

Parental Instruction in Differing Contexts: Using Hermeneutical Phenomenology to Understand Selected Biblical and African Proverbs

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ABSTRACT

*In hermeneutical phenomenology, a genuine conversation is sought between the researcher and the text or the life expression under investigation. In the present article, a conversation will take place between myself and selected texts from Proverbs, in particular, the text of Proverbs 1:8-9 as well as selected Northern Sotho proverbs. In line with the spirit of hermeneutical phenomenology, I come to the text with some measure of prior understanding an/or presuppositions. The latter entails among others, the apparent resemblances between the world view of the indigenous African peoples of South Africa and those of pre-exilic Israel and post-exilic Judah on parent-child relationships within a monogamous family context. Of particular interest is the phenomenon of parental instruction as it is observable from the gendered (?) nature of the *musar* of the father and the *torah* of the mother in Proverbs 1:8-9. Located within the genre of Instruction (cf. Proverbs 1-9), Proverbs 1:8-9, is significant because it forms part of the first pericope within the whole book of Proverbs which addresses the theme of parent-child relationships in the family context. The article seeks to provide a clearer understanding on the world views provided by both my own African-South African context and the textual context of Proverbs 1:8-9 on the following: 1) the role played by both parents in the general upbringing of their children and 2) the significance of the different words used for the nature of upbringing offered by each parent in Proverbs 1:8-9. In a nutshell, what was the nature of the phenomenon of parental instruction as it was practiced in these differing contexts? Could one draw any points of resemblance between the content of biblical texts under investigation and a similar theme from related African-South African proverbs?*

A INTRODUCTION

Influenced by my *bosadi* (womanhood) reading of biblical texts, hermeneutical phenomenology as a possible approach to the Hebrew Bible has arrested my attention on account of the following observations, among others:

- (i) Readers' subjectivity is always present when they interpret texts and/or life expressions. The appearance of a text as a phenomenon therefore cannot remain untouched by the observer.

- (ii) In hermeneutical phenomenology (hereinafter referred to as HP), the researcher's pre-knowledge or prior understanding of the phenomenon/a in question is not resented; it is acknowledged and one of the goals of a hermeneutical process is in fact the testing of such pre-knowledge.
- (iii) It follows that the phenomena that will be investigated in the present article, for example, "family," "education," "parents," and "children," will be observed and interpreted as they make their appearances to the author, not as isolated entities with the capacity to inform the observer fully about their identities, detached from the lived experiences of the observer/author. This is the kind of phenomenology that according to Westphal "takes us beyond the Cartesian/Husserlian ideal of presuppositionless intuition."¹ My understanding of phenomena will thus deviate from such definitions of phenomenology as the description of the formal structure of the objects of awareness and of awareness itself *in abstraction* from any claims concerning existence.² In this study, the objects of awareness such as parental education, parents and children will not be studied aside from my pre-knowledge of what they constitute. I, in one way or other, in my interpretive context, which is the African-South African context, will shape, whether consciously or not, my understanding of the biblical texts in question, even as I, as far as it is possible, will allow the texts to say something about themselves. My interpretation of the phenomenon of parental instruction in this essay will thus be shaped by my prior knowledge of the same, both from within the book of Proverbs and from my social location. I thus agree with Westphal that

The dispossession of consciousness as the *fons et ergo* of meaning means that my seeing-as, my construals, my interpretations are always guided, behind my back, as it were, by prior interpretations which already structure different aspects, bodily and historical, of my being-in-the world.³

In the HP tradition, the researcher's capacity to observe, reflect and judge is given prominence. My observation, which also informs my hypothesis for the present work, is that some of the proverbs on parent-child relationships both in the Hebrew Bible book of Proverbs as well as in the Northern Sotho South African context share an apparently similar content even as they reflect some points of resemblance regarding the worldview which they display on pa-

¹ Merold Westphal. "Vision and Voice: Phenomenology and theology in the work of Jean-Luc Marion," *Int J Philos* 60 (2006): 117. (117-137)

² A. Merriam Webster, *Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield: Merriam-Webster Inc. 1986), 882.

³ Westphal, "Vision and Voice", 120

rental instruction.⁴ I am arguing that parental instruction in both settings was a necessary and helpful component within households and that it appears to have been gendered. Despite the changing nature of family in present day African-South Africa, liberating parental instruction and loyalty on the part of children remain fundamental and perhaps timeless values in our contexts.

Before we engage the phenomena observable in one's interaction with the key text of this essay, a word about hermeneutical phenomenology will be in order at this stage.

B HERMENEUTICAL PHENOMENOLOGY

As already noted, various phenomena that feature overtly or covertly in Proverbs 1:8-9, such as family, children, education and parents, will form the core subject matter of investigation in this essay. Through the employment of HP, the horizon provided by my understanding of these phenomena will be made to merge with the horizon provided by the same phenomena as they are observed and reflected upon, from the context of the production of the book of Proverbs in the Hebrew Bible. It is hoped that a fresh product regarding the study of Proverbs within an African-South African setting, will emerge.

While the natural sciences endeavour to obtain knowledge and truth through method and adherence to a set of rules applicable to a specific method, the philosophy underpinning HP is that knowledge is realised in the *interpretation* and *understanding* of the expressions of human life. It is a tradition that attempts to focus on the way in which things (phenomena) appear to be, and not only that, but more importantly for the present article, it aims to be *interpretive* because the assumption is that all phenomena are encountered meaningfully through lived experience even as they can be described in human language.⁵ As Westphal would rightly argue, "in the place of intuition, hermeneutical phenomenology finds interpretation: not simply seeing but seeing-as."⁶

Phenomenology seeks to provide a true description of an object (phenomenon) based on what the object is, in itself.⁷ It is concerned to allow "that which shows itself (to) be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself."⁸ With the author of this article being a parent, her treatment of the phe-

⁴ Madipoane J. Masenya, "In the School of Wisdom: An Interpretation of Some Old Testament Proverbs in a Northern Sotho Context" (MA diss., University of South Africa, Pretoria, 1989).

⁵ Max van Manen, *Researching lived Experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy* (Ontario, Canada: Althouse, 1990).

⁶ Westphal, "Vision and Voice," 119.

⁷ Paul Sharkey, "Hermeneutic Phenomenology," in *Phenomenology: Qualitative Research Methods*, (ed. Robyn Barnacle; Melbourne: RMIT University Press, 2001), 16-37.

