

The Carmelite News

JUNE 1995



OF THE
TRIUMPH
CROSS



READ ALL ABOUT IT

HELLO again, and let me give you the main piece of news straight away. Since the last Newsletter one of the periodic changes that characterise the life of a friar has occurred. The upshot is that the next Newsletter will be my last one for this time round. After that, starting with the November issue, an old friend will be back to write to you. I will say no more about him and let it be a surprise.

In my last letter I said a little bit about the Wisdom Books in the Bible, and my intention then was to write a little about each of the Wisdom Books running over about six issues, but that plan must now be revised. (Perhaps my successor will do it, you never know!) Anything I want to say must be said in this letter because the next one will be almost all about the Little Flower, bringing to a conclusion the series on the Saints of Carmel. So here we go.

GET WISE

The basic material of the Wisdom literature is the **proverb**. This is usually a short "saying" containing some reflection on life, or provoking some thought about life, especially about the decisions life involves. Such sayings can be found scattered all through the Old Testament and they often look artless and spontaneous, but they are in reality deliberately polished expressions of what men and women believe about life. E.g. "Out of the wicked comes forth wickedness." (Isam. 24:13); "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." (Isa. 22:13); "For they who

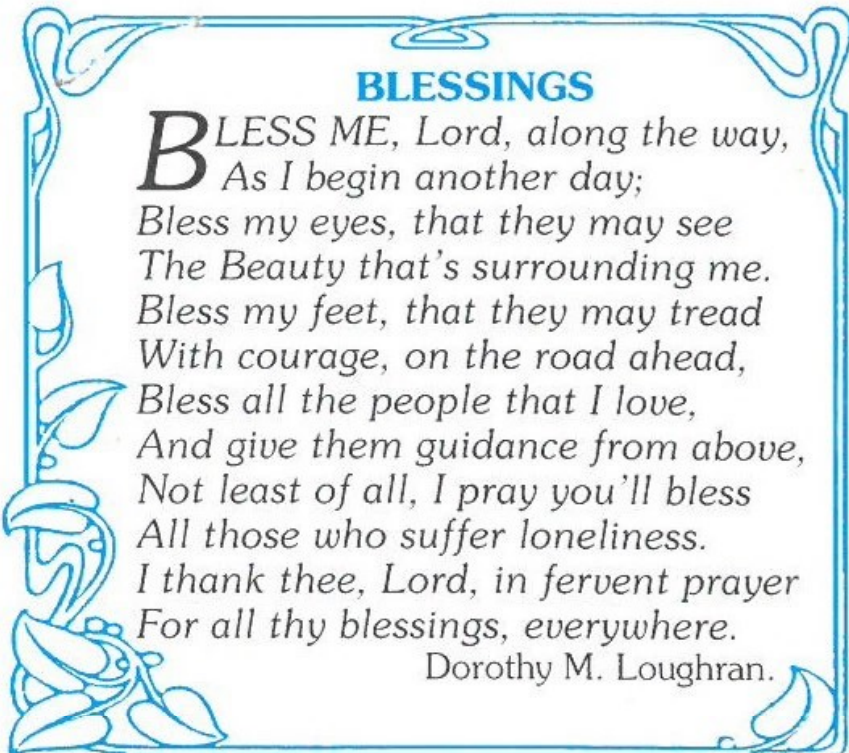
sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind." (Hosea 8:7).

In the course of time a sifting took place. Those sayings which possessed the vitality which belongs to the truth about life survived in oral circulation. Later they were taken over by the learned, polished and gathered into collections which were edited to form the core of the books like Proverbs, Qoheleth (=Ecclesiastes), Sirach (=Ecclesiasticus) and Job. Later, more lengthy reflections on living the good life were incorporated into them to form the literature we call the Wisdom Literature.

What distinguishes the basic wisdom material from the rest of the Old Testament is the way it thinks about humanity. It thinks of the individual as a human being rather than as an Israelite. What it offers is true for **every** human being, **everywhere** and at **all times**. It deals with the individual as one person bound in the bundle of life with everyone else, and not only as an elect member of God's Chosen Race. It sees the individual beset with the problems of Everyman rather than as the favoured recipient of priestly instruction; it views the individual in a setting among ordinary people rather than as one listening to the inspired voice of the prophet. Most of the basic proverbial material is shared with all civilisations - there are Wisdom writings in this sense in most religions, and the main collections in the bible date back to before the Babylonian Captivity (which began in 597 BC). But later, after the exile, wisdom reflection on life becomes increasingly and explicitly religious. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." The wisdom literature in the Old Testament, and the literature derived from it in the New Testament, offer something greater than simply a



The art of being wise is the art of knowing what to overlook



BLESSINGS

BLESS ME, Lord, along the way,
As I begin another day;
Bless my eyes, that they may see
The Beauty that's surrounding me.
Bless my feet, that they may tread
With courage, on the road ahead,
Bless all the people that I love,
And give them guidance from above,
Not least of all, I pray you'll bless
All those who suffer loneliness.
I thank thee, Lord, in fervent prayer
For all thy blessings, everywhere.
Dorothy M. Loughran.

technique for cultivating (and consoling) the mind. This literature is nothing less than one of God's means of preparing his people (and that includes you and me) to live in accordance with the Divine Will, and so is worthy of the attention of anyone who is concerned to know about the meaning of life, not only in the distant past but in the conditions of today.

