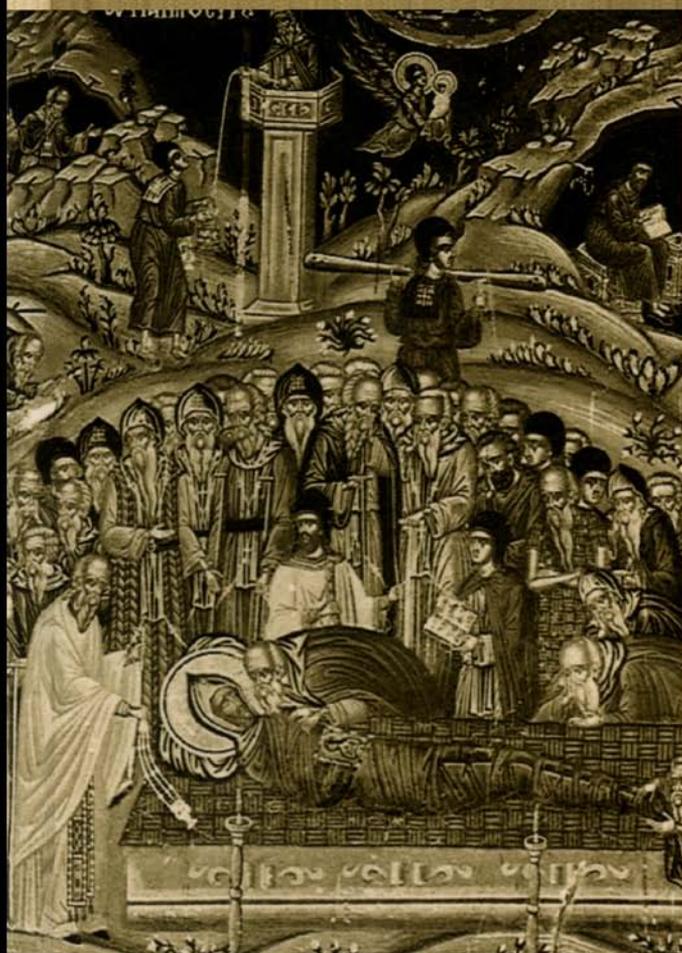


# James

Richard Bauckham



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## James

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In the history of interpretation the letter of James has been marginalized and compared unfavourably with the writings of Paul. This book argues for an important canonical role for James, not subordinated to Paul, but a complementary scriptural voice.

Richard Bauckham explores the historical and literary contexts of the text, discussing the significance of James as the brother of Jesus and leader of the early Jerusalem church. He gives special attention to the aphorisms which encapsulate James' wisdom, and to the way that both in form and content James' teaching closely resembles that of Jesus. He examines the canonical context of James within the Christian Scriptures, analysing the relationship between James and Paul and James' important relationships with the Torah and the Wisdom literature. Finally he discusses Kierkegaard's existential interpretation of the text which appropriates James' wisdom for Christian life today. The major themes of James—wholeness, poverty, speech ethics and prayer—are explored in relation to the current contexts of the contemporary reader of James.

**Richard Bauckham** is Professor of New Testament Studies at the University of St Andrews. He is the author of *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (1993).

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# James

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Wisdom of James, disciple of  
Jesus the sage

Richard Bauckham



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An opportunity to develop my thinking on James further came when I was invited to give the eighth series of Carmichael-Walling Lectures at Abilene Christian University, Abilene, Texas. Two lectures, again under the title 'James at the Centre', were delivered on 17 November 1994. I am most grateful to Dr Carrol Osburn of Abilene Christian University, who invited me to give these lectures, and for his kindness and that of others who helped to make my visit to Abilene a very happy one. Thanks are also due to Mrs Lucille Carmichael and Ms Jo Ann Walling Halbert, who endowed this annual lecture series. The two lectures have now been expanded and absorbed into this much longer treatment, but most of their substance appears in various parts of this book.

Most biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version. In some cases I have adapted the NRSV's translation, in a few cases used other versions (which are indicated), and sometimes made my own translation.