⁸ Martin Heidegger. *Being and Time* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980).

nomenon of parental instruction from the text of Proverbs 1: 8-9, cannot be something completely detached from her lived experience. As one analyses the language of the proverbs under discussion, also informed by the histories of the phenomena in question (cf. family and parental instruction), one would hope to have an appreciation of a fuller understanding of such phenomena.

I thus agree with Gadamer that human understanding both unfolds and is embedded in language and in history.⁹ Truth is ascertained not through applying a scientific method, but by entering into a genuine conversation with a text or life expression. As has already been noted, in the HP tradition, the researcher's capacity to observe, reflect and judge is given prominence. In this regard, Hyde cautions that the impression should not be given that HP is method-free. Rather, the empiricism and the claims to objectivity made by those employing the so-called "scientific method" are questioned by a hermeneutical approach whose practitioners argue, as previously noted, that the researcher's subjectivity is always and already present.

Conversation is one of the key terms in the HP tradition that deserves our attention in this article.¹⁰ For Habermas, conversation is an ideal for that which ought to happen during the hermeneutical process. For him, conversation provides an example of the qualities of responsiveness, creativity and freedom which are key to genuine understanding. In a nutshell, in HP, what is sought is a genuine conversation between the researcher and the text. What is problematic though, is that with regard to the biblical text, one wonders how genuine an interpreter can be, particularly if it is acknowledged that she/he brings her/his pre-knowledge to her/his conversation with the text.

Gadamer's view regarding understanding as a productive activity is noteworthy. In his view, "a hermeneutic that regarded understanding as reconstructing the original would be more than handing a dead meaning."¹¹

In the tradition of HP, what happens in the interpretive process is the fusion of the horizons of both the text and the interpreter.¹² HP's research, then results in the production of something new, created out of the encounter between the interpreter and the text being interpreted.¹³ What kind of new product will emerge when the family educational settings of two different contexts are merged? Another aspect of HP that will inform the present discussion is the acknowledgement of prior understanding in our handling of scriptural texts.

⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer. *Truth and method* (London: Fount paperbacks, 1989)

¹⁰ Brendan Hyde, "Beyond Logic - Entering the Real of Mystery: Hermeneutic Phenomenology as a Tool for Reflecting on Children's Spirituality," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 10/1 (2005): 35.

¹¹ Gadamer, *Truth and method*, 167.

¹² Gadamer, *Truth and method*, 306.

¹³ Hyde, "Beyond logic," 36.

While many research approaches purpose to eliminate the researcher's prior understandings, HP regards such understandings as a prerequisite for any act of interpretation.¹⁴

As part of the process of understanding the horizon provided by the text under discussion, our discussion will first benefit from a glimpse into the phenomenon of family, both in the pre-exilic and postexilic settings. Having been birthed by an African culture, to the author of this text, the phenomenon "family," depicted in the following paragraphs, particularly the Israelite family in the pre-exilic period, in part reveals points of resemblance with a traditional African-South African family set-up.

C THE PHENOMENON OF FAMILY WITHIN A PRE-EXILIC ISRAELITE SETTING

1 The Pre-exilic Israelite family

From the time of the earliest documents, the Israelite family has been patriarchal, properly described as בֵּית אָב (the house of one's father). In Israelite marriage, the husband is the בָּעֵל (master) of his wife. He had total authority over his children and even over his married sons and their wives if they resided with him, and in most cases they did.¹⁵ According to Israelite law, it was obvious that the husband's authority was extensive and unquestionable, regardless the circumstances.¹⁶ It was unconditionally accepted that the man should exercise his authority over the whole family (Gen 3:16). Without him the strong sense of solidarity, which characterised the Israelites, could not be conceived.¹⁷ In

¹⁴ Max van Manen, *Researching lived experience: human science for an action sensitive pedagogy* (Ontario: Canada, Althouse, 1990); Sharkey, "Hermeneutic Phenomenology," 16-37.

¹⁵ Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1968), 20; Carol Meyers "The Family in Early Israel," in *Families in Ancient Israel* (ed. Leo G. Perdue *et al.*; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 1-47; Carol L. Meyers "Everyday Life: Women in the Period of the Hebrew Bible," in *The Women's Bible commentary* (ed. Sharon H. Ringe, Carol A. Newsom; London: SPCK, 1992), 244-251. Leo G. Perdue, "Israelite and Early Jewish Family: Summary and Conclusions," in *Families in Ancient Israel* (ed. Leo G. Perdue *et al.*; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 163-222.

¹⁶ Deist makes an interesting observation about what one would regard as the indirect power of women in a patriarchal society: "Even though the father of a household is the important figure as far as identity and status are concerned, a person's mother is the real distinguishing factor in the household. It is this 'branching' function of a mother in a genealogy that allowed for the metaphorical usage of 'mother' to indicate a fork in a road (cf. Ezek 21:21)." Ferdinand E. Deist. *The Material Culture of the Bible: An Introduction* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 245.

¹⁷ Joseph W. Gaspar, "Social Ideas in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament" (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1947), 29.

Deist's opinion, the family, the family בֵּית אָב is basically a unit of social and economic responsibility to take care of the following: bringing children into the world, educating them, making certain that they are married, having a share in food production, keeping order as well as arranging inheritance.¹⁸ Does it come as a surprise then, that although the book of Proverbs, and in particular, Proverbs 1: 8-9 reflects the life expression of "responsibility of both parents in the education of their children," it is the *musar* (instruction) of the father that occupies centre stage?

In the home, the father had the responsibility of securing the safety of his children as well as providing for them. This social obligation directed at the father was based on the moral and religious obligation derived from the fear of the Lord. The latter was the foundation of all action in the wisdom literature. The father was supposed to set an example to the children by being righteous. Gaspar states in this regard that "'like father, like son' was dogmatic to the wisdom writers."¹⁹

In the home, the son was taught the practical skills thus enabling him to follow his father's example (Exod 12: 26-27; Deut 6: 6-7, 20-25) while the daughter was taught the domestic and maternal skills. This teaching was the mother's responsibility. The mother's opinion was also heeded where the daughter's education was concerned.²⁰ The children were obliged to obey their parents. It was the parents' right to demand this obedience. This right was based on God since the parents were sharing in the universal fatherhood (and motherhood) of God and as such, shared in God's power and authority. They had the right to the service of the child for they were the parents, the begetters. Noteworthy though is that, it was the service of obedience and not a slavish subjection.²¹

The Israelite "family" was constituted by those united by common blood and commonplace of abode. The Hebrew word used is בֵּית (Neh 7:4). Noah's "family" incorporated wife, sons and their wives (Gen 7:1, 7). The בֵּית אָב was therefore a community with one man as head and father of the household. All those under his control would claim kinship with him and call him "father." A family could also be composed of generations, for example the three generations of Jacob's family (Gen 46: 8-26).²²

¹⁸ Deist, *The Material Culture of the Bible*, 257

¹⁹ Gaspar, "Social ideas in the wisdom literature," 33.