IN THE BEGINNING

The Hebrew word *hokmah* which is usually translated as *wisdom* originally meant simply 'skill' and was applied to workmen being skilled in their trades. Gradually the scope of the term was extended from wisdom as skill to wisdom as knowledge, to wisdom as shrewdness. Wisdom was the skill to use knowledge with prudence to cope with life's ever changing circumstances, and since life's circumstances never repeat themselves exactly the wise were those who could meet life with vigilance, flexibility and right thinking. Wisdom is neither innate talent nor disciplined human achievement; it is a divine gift. It is something to be pursued, sought after and prayed for, but

ultimately, in some sense, it is wisdom that finds us.

Just as we require wisdom to control our way through life, so God has his wisdom in making the world in the first place, and it is his gift that shares his wisdom in creation with us as we make our way through that creation during our life. Thus wisdom came to be understood as something that belonged to God which he was willing to share, give, send to us to help us live the good life. And that something, that divine skill we could use if God gave it,

came to be seen as a "person" through whom God created the world and with whose help we could navigate our way through the world in a way pleasing to God. And most remarkably of all, given the social organisation of the time in Israel, that "person" was pictured as a woman, Dame Wisdom. The best place to read about her is in the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs. There she commands her servants to go out and invite people to her feast where she provides food and drink that confer life. She is a preacher who stands in the gateway and exhorts men to choose between good and evil. Some of the language used by this figure of Wisdom about herself is the kind of language applied to God. She was created by God, but before the rest of creation, and worked at God's side during the act of creation. These remarkable passages were taken up and elaborated in later books, especially Wisdom (chapter 8) and Sirach (chapter 24). She is a mother and a wife, she must be sought as a bride; she is eternal, the reflection of the brightness of God; she comes down from heaven to earth while remaining at the side of God's

throne. All very remarkable stuff, and I hope faintly familiar. When St. Paul and St. John were looking for words to describe the relationship between Jesus and God the Father, they borrowed the descriptions of Wisdom. For them, and through them for us, Jesus IS the wisdom of God come on earth, he is the image of the invisible God, the brightness of God made visible. He exists with the Father before the creation, he is uniquely associated with Creation, and he shows us the way to salvation. So it's time to get out the Good Book and read those passages in the Old Testament, and compare them with the opening chapters of St. John's Gospel, the opening of the Letter to the Hebrews and the passage from St. Paul in Colossians 1:15-20. And the whole Letter of James is wisdom literature of the classic type - rules for living the good life.

The Wisdom Literature is an unjustly neglected part of the Bible - you won't hear much of it read out in church. So if I have managed to whet your appetite for it let me point you in the direction to look. The easiest introduction to the whole topic is a

little book by James Wood called *Wisdom Literature* published by Duckworth in 1967. A

more modern book but

more difficult is *Gospel and Wisdom* by Graeme Goldsworthy published in 1987 by the Paternoster Press/Lancer. If you would like a feminist viewpoint, try *The Wisdom Literature* by Kathleen M. O'Connor published in 1988 by Michael Glazier.

MARY AS WELL

Isn't it amazing how some little details can survive in our memory from many years ago. I can distinctly remember someone saying once when I was a child and television was something very new that "you get better pictures on the radio." I can't remember who said it or why, but I can hear the words still. At the time I thought it was crazy, but now I know it is true, just as the pictures in one's memory are better than any photograph. For the same reason I am glad there is no photograph of Our Lady. Instead the Old Testament provides us with symbols that suggest without describing, and we gather them into collections like the Litany, which pile image on image to create an impression without providing any distracting picture claiming our attention from the original to which we should attend.

So we think of the Sun and the Moon because she too is "bright as the sun, fair as the moon." (Song of Songs 6:10); we think of a star - Star of the Sea (one interpretation of her Jewish name, Miriam), the Star of Jacob, the Morning Star of the Carmelite

antiphon by St. Simon Stock (Ave, stellam matutina) - or Twelve Stars, adorning the Woman of the Apocalypse who stands

on the crescent moon. We think of the Lily of the valley (Song 2:2) which is fragrant and pure, sometimes pictured as a lily among thorns. We think of the Rose of Sharon (Song 2:1) which is a symbol of Beauty, and recalls the rosary. We think of a Garden Enclosed (Song 4:12) which

FORTHCOMING NOVENAS

To the Sacred Heart	15th - 23rd June
To Our Lady of Mt. Carmel	8th - 16th July
To St. Jude	16th - 24th August

reminds us of her Immaculate Conception, the Well always full (of grace), the Fountain ever sealed, the Tower of David, the Temple of Solomon, The City of David - those places where God was present within. (Song 4:4, 12, 15).

