW and YHWH, a great deal of the discussion on this passage centers around questions about the precise nature of her role in creation. Is she a co-equal, a subordinate agent, or merely an observer in the process of creation? Should she be understood as a characteristic of God’s creative activity or as a companion with a distinct identity? There is enough ambiguity in the text about this that Murphy has commented, “Lady Wisdom has received great press by reason of her association with creation, but her precise role remains unclear.” As significant as this question is, particularly with regard to questions around the Trinity, I want to focus on a different relationship question than that of LW’s precise role in creation.

Perdue suggests that the most important theological metaphor in these verses is YHWH as divine parent. In this case, YHWH’s offspring is Wisdom, at first a newborn infant and then a small child. This metaphor is developed with the use of specific language associated with procreation, birth, and childhood.

22Deutsch, 16.
24Perdue., 90.
First, three verbs are used to describe Wisdom's origins. YHWH "fathers" (qnh) Wisdom (8:22). YHWH also "gives birth to" (ḥāl) Wisdom (8:24, 25). There is a problem with the meaning of the third verb, in 8:23. The verb nsk is usually translated as "poured out." Perdue suggests this as either an image of birth ("poured out," alluding to either the pouring out of semen or the breaking of the water in the mother's womb during the birthing process) or as possible royal imagery ("installed," suggesting the inauguration of royal rule). Another possibility is suggested by Koehler and Baumgartner. They propose a second root meaning of nsk, nsk II. In qal they suggest a meaning of "to entwine, plait, weave" (Is 25:7). And in nifal, the stem used here, they suggest a meaning of "to be woven, shaped." They relate this as a by-form to skk II which in qal occurs in parallel with qnh in Psm 139:13. "For it was you who formed (qarīta) my inward parts; you knit me together (tēsuḵkēnī) in my mother's womb." (NRSV).

In addition to these verbs the parent/child image is carried by the noun ḥamōn in verse 30a. There has been a great deal of controversy surrounding the translation of this noun. The main explanations for the meaning of ḥamōn in recent discussion are "artisan/master worker" or "darling/little child." M. Fox recently suggested another possibility for the translation of ḥamōn. Fox suggests reading ḥamōn as an infinitive absolute meaning "being raised"/"growing up," serving as an adverbial complement to the main verb. These verses would then be translated as:

25 Dennis J. McCarthy, S.J., "Creation Motifs in Ancient Hebrew Poetry," CBQ 29 (1967): 398 argues that qnh in Ugaritic poetry has the sense of "produce" and "procreate" as well as "acquire," "be master of." Thus, the Ugaritic evidence points to the definite sexual overtones of qny/qnh.
26 ḥāl reflects the activity of writhing in birth pains. The verb here is passive, "I was brought forth" with the one who bears not specifically named. However, in context is would seem that Wisdom is given birth by God. See Perdue, 355.
27 Perdue, 90.
29 Ibid., p. 754.
YHWH fathered me (as) the first of his way,
the beginning of his works of time past.
From eternity I was woven,
from the first, from the beginnings of earth.
When there were no deeps I was birthed,
when there were no springs abounding in water.
Before mountains were sunk,
before the hills,
I was birthed,
before he made earth and open country
and the first loose dirt of the world.
Then I was beside him growing up,
and I was (his) delight day by day. (8:22-26, 30)31

What is significant about this parent/child relationship? First, as with the hymn in chapter 3, these words of LW emphasize both her antiquity and the closeness of her relationship to YHWH. As she says, "I was there." What is significant is that regardless of exactly what her role is in creation, from the very beginning of it all, she was there, with YHWH. This is some sense distances her from humanity. It emphasizes her transcendent qualities. She and YHWH were/are together in that time that is inaccessible to human abilities. Perhaps more than anything this poem emphasizes the intimacy that exists between LW and YHWH. As God's firstborn they are organically and intimately connected.