²⁰ Kenneth T. Aitken, *Proverbs* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew, 1986), 53.

²¹ Gaspar, "Social ideas in the wisdom literature," 102.

²² De Vaux, "Ancient Israel," 20; Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its life and Culture* (2 vols.; London: Oxford University, 1926), 48; Perdue, "Israelite and Early Jewish Family," 163-222; Meyers, "The Family in Early Israel," 1-47; Carole R. Fontaine, "Social Roles of Women in the World of Wisdom," in *A Feminist companion to wisdom*,

The family apart from its blood members also had servants, resident foreigners (גויים), people without political rights, widows as well as orphans who all found their security in the head of the family. However, **בֵּית** (house) like the word “family” was very flexible and could even include the whole nation, for example, **בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל** (the house of Israel) or a larger section of the nation, for example, the **בֵּית יְהוּדָה** (the house of Judah). It could also refer to kinship in a wider sense (compare Yoazanyah, Rekab's descendant and his brothers, the house of Rekab, Jer 35: 5);²³ was therefore, not just a house or home, it was a social organism established through procreation and adoption; it was a household.²⁴

The expression **בֵּית אָב**, nevertheless, was not only confined to the extended family, it could be used as a metaphor for **שְׁבָט** (tribe) or **מִשְׁפָּחָה** (clan).²⁵

The primary aim of the **מִשְׁפָּחָה** and the **שְׁבָט** was to ensure that the **בֵּית אָב** was preserved and that the latter's freedom and *shalom* (wholeness) were preserved.²⁶

In the period before the monarchy in Israel, the **בֵּית אָב** (the father's house or extended family) was the basic socio-economic unit.²⁷ As a socio-economic unit, the family came to assume a very conspicuous role theologically because the life of Israel as a community rested on its stability. If stability did not exist in the family it would fail to portray the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel and would therefore contribute to the disunity of the community since its members were bound by religious bonds.²⁸ Later, due to the transition to settled life, family customs developed. This was experienced by the advent of the monarchical period. As the standard of material welfare rose, certain families ceased to be self-sufficient.²⁹

Few of the large patriarchal families where several generations united with one head remained. Living conditions in towns restricted the numbers that could be accommodated under one roof. Rarely does one hear of a father surrounded by more than his unmarried children. When a son entered matrimony and started a new family, he was said to build a house (**בֵּית**, Neh 7:4).³⁰ Noteworthy is the observation that the latter depiction of the phenomenon of

dom literature (ed. Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 24-49.

²³ De Vaux, “Ancient Israel,” 20,21

²⁴ Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh* (London: SCM, 1979), 248.

²⁵ Gottwald, “The Tribes of Yahweh,” 287-288.

²⁶ Claudia V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Decatur, GA: Almond Press, 1985), 244.

²⁷ Gottwald, “The Tribes of Yahweh,” 315.

²⁸ Camp, “Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs,” 245.

²⁹ De Vaux, “Ancient Israel,” 22.

³⁰ De Vaux, “Ancient Israel,” 22.

family is the one that features in the book of Proverbs, particularly in the Instruction of 1-9.

During this time, known as the monarchical period, a new situation arose, characterised by a society of, among others, kings and subjects, employers and employees, rich and poor. This situation was a complete contrast to its predecessor that was constituted merely by family groups in which the servants shared the same roof with their masters. Consequently, the authority of the family head slowly began to diminish. A father could for example, no longer put his son to death. Says De Vaux: "So, as the feeling of solidarity grew weaker, the individual person began to emerge from the family group."³¹ Something akin to this happened when colonialism and *apartheid* intruded, resulting in the disruption of the phenomenon of family within the indigenous African contexts of South Africa.

Also, there occurred a shift in the locus of authority from the family to the king. The success and stability of the nation was viewed as dependant on the capability of the king in charge and not on the *shalom* (wholeness) of the family. Then, the *shalom* of the family as a contributing factor to the success of the nation receded into the background.³²

During and after the exile (particularly during the sixth and fourth century B.C.E.) though, a different situation arose. The family was not only the basic unit of production, but the centre around which the political authority of the community revolved. The family thus, came to be the primary symbol for exposing God's purpose for the exiles and those who remained in the land, as a society as well as their relationship with God.³³ During this period, the family continued to be a social and economic unity despite the destruction of the unity of Judah as a political entity. Irrespective of the fact that to the members of the postexilic community, God appeared to be very distant, to the individual family, however, God's presence could be felt. This was strengthened by the fact that the individual in the family could still see God as provider of crops, of children born and also as healer of wounds, among others. In the family, the individuals were still bound by their relationship with God who met their social and economic needs. During this time the family constituted a social and economic unity.³⁴

This family piety, this close relationship with God which individual members of the family experienced, therefore saved the faith of the Jewish exiles during the exilic period. Doubts arose about the sincerity of this religion due to the apparent lack of God's protection for God's people while they were

³¹ De Vaux, "Ancient Israel," 23.

³² Camp "Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs," 246.

³³ Camp "Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs," 247.

³⁴ Camp, "Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs," 247-248.

in exile. Their faith was shattered by their exile.³⁵ Having got a glimpse about the phenomenon of “family” as it was understood as well as it functioned within a pre-exilic Israelite setting, I now wish to situate this phenomenon within the book of Proverbs. The question I am asking is: How was the phenomenon of “family” understood within the post-exilic context?