The prophet Ezechiel gives us the image of a Closed Gate (Ez. 44:4). The Cedar of Libanon, because of its height, its incorruptible substance, its perfume and its healing properties expressed the greatness, the beauty and the goodness of Mary. The victorious palm, the plantain "ever spreading" and the Cypress pointing to heaven are also symbols of the Virgin. The olive, a sign of peace, hope and abundance, is also a fitting emblem of Mary.

The Book of Wisdom (Wis. 7:25) gives us the image of a spotless mirror, and Isaiah (Isa. 29:11 and 12) supplies the idea of a Sealed Book. The Bush that burns but is not consumed (Exodus 3:2) reminds us of her perpetual virginity. Certain women of the Old Testament are regarded as especial types of the Blessed Virgin: Eve, with Mary as the Second Eve; Rachel as the ideal of contemplative life, Ruth as the ancestress of David, Bathsheba, because she sat at the right hand of the King her Son; and Judith and Esther, who redeemed their people and brought deliverance to Israel. Thank goodness there is no actual portrait of the woman herself. Given all those images each of us builds up our own picture that is secret to us. This is why I find Icons of the Virgin, which are not really life-like, so much better for devotion than all those realistic Madonnas, with or without the Child, that fill our art galleries and our churches and our prayer books, pretending to be the Mother

of God, but which could be anybody! Don't forget to have a good celebration on July 16th, the Carmelites' big feast, the Solemn Commemoration of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

LUCKY FOR SOME

I mean the number 13. Although the Reformers tried to stamp out the influence of this number by trying to get it the reputation of bad luck, in our Catholic past it was a lucky number!

The model of course was Our Lord and the twelve Apostles, and this group was copied in many unusual ways. A benefactor who wanted to found some almshouses (or hospitals as they were called) would as a rule build a group of thirteen dwellings. Thus in 1190 Hugh II, Abbot of Reading founded a double hospital for 13 poor men and 13 poor women. When King Richard III founded the College of Heralds he set it up composed of 13 members and so it is to this day. When a monastery wished to found a new daughter house they commonly sent of a party of 13 men. When Catherine of Braganza (wife of Charles II) invited a group of Portugese Franciscans to come to London in 1662 the group consisted of Father Guardian and 12 other friars. A 'baker's dozen' consisted of 13 loaves or cakes - and there was legislation connected with this custom. When a 'sitting' of eggs is advertised for sale it is always understood to be 13 eggs under the hen. If the number 13 was really unlucky, why put 13 eggs under the hen? Surely it was not in the hope that they would NOT hatch? It was, of course, to make sure that they did, because 13 was a lucky number! And a set of Apostle spoons has 13 spoons in it, 12 for the Apostles and one for

the Master. All these things show how deeply matters connected with our religion, in however small a way, entered into the daily lives of our forefathers.

GRAND DRAW

And speaking, or at least writing, about luck reminds me that this issue goes out with the tickets for our Grand Draw. We are not in the same class as the Sweepstake or National Lottery, but our prizes are not to be sneezed at, so have a flutter, you never know your luck! Details of the winners will be in the next issue - and your name might be among them, so don't delay. And don't forget to keep your half of the tickets in a safe place so that you can prove that it was your ticket that won!

THE HOME STRAIGHT

A friend of mine was going on a fishing holiday in a rather isolated part of the country (looking for peace and quiet). It was just getting dark when he approached the village where he intended to stay. Just before he got to the village his car just died, and silently came to a stop by a gate into a field at the side of the road. Now my friend is not very mechanically minded but he does know which end of the car the engine is in, so he opened the bonnet and peered uncertainly into the engine. After a few minutes silence, as his heart slowly sank and he contemplated finishing the journey on foot, a voice behind him in the descending dark said, "I think it's the distributor." Startled he looked round, but saw nobody: only a horse looking at him over the gate of the field. He looked nervously into the engine again, and the voice came again, "Yes, it's definitely the distributor."

Again, no-one about, just the horse. And to my friend's amazement the horse looked him straight in the eye and said "The distributor cap's loose." And sure enough it was. The spring clip that holds it in place had been jolted off. So keeping a close eye on the horse he put the clip back in place, securing the cap, closed the bonnet and got back in the car. And it started first turn. He drove into the village. He couldn't wait to get into the bar and tell somebody about what had happened, but the barman was not a bit surprised by his strange story. "What colour was the horse?" he asked my friend. "Well, it was getting dark, but I think it was grey." "That was a stroke of luck for you then," said the barman. "Oh," said my friend, rather puzzled, "why was that?" "Well," the barman said, "that farmer has two horses and he usually keeps the brown one in the field by the road, so you were lucky it was the grey there today." "Why should that be lucky for me?" my friend asked. "Because," the barman explained, "the brown horse knows absolutely nothing about cars."

Be good till next time, and then some.

God bless,

Our Lady guard,

all saints pray

for you and for me.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David J. Fox" with "O. Carm." written in smaller letters below it.

David J. Fox, O. Carm