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# Abbreviations

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In addition to standard abbreviations for biblical books, the following abbreviations for ancient literature are used:

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| 'Avot R. Nat.  | 'Avot de Rabbi Natan                               |
| b. Ber.        | Babylonian Talmud tractate Berakot                 |
| b. 'Eruv.      | Babylonian Talmud tractate 'Eruvin                 |
| b. Ket.        | Babylonian Talmud tractate Ketuvot                 |
| b. Qidd.       | Babylonian Talmud tractate Qiddushin               |
| b. Shabb.      | Babylonian Talmud tractate Shabbat                 |
| Cant. R.       | Midrash Rabbah on Canticles                        |
| CD             | Damascus Covenant                                  |
| 1 Clem.        | 1 Clement  |
| 2 Clem.        | 2 Clement  |
| Jub.           | Jubilees   |
| LAB            | Pseudo-Philo, <i>Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum</i> |
| LXX            | Septuagint   |
| m. Naz.        | Mishnah tractate Nazir                             |
| m. Ohol.       | Mishnah tractate Oholot                            |
| m. Rosh. Hash. | Mishnah tractate Rosh ha-Shana                     |
| m. Sota        | Mishnah tractate Sota                              |
| m. 'Avot       | Mishnah tractate 'Avot                             |
| Num. R.        | Midrash Rabbah on Numbers                          |
| Par. Jer.      | Paralipomena Jeremiou (or 4 Baruch)                |
| Pes. R.        | Pesiqta Rabbati                                    |
| Ps.-Phoc.      | Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides                     |
| 1Q             | Manuscripts from Qumran Cave 1                     |
| 1QH            | Hodayot (Thanksgiving Hymns) from Qumran Cave 1    |
| 1QM            | War Rule from Qumran Cave 1                        |

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| 4Q        | Manuscripts from Qumran Cave 4                    |
| 4QMMT     | Miqsat Ma'aseh ha-Torah from Qumran Cave 4        |
| 4QTQahat  | Testament of Qahat from Qumran Cave 4             |
| Sir.      | Sirach or Ben Sira (or Ecclesiasticus)            |
| Tg. Neof. | Targum Neofiti                                    |
| t. Sanh.  | Tosefta tractate Sanhedrin                        |
| y. Sanh.  | Jerusalem (Palestinian) Talmud tractate Sanhedrin |

## Looking into James as into a mirror

---

Christian scholarship is the human race's prodigious invention to defend itself against the New Testament, to ensure that one can continue to be a Christian without letting the New Testament come too close.

(Kierkegaard 1975:270)

It appears to me that on the whole the great mass of interpreters damage the understanding of the New Testament more than they benefit an understanding of it. It becomes necessary to do as one does at a play, where a profusion of spectators and spotlights seeks to prevent, as it were, our enjoyment of the play itself and instead treat us to little incidents—one has to overlook them, if possible, or manage to enter by a passage which is not yet blocked.

(Kierkegaard 1967:83)

Above all, read the New Testament without a commentary... Every commentary detracts. He who can sit with ten open commentaries and read the Holy Scriptures—well, he is probably writing the eleventh, but he deals with the Scriptures *contra naturam*.

(Kierkegaard 1967:85)

The great Danish religious thinker Søren Kierkegaard is probably the only person who is on record as having regarded the first chapter of the letter of James as his favourite portion of Scripture (Kierkegaard 1978:416; cf. 569). Kierkegaard's rather special appreciation of James is the reason I have selected quotations from Kierkegaard to stand at the head of each chapter of this book. It

also explains why Kierkegaard's interpretation of James will be given particular prominence in the last chapter of the book. But the reason for introducing Kierkegaard at this stage, before we embark on our study of James, is that Kierkegaard poses very starkly and powerfully a fundamental hermeneutical issue about appropriate ways of reading Scripture, James included. As the quotations above are sufficient to make clear, with the polemical extravagance typical of Kierkegaard's work, he considered that the work of academic biblical scholarship, so far from fulfilling its professed aim of assisting Christian reading of Scripture, functioned rather to impede it. Were he able to take account of the way that academic biblical studies have developed in the hundred and fifty years since he wrote, I do not think his mind would be significantly changed. Perhaps, taking note of the overtly secular atmosphere in which much of the academic study of the Bible now takes place, he would expand the first quotation in this way:

Biblical scholarship is the human race's prodigious invention to defend itself against the New Testament, to ensure that one can continue to be a Christian without letting the New Testament come too close, or to ensure that one can continue not to be a Christian by not letting the New Testament come too close.