Together these two poems present us with a rather paradoxical view of LW. The antiquity and divine nature of her origin distances her from the human world. In that sense she has transcendent qualities. At the same time that she is "born of God brings a sense of the divine presence and closeness to all of creation that is simply unequaled."32 Since she is present with God at the creation of the world, she is also intimately connected to the cosmos. Thus LW also possesses immanent qualities since, as part and parcel of the created world, she is accessible to all.

31Of course, in all of all this it should be kept in mind that there is immense ambiguity in all of these words (perhaps, as a way of delighting humankind?) which is why there has been such intense debate as to their meaning and translation. Thus, the other possibilities for meaning should also be kept firmly in mind.
III. The Holy Trinity: Wisdom, God, Humanity

The fact that I am able to examine LW's relationship to humanity/the sage and to God separately hints at what her role might be when the relationship between LW, humanity and God is looked at as a whole. That LW stands in relation to the human realm and the divine realm suggests that the primary understanding of her relationship with both God and humanity is that of mediator between them. As with her relationships separately with humanity and with God, LW's role as mediator is portrayed in multiple ways.

That she is the primary link between humanity and God is seen most clearly in the joyful chiasm of 8:30b-31.

And I was (his) delight (ša'asu'm) day by day playing (mēšaheqet) before him all the time playing (mēšaheqet) in his inhabited world and the delight (ša'asu'm) of humankind.

The "delight" of the proud parent in the offspring and her own playful "delight" in the world of humanity provide the intimate link between the creator and the created. Her pleasure and play is associated both with God and with human beings. In this poem LW is the only link between God and humans. For whatever reason the precise nature of her mediating role is not defined. Rather the emphasis is on the quality of her relationship. There is, in these words of LW, more emphasis on joy and play than on any other activity.

Although her exact mediating role is not specifically defined in Proverbs that role is hinted at in the connection of LW to the wife in chapter 31. As Camp notes, the wife in Prov 31 is the mediator of YHWH's blessings to the house. It is through her work and her "fear of YHWH" that shalom prevails. In a similar way, in 9:1-6, LW offers the invitation to her house. And to those who enter her house she offers life, the supreme gift of God, which she alone is able to give because of who she is and what she does. LW's relationship to God as God's offspring also plays a part in understanding her ability as

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33 This becomes more clearly defined in other Wisdom texts.
mediator to bring life. Through the delight YHWH has for this child, LW rejoices in the world of human habitation and the human race, and because YHWH delights in the firstborn, the world becomes the recipient of divine blessing that enables life and its abundance to continue.35

For Camp, another of the ways LW is portrayed as mediator is through love language. Her understanding of LW as mediator is that love builds a middle way between divine and human. Readers are asked to draw not only on their individual experience of human love, but also on their collective experience as Israelites of YHWH's love, in order to understand what God intends for them in the gift of Wisdom, namely life itself. God can become almost human, and so knowable, in expressing this kind of love for the covenant people. And human beings, male and female, can become almost divine in the love they show each other. The importance of love language applied to Wisdom is that it can be understood as an essential source of the power of mediation between the divine and human realms that personified Wisdom claims for herself.36

In addition to being this boundary crosser as a lover between the divine and human worlds LW takes the position of the king as the mediator between the divine and human worlds. According to Camp, the post-exilic period required a new kind of mediator to replace the king and this is accomplished through LW. Although Camp suggests several ways in which this transformation happens, one of the ways LW replaces the king as mediator is as the administrator of divine justice.

In the tradition it was the king who was divinely ordained to judge his people with righteousness and to care for the disadvantaged members of society. It is clear from Prov 1-9 that LW now fulfills this mediating role. In Prov 8 LW proclaims herself as the arbiter of justice, taking precedence in time, in proximity to YHWH, and in power over human

35Perdue, 93.
rulers. Her justice is available to all, with or without the royal mediator (8:15-16, 20). LW's role as the administer of justice is also highlighted in her speech in 8:6-9. Her claim that what she says will be right, true and righteous, and that there is nothing that she says that is twisted or crooked uses the words associated with issues of justice in the FT (cf. Lev 19:11-16; Deut 16:18-20a).