D THE PHENOMENON “FAMILY” IN PROVERBS WITHIN THE POST-EXILIC CONTEXT

The post-exilic or Persian period (sixth to fourth century B.C.E.) was a pivotal era because it was during this time that Jewish life, in the aftermath of military, economic and religious devastation, had to be reconstructed.³⁶

Noteworthy for the present discussion is that the term אבות (literally “fathers” or “patriarchs”) became a prominent word for community during that time. It replaces the *mišpāhah* (family) or *bît ab* (house of father) or *šabt* (tribe). Weinberg’s warning against making an easy connection between these “family” terminologies within the different eras is worth noting. He asserts:

The *bet 'abot* of the Achaemenid era is found in genetic relationship with the *mišpag(h)ah* or *bet 'ab* of the preexilic society. In relation to this however, one must not be simplistic and see the *bet 'abot* as merely a direct development of the pre-exilic institutions, since between the two, the destruction of the Judaean state occurred with its repeated deportations which concerned mainly the southern part of Judah. Through this catastrophe, many *mišpāhot* and *bāttē 'ābōt* were either destroyed or dispersed. However, given the unique situation of the exile as well as the return, a need arose for the consolidation among the exiles and the returnees which led to the formation of a new social construction emerging from the pieces of pre-exilic institutions, the *bāttē 'abot* of the sixth to the fourth centuries B.C.E.³⁷

In Weinberg’s view, the *bît abot* was a social institution; a collective within the citizen-temple community of the sixth to the fourth century B.C.E.. He argues that a carefully outlined and important family tree is recognisable, for the *bît abot* of the sixth to the fourth century B.C.E., hence, the richness of the genealogies in the Old Testament and apocryphal works of the postexilic era. In his view, the genealogy was no minor formality. It was a significant at-

³⁵ Camp, “Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs,” 247.

³⁶ Tamara C. Eskenazi, “Out from the Shadows: Biblical Women in the Postexilic Era”, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 54 (1992): 25-26; Joel Weinberg, *The Citizen-Temple Community* (trans. Daniel C. Smith-Christopher; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 61.

³⁷ Weinberg, *The Citizen-Temple Community*, 53, 61.

tribute of the *בֵּית אֲבוֹת*, even as its absence could provide either a reason (or a pretext) for the exclusion of a collective from the citizen temple community.³⁸

The discussion on the phenomenon of family in this article should be understood within the preceding background of the post-exilic setting. This is the monogamous family setting within the context of the *בֵּית אֲבוֹת*.

Although I agree with Weinberg that one should not see an easy continuity between the pre-exilic Israel and the postexilic Jewish context, it would also be an exaggeration to assume that there was a complete break with regard to the understanding of the concept of family between the “same” people, who lived though, in totally different contexts. It occasions no surprise then, that the old age expectation that parental instruction should form part and parcel of each household and that it would be expected to meet with obedience on the part of children in households, would still hold waters for Jewish families within the postexilic era. Also, even as the pre-exilic family was patriarchal, patrilocal, patrilineal, less interested in daughters and sisters than it was in sons and brothers, so was the post-exilic family setting. However, we agree with Eskenazi that the egalitarianism between women and men that typified the period of early settlement in Canaan, also typified the citizen-temple community of the Achaemenid period. Her words in this regard are compelling:

I suggest that conditions similar to premonarchic Israel recur in the postexilic era. If as Meyer holds, the emphasis on family in premonarchic Israel meant more equitable distribution of power for women, then the re-emergence of the family as the significant socio-economic unit in the post-exilic era likewise leads to greater power for women than was available during the monarchy...Once again, pioneer-life conditions characterize Judahite reality, and once again, the population is primarily rural . . . Once again the community experiences an era when internal boundaries are in flux. If Meyer's thesis correctly describes premonarchic Israel, I suggest that it also supports a measure of egalitarianism in postexilic Judah.³⁹

Proverbs, more than any other book in the Hebrew Bible perhaps, clearly presents a picture of the socio-economic significance of the family, thereby providing the image of an ideal family atmosphere.

The father is presented as the family head, responsible for its protection. He was supposed to provide for it financially, spiritually and otherwise (cf. Prov 27:8). As the head and leader, he was also responsible for catering for its economic needs.⁴⁰ Meyers reveals, though, that generally, women's tasks were more demanding in terms of technical skills and their multi-faceted nature than

³⁸ Weinberg, *The Citizen-Temple Community*, 55.

³⁹ Eskenazi, “Out from the Shadows,” 33

⁴⁰ Gaspar, “Social ideas in the wisdom literature,” 31.

were men's. Proverbs, being part of the Israelite canon, is of importance because it directly supports the idea that there should be integrity within an individual family; by so doing, the book indirectly supports the idea of Israel's covenant relationship with God. For this reason, Camp opines that the covenant relationship is the main criterion for qualifying Proverbs as canonical.⁴¹

Although in its present appearance Proverbs portrays an extra-familial instructional post-exilic setting, the sages used it to inculcate family values as the foundation for a manageable social organisation. In Camp's view, so conspicuous is this goal that it has obscured whatever original diplomatic training for which it may have been previously used, even though this obscurity was partial (cf. 23:1-3).⁴²

In light of this, the phenomenon "family" will be used in this article both in its "earliest" (pre-exilic) and "late" (post-exilic) contexts, with the "earliest" context being used wherever it may be applicable. One other question that warrants attention in the observation and reflection on the phenomenon of family, is whether parental instruction was gendered.

Was the instruction of the father different from the teaching of the mother? In other words, would it be proper to assume that parental instruction was gendered? We now turn to these questions.

E WAS ISRAELITE PARENTAL INSTRUCTION GENDERED?

In my attempt to have a better appreciation/understanding of the phenomenon of parental instruction in Proverbs 1:8-9, I will draw on Gadamer's foregrounding of language as one of the important aspects in HP to enable me as the interpreter, to have a better understanding of texts and/or life expressions being researched, and reflect especially on the words *מוסר* and *תורה* within the semantic field of education/instruction.

Arguing for a family setting for Proverbs, Michael Fox observes the repeated pair of father and mother both within the instruction and some of the sayings in 10-31. He says: "The mention of the mother's teaching in 1:8 and 6:20 is significant for 'mother' can hardly mean a schoolmarm. Moreover, Prov 30:1-9 is an example of an instruction attributed to a woman, Lemuel's mother." The mother's teaching is spoken of in the same terms as the father's; the two persons are of the same order. The authenticity of the ascription is unimportant; what is significant is the author's image of a mother delivering

⁴¹ Camp, "Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs," 251.