Camp suggests that the reason a female figure is able to claim a place previously reserved for the male king is two-fold. One, the family replaced the monarchy in the responsibility for administration of justice and care for the poor. Prov 31 suggests that women played a crucial role in that function since the responsibility for the care of the needy is placed on the female representative of the wisdom of the house (31:20). Two, there existed a literary tradition that portrayed wise, practical women taking matters into their own hands when the male hierarchy of "justice" failed to provide and when God failed to respond. Thus, in a situation where the male mediator of justice (the king) is ineffective, LW does what Israel had literarily come to expect its women to do: she matter-of-factly steps in and makes her own work do for both God's and men's.

In summary, as the mediator between God and humanity Proverbs suggests that LW brings the divine and human realms together though play and delight, that what she brings from God to humanity is life and justice and that as a female she is uniquely able to fill that role. I would propose, following Camp, that one of the functions of this understanding of LW's role as mediator would be to undercut oppressive orders. Camp argues that the emphasis on play, delight and love is what undermines oppressive orders

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37Ibid., 278-279. It should be noted that the focus here is universalistic in nature. There is no particular reference to the Israelite king.
38Some of these women were mentioned above. In addition one could add Tamar, Rahab, Jael, Ruth, Esther, and Judith.
39Ibid., 280.
and that "no oppressive order, not even YHWH's, is secure where children play, lovers meet and life comes forth. Play is a fundamentally liminal, deconstructive activity."^40

V. Conclusions

What I have done so far has been primarily descriptive and analytical. I know want to turn to the question of what significance this discussion might have for our contemporary situation since this, of course, is where issues of community and power are most relevant. It is the contexts of which I spoke in the Introduction that suggest for me some possibilities for reflection.

Being in Jerusalem and being a member of a community that practices non-violence raises the issue for me of the violence both within the biblical text and that can result from the interpretation of the text. In class, my students struggle to accept the conquest narratives of Joshua and the stories of violence against women in Judges as part of Scripture. Not all of them succeed. They struggle even more when they read essays by Palestinian Christians who understand that, for them, the interpretation of Exodus, Deuteronomy and Joshua provides theological justification for the confiscation of their land and forced displacement from their homes. Certainly a major theme in these biblical narratives is the use of violence in service to nationalism and conquest. Not only in contemporary Palestine/Israel, but throughout the history of the Church, we have seen the powerful and serious consequences of interpretations of the biblical text that justify the use of violence. Today we recognize the harmful consequences whenever Christianity (or Judaism or any other religion) and nationalism and conquest are identified together. My purpose here is not to focus on the inappropriateness of such a use of the Bible. Rather, I would like to ask what difference it might make for the life of the community of faith to shift our focus from the texts which speak of conquest to the texts of LW.

C. Camp in *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* lays some groundwork for making such a shift. She argues that one of the most significant issues for Israel in the post-exilic period was the loss of the king. From a sociological perspective this meant a "shift from a monarchical society identified by its king and organized by the means and power of a centralized bureaucracy, to a society identified by its families and organized around the needs and concerns of the household."\(^{41}\) Theologically, the loss of the king also meant the loss of a mediator between God and the people. Camp then suggests that the emergence of the female figure of LW can best be understood in this context where she both affirms the structure of the household and acts as a mediator between God and the community.\(^{42}\)

In her essay "Woman Wisdom as Root Metaphor" Camp discusses some implications of her work in *Wisdom and the Feminine* for contemporary theological reflection. One of her discussions is on the "politics of Wisdom" where she sets up a contrast between the politics of prophecy and the politics of women and wisdom. She describes the prophetic paradigm as androcentric, hierarchical and supernaturalistic. On the other hand, the politics of wisdom and women depends upon indirection, the resources of one's own mind and body, authority that is lateral and natural, and is often absent the direction or assistance of the deity.\(^{43}\)