⁴² Camp, "Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs," 251-252.

wisdom teachings. This image would make no sense if the “father” he had in mind were only a school teacher.⁴³

Instruction existed in Israel as parental or scholastic *musar* (v. 1 מוסר and בָּבָא) and not just as מוסר יהוה. It thus provided a foundation for the hypothesis of Yahwistic reinterpretation. Israel took over the international Instruction together with the concept of authority associated with it.⁴⁴

Within the school’s instructional setting, the teacher’s authority over his pupil is defined in terms of a parent’s natural authority over his/her child. Whether the setting is home or school, the same kind of authority is envisaged.⁴⁵ Such an understanding of authority (i.e., both the מוסר אב and the תורה מא), is radically different from the concept of religious authority represented by the מוסר יהוה. The impression should thus not be created that parental instruction as it appears in the Instruction of Proverbs is not authoritative because it does not carry Yahweh’s authority, but rather, that it is validated by tradition and empirical testing.

Says McKane,

He (the father) derives his authority from the circumstance that he is in a good succession; because he has lived inside the tradition and allowed it to shape his life, he can speak with a personal and not merely a derivative authority (cf. v. 2, “my *tora*,” and v.5), “Do not forget my sayings nor deviate from them.” The tradition is a living process, and he has made his own contribution to its ongoing life. Hence appropriation of the tradition (*leqah*, v.2...) is not just acceptance of arbitrary external demands, but education in depth, and only one who is thoroughly saturated in it has the authority to teach. There is no question of appeal beyond the authority of the teacher himself, just as there is no suggestion of religious illumination. The context is educational, and *bīnā*, “intellectual discrimination” (v. 1), will be achieved through attentiveness, receptivity and rigorous application.⁴⁶

Given the role that the mother played in the earlier lives of children of both sexes, despite her position as a female in a patriarchal setting, she was equally a parent to her children. What McKane argues in the preceding paragraphs about the *musar* of the father/teacher, can equally be applied to the mother’s *torah*. She lived within the tradition, even as the latter was allowed to

⁴³ Fox, Michael V. “Social Location of the Book of Proverbs,” in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A tribute to Menahem Haran* (ed. Michael V. Fox; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 227-239.

⁴⁴ McKane, “Proverbs: a new approach,” 303.

⁴⁵ McKane, “Proverbs: a new approach,” 303.

⁴⁶ McKane, “Proverbs: a new approach,” 304.

shape her life. Hers, too, was an authority validated by tradition. Carol Fontaine's words thus make sense:

The mother's role as the instructor of the very young children of both sexes, girls of all ages and the female domestic work force, is one of the great sources of her power, marking her as an "authority" within the household. Well into the male child's adulthood, his mother was still a source of authority and wisdom. In fact this tendency to defer to the mother's counsel was one of the reasons that Protestant Reformers felt the need, even beyond their general position of iconoclasm, to diminish the role of Mary of Nazareth in Christian theology and piety for what man, even as a messiah, does not listen to his mother?⁴⁷

Most of a woman's time was spent in the household with children of both genders until the boys were big enough to be able to accompany their fathers to the fields. Due to this observation, and the general if not total absence of any formal or institutionalised education particularly in the pre-exilic period, mothers did the socialisation of young children. In societies that had no schools, this was, indeed, no trivial task. Such instruction was basic to the transmission of culture, technology and values in ancient Israel.⁴⁸ This important contribution is hardly notable in the biblical text. One has to scratch really hard to gain a clearer picture of what could have been the actual state of affairs regarding the mother's educative role. We thus agree with Meyers, who argues:

This educative role is not directly visible in scripture, where the presence of sages and elders gives the impression of a male monopoly on the teaching and inculcating of traditional practices and beliefs. Yet the day-to-day interactions of mothers with children in the household were of foundational significance in passing most aspects of Israelite culture from one generation to the next. Indeed, the very notion in Proverbs that "wisdom," which includes pragmatic as well as lofty sagacity, is female may be rooted in the broad role of mothers in caring for, and socializing their children (see, e.g., Prov 4:1-9; 6:20; 8:1-36; 31:10-31).⁴⁹

To be sure, if one were to undertake an investigation of the phenomenon of education within Israelite/Jewish families both in the pre-exilic and post-exilic periods, solely from the horizon provided by the text of Proverbs, one would be left with an incomplete reflection of the situation then. In an androcentric canon, the important role that the *torah* of the mother played could easily either be ignored or downplayed. In order to get a fairer picture of the situation of women in this period, one needs to read relevant works such as the work

⁴⁷ Carole R. Fontaine, *Smooth Words: Women, Proverbs and Performance in Biblical Wisdom* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 2002), 34.

⁴⁸ Carol L. Meyers "Everyday Life," 248.

⁴⁹ Meyers, "Everyday Life," 248-249.

by Tamara Eskenazi.⁵⁰ She examined the Elephantine documents as a source for understanding the positions of women in one Jewish community as a background for having an appreciation of the controversies in Judah. In our view, she successfully analyses Ezra-Nehemiah in order to reveal that in the MT (if not in translations), women were represented in each of Israel's return and reconstruction. From her article, one comes to note that in some cases, women (including daughters, even if they had male siblings) could own property, a married man could take the name of his wife, and women could even occupy a prophetic office!⁵¹

In the next section, I pay attention to the main text of my investigation in order to see the kind of understanding that emerges regarding the life expression of parent-child relationships within an Israelite/Jewish family setting.

F THE PHENOMENON OF PARENTAL INSTRUCTION FROM THE HORIZON PROVIDED BY PROVERBS 1:8-9

שְׁמֹעַ בְּנֵי מֹשֶׁר אָבִיךְ וְאֶל-תִּתְשַׁחַת תּוֹרַת אָמֵן: ^{WTT} Proverbs 1:8

כִּי לְוִית חָן הֵם לְרַאשָׁךְ וְעַנְקִים לְגַרְגְּתִּיךְ: ^{WTT} Proverbs 1:9

⁸ Hear my son the chastening of your father and do not disregard the teaching of your mother.

⁹ For they are a garland to your head and necklaces for your neck (RSV).

The first parental instruction (cf. Proverbs 1:8-19) begins with the parent giving a warning to a son, not a daughter. He is warned against joining a murderous gang of sinners who lure the simple-minded with get-rich quick schemes.⁵² The parent sees through wicked arguments because he, more than the child, understands how the world works. This parental instruction is given to the adolescent in the midst of other competing voices out there. The child now has a responsibility to choose for himself.⁵³

The parent speaking in this instruction comes from an upper class stratum of Israelite society, but the problem of evil that he addresses is universal. In Raymond van Leeuwen's view, the dissuasive view speaks to a variety of situations.⁵⁴

The parental wisdom and commands are sometimes explicitly linked with the Mosaic Torah. The language of verse 2b resonates with texts on the

⁵⁰ Eskenazi, "Out from the Shadows," 25-43.

⁵¹ Eskenazi, "Out from the Shadows," 25-43

⁵² Raymond van Leeuwen, *Proverbs. A Commentary in Twelve Volumes* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 37.

⁵³ Van Leeuwen, "Proverbs," 37.

⁵⁴ Van Leeuwen, "Proverbs," 38.

forsaking of Yahweh's law as it was received by the ancestors.⁵⁵ Verses 8-9 in this chapter should therefore be understood in the context of this first instruction.

Of particular interest for my discussion and in my attempt to be *interpretive* in the spirit of the HP, even as I exploit the significance of language in the understanding of texts, is the gender-matched parallelism which is notable in verse 8. What one observes in this type of parallelism is that the basic feature is the gender of the nouns employed in each stichos. The nouns in each stichos match because masculine and feminine genders are found in parallel lines.⁵⁶ The first stichos of verse 8 contains masculine nouns, מושך and בָּאָת, while the second one contains feminine nouns, רָהַתְוָה and מָאָת. The semantic class represented by the word מָוֶסֶת which stands in a rhetorical relationship with תּוֹרָה in the second line is education. These two phenomena, namely instruction and teaching, are part of parental education. In educating their children, fathers could not do without discipline neither mothers without teaching. Without the mother's *teaching*, the father's *instruction* would remain incomplete; hence the inclusion of the mother's teaching in the second stichos. The gender-matched parallelism in verse 8 could have been used to depict harmony. The fact that each line contains similar gender nouns in itself shows evidence of harmony. The father's discipline and the mother's teaching are placed on an equal footing. The harmony found in verse 8 will also be attained when the child submits to the authority of both parents.

Secondly, such a parallelism is employed for the sake of emphasis, which can be either an emphatic denial or an emphatic affirmation. In verse 8, the poet is emphatically affirming that the son should respect both parents while at the same time, he strongly challenges the possibility of the son neglecting parental instruction.⁵⁷

Although the appearance of the phenomenon of parental education in Prov 1:8-9 seems "harmonious," if it is made to appear within the context of the whole book, the text's androcentric nature becomes visible: the father figure is the one repeatedly mentioned within the Instruction even as his instruction is more foregrounded than the mother's teaching (*torah*). Also, even where the mother's *torah* is given prominence as in the instruction of the Mother of Lemuel in 31:1-9, its content basically resembles that of men. It comes as no surprise that a mother can be portrayed as warning his son against the foreign women among others, thus joining a similar male chorus on the subject!⁵⁸ Also

⁵⁵ Van Leeuwen, "Proverbs," 59.

⁵⁶ Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its techniques* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1984), 123.

⁵⁷ Watson, "Classical Hebrew Poetry," 126.

⁵⁸ For an elaborate helpful discussion of the *torah* of Lemuel's Mother to her son, refer to Makhosazana K. Nzimande. "Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation in Post-

noteworthy is the glaring absence of the female child within the educational setting of Proverbs 1-9. All of the preceding observations could problematise the idea of “harmony” with regard to the phenomenon of parental education as it was viewed by the sages. Such a glaring absence of the girl child within an educational setting cannot be palatable to modern day readers, an absence that serves as painful reminder in our patriarchal societies that even today, there obtains many an African family setting in which school education still remains largely the privilege of a boy child vis-à-vis that of his female counterpart.

Another worthy observation in my quest for understanding the gendered nature of instruction in Proverbs 1:8-9, concerns the parallel word pairs that appear in verse 8. The “father and mother” pair represents the semantic class of “parent.” The second stichos in which the word “mother” occurs, was necessary to depict a rhetorical relationship between the two stichoi. In Watson’s view, without the second line, the first line in which the word “father” occurs would have been incomplete and therefore insufficient.⁵⁹

Although Watson’s view might make sense in the light of a rhetorical approach,⁶⁰ what may be the implications of such arguments for my understanding of the phenomenon of education as it was practiced within the Israelite/Jewish family? If taken literally, it might leave readers with the wrong notion that the mother was not very significant in parental instruction! In my view, it should not be either or, but both and. Although the word “mother” was found to be a fitting one for the establishment of harmony with the word “father” in these sayings, it was also a necessary pair because children were not only exposed to the instruction of a male parent.

In the following section, I bring the phenomenon of parental education as it appears in Proverbs 1:8-9 to bear on its counterpart within an African-South African setting, a very rare occurrence within the scholarship of Proverbs, both past and present. It may be argued, though, that the fusion of the horizon provided by Proverbs 1:8-9 and my interpretive context has covertly been taking place up to this point in this article. In the following paragraphs, a concrete example of the fusion of the horizons on parental instruction, as a

Apartheid South Africa: The *גבורה* in the Hebrew Bible in the Light of Queen Jezebel and the Queen Mother of Lemuel,” (PhD diss., Texas Christian University, 2005), 145-167. She cautions us to take cognisance of the gender ideology inherent in the mother’s teaching even as she agrees with Fontaine that “the elite mother, if this passage is indeed by a woman, has internalized the male fear of women so prevalent throughout the book (31:3a).” Carole Fontaine, “Proverbs,” in *Women Bible Commentary, with Apocrypha (expanded edition)* (ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe; Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 1998), 159 as quoted in Nzimande, “Post-colonial Biblical Interpretation,” 162-163.

⁵⁹ Watson, “Classical Hebrew Poetry,” 130.

⁶⁰ Haran, “The graded Numerical sequence,” 238-267.

phenomenon within the (pre-exilic Israelite) postexilic Jewish settings and a specific African context, is given.