In setting up this contrast between the politics of prophecy and wisdom Camp states that the politics of wisdom is not "the politics of fully authorized, unconditional power, power that can celebrate its own, vigorous being."\(^{44}\) I would like to suggest that the issue is not necessarily one of authorized vs. unauthorized power or unconditional vs. conditional power. We should note that prophecy in the FT is almost exclusively


\(^{43}\) Ibid., 67-68. Camp develops the politics of wisdom and women based upon the connections between LW and the biblical stories of women exerting influence through counsel to their husbands and of women taking indirect action to achieve justice in a situation in which they have no other means of control.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 68.
associated with the monarchy and the king. Perhaps what Camp is noticing is how the imaging of power in the social and theological realms has changed in Israel's shift from a world and theology rooted in kingship to a world and theology rooted in the household. What difference might this shift have for our understandings of power and community in our human relationships and in our relationship to God?

Here are some possibilities to consider. In the texts of the monarchy and prophecy the primary social images for God are connected with issues of kingship, dominance, and conquest: King, Lord, Warrior. The image of God as king or sovereign carries with it the image of sovereign and vassal as the main image of the relationship between God and the people. It is as Sovereign that YHWH grants the people the land via the covenant. And it is as Warrior that YHWH fulfills that covenant promise by giving the Hebrew slaves victory over the local Canaanites. Although there is covenant language present with respect to LW in the book of Proverbs that language is now bound up in the language of love between man and woman. Thus the substance of "covenant" is not the promise of a particular land to a particular people, but the promise of life and how to get along in the world and it is made with all who will love her. This covenant is not tied to a place or a people, but to a relationship and a way of life. And since the whole of the cosmos is already her place of habitation, unlike the image of YHWH as Warrior and King, LW does not wage war. The only "conquest" LW seems to want to make is of the heart of those who seek her. LW does not succumb to violence in order to fulfill her covenant promise of life.

Another way the shift from kingship to household can make a difference in our understanding of community and power comes from LW's association both with creation and with the house. Because of this dual association she can be a mediator in another way by bringing these two places together. Thus, it is possible to suggest that we imagine the world as a household. What happens if we imagine the world as a household? I don't

45Camp, Wisdom and the Feminine, 104-109, 276-277.
particularly have an answer to this question. Such an imaginative exercise would include both great potential and serious problems. At a minimum I think the household we need to imagine is one where we understand that we are all related to one another, i.e. there is no one is this world, even our enemies, who are not our "family." "We" would no longer be defined as separate nations with kings or presidents but rather "we" would be a community built up of families. Also, we need to imagine a household that is free of coercive power and violence against any member of the household.

In summary, a focus on LW offers an opportunity for alternative theological discourse about how we understand power in the social and theological realms. In the world of LW we can model our human relationships on the world of the household rather than on the world of king and vassal. Instead of war and conquest, we might learn to offer what we have to a family member in need. In this world, life, well-being and justice is offered to all family members, with out regard to status or privilege or rank. LW invites us to image the global community as a community of households rather than of nations. These are just a few suggestions for ways in which LW offers possibilities that might enable humanity to live together in a way that is not dominated by violence.

I also want to address two of the specific concerns raised by feminist interpreters and believers. One concern is with the way in which the relationship between the faith community and God is imaged. In particular the concern has been with images that are hierarchical in nature, such as the ones just discussed, particularly King and Lord. This is also a place where the figure of LW provides some alternative images. Her roles as both Lover and Teacher are of particular significance. These roles were used to describe LW's relationship with humanity. But in each case her relationship with humanity was paralleled by human relationships. Thus we should consider that the roles of lover and teacher have significance for our own relationships with one another. And because LW is by nature divine her relationship with human beings has implications for our relationship with God.
Feminist understandings of lover and teacher will be used to suggest possibilities both for our relationships with one another and with God.