G A FUSION OF HORIZONS: A GAZE AT TWO EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS

1 Hebrew and Northern Sotho Proverbs

If biblical texts on parental instruction from Proverbs are observed and reflected upon together with Northern Sotho proverbs, which insights might emerge on the phenomenon of parental instruction within a family setting? Some suggestions follow regarding the responsibility of parents in an educational context.⁶¹

1a Hebrew proverbs

Proverbs 1:8-9

שְׁמֹעַ בְּנֵי מוֹסֵר אָבִיךְ וְאֶל־חַטָּאת תֹּורַת אָמֵךְ: Proverbs 1:8

כִּי לוֹתָת חֹן הֵם לְרַאשָׁךְ וּעֲנָקִים לְגַרְגְּרַתְּךָ: Proverbs 1:9

⁸ Hear my son the chastening of your father do not forsake the teaching of your mother

⁹ For they are a garland to your head and necklaces for your neck. (RSV)

Proverbs 6: 20-22

נָצֶר בְּנֵי מִצְוֹת אָבִיךְ וְאֶל־חַטָּאת תֹּורַת אָמֵךְ: Proverbs 6:20

קְשָׁרָם עַל־לְבָבֶךָ תִּמְיד עֲנָדָם עַל־גַּרְגְּרַתְּךָ: Proverbs 6:21

בְּהַחֲלָלָכֶךָ תַּנְחַה אַתָּךְ בְּשַׁכְּבָךְ תַּשְׁמַר עַלְּךָ Proverbs 6:22

וְהַקִּיצּוֹת הָיָא תַּשְׁיִיחַךְ:

²⁰ My son, keep your father's command - and forsake not your mother's teaching; tie them about your neck always.

²² When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will talk with you (RSV)

1b Northern Sotho proverbs

(i) *E kitimile kgale thamaga le mmala wa yona ke mokhunou.*⁶²

⁶¹ Cf. Masenya, "In the School of Wisdom," 160-164.

⁶² J. R. D. Rakoma. *Marema-ka-dika- tša Sesotho sa Leboa*. (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1983), 129.

It is long that an ox (red with white on its back) has been running; even its colour has changed.

Tenor: A parent becomes honoured when he/she has brought up his/her children to respect their seniors to adhere to societal norms and values.

(ii) *Rutang bana ditaola, le se ye natšo badimong.*

Teach the children (the art of) divining bones, do not take them to the ancestors.

Tenors: Parents are supposed to provide children with proper education (societal norms and values), then even after their death, their children will be able to survive.⁶³

A parent who brings up his/her children properly is respected.⁶⁴

The four proverbs mentioned above proffer a common teaching. Israelite/Jewish as well as African (Northern Sotho) parents had the task of educating their offsprings according to their societal traditions, with a view to developing them to be better adults. The manner in which the phenomenon of parental instruction (education) appears in the proverbs is different, nevertheless. The Israelite proverbs might be designated as being Yahweh-orientated. This is particularly the case with Proverbs 1:8-9 which appears in the context of Proverbs 1:7. In that sense, it may be suggested that the father's authoritative teaching and commandments as well as the mother's law, conveyed religious overtones. A child had to copy good ways from both parents whose behaviour was also supposed to be Yahweh-conscious. They had to teach their children the fear of the Lord.⁶⁵

The African proverbs are devoid of God-language. The observation that *badimo* (ancestors) feature in one of the proverbs, reveals that for African peoples, the living dead/ancestors were/are believed to still be part of people's daily lives. Both parents, as with the Hebrew parents, had the responsibility of instructing their children on societal norms and values not basically for *badimo*'s sake, but in order for the children to be good community members. Mention should also be made of the fact that due to Africa's holistic outlook on life, children's submission to societal norms and values was eventually carried out with a view to satisfying the ancestors because in Africa, the whole is religious.

⁶³ Rakoma, "Marema-ka-dika- tša Sesotho sa Leboa," 225.

⁶⁴ Rakoma, "Marema-ka-dika- tša Sesotho sa Leboa," 129.

⁶⁵ John E. Johnson, "The Contribution of Proverbs to Ethics," (D.Th. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984), 121.

Another notable difference between the representations of the phenomenon of parental instruction above is that the Hebrew proverbs appear to “foreground” children while the Northern Sotho proverbs seem to “foreground” parents.

In fact, Proverbs 1:8-9 would not have been written if there had been no child (son) to be instructed to “listen” (obey). Both the father’s *musar* and the mother’s *torah* are presented to the child even as he is informed about the reward for his obedience. Within the volatile socio-economic situation of the postexilic community, a situation in which attempts were made to ensure that only particular people will belong to the civic temple community, it makes sense that not only would the sages have been preoccupied with the intrusions/disruptions which could have been caused by Woman Stranger, but also with the concern that their children (who would come and perpetuate their legacy in the future) would have been equipped with *proper* education. Just like the early settlement period, in which the role of women as mothers (or producers of children, and particularly male children) was foregrounded, that was the case even within the members of the *golah* community.

The Northern Sotho proverbs on the other hand, put the parent in the limelight probably due to the following reasons:

Firstly, the Northern Sotho (African) people so valued parents that in some circles parents could be designated, “*badimo ba go ja bogobe*” literally, “ancestors who eat porridge.” The latter phrase implies that parents are the living ancestors. Is it then any wonder that the parents had to be respected unquestioningly by their children? The reference to parents as *badimo* (ancestors) might also imply that as elderly people, they would sooner or later join the realm of the ancestors (dead) after their exit out of earth.

A second reason for the conspicuous place given to parents in African (Northern Sotho) proverbs could be due to the African past-oriented mythology (cf. the word *zamani* Swahili).⁶⁶ According to such a mythology, everything that belongs to the past is highly valued. Parents also, as people who had more experience (when compared to children) about the past, would be held in high esteem.

The third probable reason for the parents to be given such a marked place in African proverbs could be due to the hierarchical nature of African communities (a feature that also typified Israelite peoples). Members of the society were supposed to find their appropriate places in the hierarchy. In the

⁶⁶ John Mbiti. *African religions and philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 159. Jasper J. Burden and Hendrik L. Bosman. *Only Guide for OTB302-3* (University of South Africa: Pretoria, 1982), 83.

family hierarchy, the child was located on the last rung of the ladder. Parents, particularly fathers, as those who sat on top, were given high esteem. In such a situation, those at the top of the patriarchal hierarchy had more power than those lower down, hence the fact that Northern Sotho children had to submit without question to the authority of their seniors.

Although the preceding proverbs display different styles of presenting their tenors, in my view, they all shed the following light on the phenomenon of parental instruction: both father and mother bore a responsibility to instruct children in societal norms and values for the latter to be good future community members. Despite the patriarchal settings within which such instruction occurred, even the mother had an important share in the educative process. In both contexts, there was an expectation that well cared children would, when they had grown into adults, care for their aged parents' needs. The Northern Sotho proverb: *Ka hlagolela leokana, la re go gola la ntlhaba.* (I weeded a young thorny plant and after it grew big, it pricked me), point in that direction. In both contexts, there was an expectation that parents' discharge of their responsibility for their children's education would meet with listening ears. Within both settings, however, that was not always the case. Disobedient children were found (cf. the use of different words for a fool in Proverbs, such as נָבָל and כָּשָׁל). In conclusion, a brief review of the phenomenon of parental instruction as it appears within the post-apartheid African-South African family setting is in order.

H AN AFRICAN FAMILY WITHIN THE POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICAN SETTING

As stated previously, in the HP, the researcher's *interpretive* context plays a role in how he/she observes, reflects on the (biblical) text. That becomes even more pointed in a context where the Christian Scriptures still play an important role as a spiritual resource in certain family settings. I now ask: how helpful, if at all, is the preceding analysis of the phenomenon of parental instruction as it was reflected upon from Proverbs 1:8-9 and selected Northern Sotho proverbs, to the post-colonial, post-apartheid African-South African family context?

Prior to the present negative effects of globalisation on the African-South African family, the family was disrupted in one way or another by colonialism and, later, by the *apartheid* regime. The pre-colonial African-South African family set-up shared some points of resemblance with the tenth century Israelite family model. The phenomenon of one nuclear family was basically non-existent because it was common to find married sons who built their houses on their father's property. Polygyny then, particularly for royal and wealthier families, was the norm rather than an exception. With the advent of Christianity, such a practice was challenged by many missionaries as being heathen.

Within an African extended family setting, although the educative process was the responsibility of both parents, it was more communal. A second wife could give instruction to the children of the first wife and the other way round. Colonialism and *apartheid* succeeded in dismantling the African communal/family mentality, leading to the resultant individualistic / individualised nuclear family setups. The latter, as can be expected, are not without their share of challenges.

When the Afrikaners took over from the English, a new development occurred, with its negative impact on the African family from that point to date, namely, the implementation of the Migrant Labour Act. According to that Act, African married couples were not allowed to relocate to urban areas. Only men could stay in such areas as labourers. They were thus severed from their families for longer periods of time, with severe repercussions for their families: the absence of the father figure in parenting male children as well as the general absence of a father in the family!

While polygynous family settings continue to remain in some rural contexts, even monogamous families have been "disrupted." The "ideal" monogamous family setting portrayed in Proverbs by both parents sharing equally in parental instruction, has become an "ideal." Why? The new economic modes, as well as the global economic recession, demand that both parents earn a living. Children are usually left to the care of domestics, grandparents and pre-school teachers, among others. Most parents' tight schedules in a highly capitalist and technological milieu result in the media offering instruction as substitutes for the parents! The denigration of African culture and the entrenchment of Western moral values were accompanied by the devaluing of some of the good values enshrined in African wisdom sayings (cf. the content of the proverbs discussed above). The Western individualistic tendencies that African-South African peoples have inherited from colonialism, *apartheid* and the neo-colonial (particularly the northern) global context, means that nowadays one can hardly find any communal educative parental setting. Is it any wonder that discipline is actually dying a slow death in many of our school educational contexts?

In addition, the new global developments found in the proliferation of single female-parented families, "couples" who choose to have a "family" outside of the traditional notion of "family," and the growing pattern of gay families, all problematise the "traditional" notion of the phenomenon of parental education in a monogamous family setting.

I CONCLUSION

Before one embarked on the research journey, one possessed a pre-knowledge that one needed to test by employing hermeneutical phenomenology. My stance, in line with the spirit of the HP was to be interpretive, employing the

use of language and history (particularly with reference to Proverbs 1:8-9) to interact with the phenomena discussed in this text. I was also aware that in my efforts to act as interpreter, to seek to observe, reflect on and make judgments on the subject matter of parental instruction in two different contexts, my social location would impact on the texts to be observed.

Part of my pre-knowledge was the understanding that there are apparent resemblances between the content of some of the Hebrew Bible texts and that of African (Northern Sotho) proverbs on the phenomenon of parental instruction, particularly within a family setting. My personal observations and experiences have revealed this. Such pre-knowledge, as was stated in my hypothesis postulation in the introduction of this article, was confirmed, to a great extent by the present study:

Some of the proverbs on parent-child relationships both in the Hebrew Bible book of Proverbs (cf. Proverbs 1:8-9 and 6:20) as well as those originating from the Northern Sotho South African context, apparently share a similar content even as they reflect some points of resemblance with regard to the worldview which they display on parental instruction. When the phenomenon of parental instruction was investigated in both settings, it was discovered to be a necessary and helpful component within family households. Parental instruction appears to have been gendered. Despite the changing nature of family in present day African-South Africa, liberative parental instruction and loyalty on the part of children remain fundamental and perhaps timeless values not only in our African-South African contexts, but in all contexts.

My social location in which the Christian Bible continues to play a role as an important spiritual resource, and the deteriorating nature of parent-child relationships within African family contexts, have influenced my choice of texts to be investigated. Proverbs 1:8-9, together with selected African proverbs on the phenomenon of parental instruction, were observed and reflected upon with a view to glimpsing the (new) product that would emerge from the fusion of the horizon of the author (cf. in particular, the African proverbs investigated as well as the brief scenario of the post-apartheid African-South African family set-up) and the horizon provided by the text of Proverbs 1:8-9. From the fusion of the two horizons, the following can be observed about the phenomenon of parental instruction within the two different contexts:

In both the (pre-exilic Israelite) postexilic Jewish community contexts as well as the African/Northern Sotho context, there was an expectation that parents, both in the nuclear and extended families, would offer education to their children (including those who were not their blood children). Although information is scant with regard to whether parental instruction was gendered or not, my observation, particularly from the texts in Proverbs, points to the direction of the gendered nature of such instruction. Such instruction was expected to be met by listening ears on the part of children. From a survey of the post-colo-

nial, post-apartheid African-South African family, it became clear that the “ideal” family set-up depicted in the two canons hardly exists. Despite the disruption of the African family and the changing nature of the phenomenon of “family” in present-day South Africa, in my view, for as long as parents continue to take delight in procreation and for as long as children are found in our midst, the words of the wise both in Africa and in Israel remain:

Rutang bana ditaola, le se ye natšo badimong

Teach the children (the art of) divining bones, Do not take these along to the ancestors.

⁸ Hear my son the chastening of your father and do not forsake the teaching of your mother

⁹ For they are a garland to your head and necklaces for your neck

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