With respect to the image of Lover I am particularly struck by Perdue's language of "the values of intimacy." When I consider the values of intimacy I desire in a human lover, I also consider that these are the values I desire to have with my divine Lover. Some of the values I desire include respect, communication, trust, faithfulness, equality, vulnerability, and passion. In this I recognize Camp's understanding of the way in which love language mediates between the divine and human realms. If God loves us with these values and we are able to love God and each other with these same values, then, indeed, LW will have brought us life.

Pedagogical issues, especially the nature of the relationship between student and teacher and the manner in which instruction is carried out in the classroom have been a significant area of interest and discussion for feminist teachers. Certainly feminist pedagogy has argued for new ways of teaching and learning. Some of the insights from feminist educators include understanding the teacher and student as co-learners so that even the teacher's roles and views are subject to critique and evaluation; the need to make the classroom a community where all voices are valued and where different voices can be heard; the necessity for teaching style and method to take account of those differences; that teaching and learning take place in a context that unites theory and practice; that learning should involve the whole person; that education should enable and enhance our capacity to be free.46

Certainly LW as sage and teacher invites us to reflect not only on our human classroom endeavors, but to imagine God as our Teacher. God as Teacher invites us, as students, to critique and evaluate God's curricula and pedagogy. God as Teacher hears all our voices and makes sure that we all are heard and contribute. God as Teacher asks us

to involve body, mind and spirit in the process of learning. God as Teacher offers us a space whereby we are able to change, transform and become free. Both of these images, Lover and Teacher, fundamentally suggest that at its heart our way with God, and each other, is relational and holistic.

The second feminist issue I would like to address is the importance of Wisdom being presented as a woman character. Recent scholarly attention has been given to the background of goddesses in the ancient world whose characteristics Israel may have later applied to the figure of LW. The obvious fashion in which LW takes over imagery associated with other ancient Near Eastern goddesses has led some feminists to believe that in LW the goddess is there for those who need her. Regardless of whether one considers LW to be the remnant of a goddess figure in ancient Israel or is still a goddess to be worshipped, she nonetheless evokes possibilities for imaging God.

The characterization of hokma as a woman, and her intimate connection, if not identification with God, offers the possibility for understanding that female characteristics are essential characteristics of the deity. What fascinates about LW is the understanding of what constitutes "female." This is a deity who understands the intricacies of running a household and who lives in the everydayness of life. This God's female characteristics include an understanding of the complexities of the marketplace. In the world of politics, God may have to depend upon indirection and the use of authority that is lateral instead of vertical in order to achieve justice. LW shows that the "proper place" of women and of God is in the world of relationships, both public and private.

A deity who exhibits the characteristics of a woman validates women's experiences of themselves and God and empowers them to name these experiences as true. Acknowledging that female characteristics are intrinsic to God's being also breaks open our present reality to move us beyond traditional male conceptualizations of God. To move beyond the tradition enables us to consider other possibilities for understanding who God is and how God is in relation to the world. That Lady Wisdom and human women
offer to the community of faith other ways of seeing God suggests that we should open our hearts and minds to other experiences of who God is as well.

It is my suggestion that the world of the household and of LW offers alternative social and theological understandings of community and power, both in the biblical world and for today’s contemporary world. What I have presented are some possibilities for how LW might shape our life together. We would have to live for awhile in LW’s house to see if these possibilities could become reality. Let me offer one final thought on the alternative world of LW. As we seek to imagine a world governed by LW’s peace and well-being we should pay close attention to one of the aspects of her role as mediator. As mentioned above, her role as mediator evokes a world of delight and play, life and justice and that this activity functions to undercut oppressive orders through the liminal activity of play. This would suggest that any world of which play and delight are not a part and where there is no life or justice, is a world that is not of God nor LW.