He might also observe that the hermeneutical concerns that lie behind the statements we have quoted from him are now more widely recognized in theological circles, but that the issues he raised about the relationship between academic biblical studies and the church's reading of the biblical texts as Christian Scripture have certainly not been satisfactorily resolved. Meanwhile, of the making of commentaries there is seemingly no end.

In order to understand the hermeneutical concerns that prompted such negative appraisals of the value of biblical scholarship as those quoted above, we can appropriately proceed by considering one of Kierkegaard's reflections on James. It is not accidental that his fullest discussion of biblical hermeneutics takes the form of a reflection on James 1:22–25 in the first section of a work called *For Self-Examination* (Kierkegaard 1990a:25–46). The text is James' parable of the mirror:

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a

doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But he who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing.

(Jas. 1:22–25 RSV)

Kierkegaard reads this as a parable about reading Scripture. Probably ‘the perfect law, the law of liberty’, which James here equates with ‘the word’, is specifically the Torah as interpreted by Jesus, but Kierkegaard is surely quite justified in applying the parable more broadly to the whole of Scripture, understood as expressing the word of God. Two points in the text are the key ones in his interpretation. The Christian who reads Scripture as Scripture, as God’s word, must first observe himself or herself in the mirror of the word, and must then put what is heard into practice.

In making the first point, Kierkegaard takes the action of *looking at oneself* in the mirror to be not merely an aspect of the parabolic picture but indispensable to what the parable says about hearing or reading God’s word in the right way. He does not attempt to justify this interpretation—Kierkegaard rarely discusses exegetical issues—but in favour of it is the fact that it is otherwise difficult to see why James should use the image of a mirror at all. God’s word is a mirror in which one should observe oneself. The image appeals to Kierkegaard because it coheres with his own emphasis on self-knowledge as essential to ethical and religious existence. To know God is necessarily also to know oneself as an individual before God, as both loved and commanded by God, indebted and responsible to God. Thus to read Scripture as God’s word must mean to find oneself in it, given oneself and addressed by God.

The first step therefore must be to see oneself in the mirror. Kierkegaard detects in his own age a possibility the parable in James does not explicitly envisage: that of observing only the mirror and not seeing oneself in it. This is what happens when biblical scholarship intervenes between the text and its hearers or readers. While professedly aiming at establishing the correct interpretation of the text so that readers can understand it and then appropriate it in faith, in fact biblical scholarship raises so many questions about the text that it can never conclusively answer, and continually generates so many new lines of supposedly objective enquiry that its effect is to postpone faith and obedience to God’s word

indefinitely. It is a way of avoiding the subjective encounter with what is perfectly plain in the text. It is human, argues Kierkegaard, to find the existential demand of the text too much for one and to pray for God's patience, but

it is not human to give the matter a totally different turn: that I cunningly shove in, one layer after another, interpretation and scholarly research, and more scholarly research (much in the way a boy puts a napkin or more under his pants when he is going to get a licking), that I shove all this between the Word and myself and then give this interpreting and scholarliness the name of earnestness and zeal for the truth, and then allow this preoccupation to swell to such prolixity that I never come to receive the impression of God's Word, never come to look at myself in the mirror. It seems as if all this research and pondering and scrutinizing would draw God's Word very close to me; the truth is that this is the very way, this is the most cunning way, to remove God's Word as far as possible from me.

(Kierkegaard 1990a:35)

Kierkegaard is really combining two complaints against biblical scholarship when it represents itself as the necessary means to the religious purpose of Scripture. One is that the process of research and interpretation is never done. A hundred and fifty years later this is so much more obviously true. The great nineteenth-century project of historical-critical study of the Bible, fired by the aim of establishing the objective meaning of the text independently of confessional and dogmatic presuppositions, has quite evidently failed in this aim. The scholarly effort has been immense and, of course, there have been real advances in knowledge, especially of the contexts in which the texts originated, but on most of the central issues of interpretation which the historical-critical enterprise was expected to solve there is still no prospect of stable consensus. Indeed, the enterprise, as it is now embodied in institutional structures and controlled by sociological factors other than pure desire to know or to believe, is such as always to prevent any emerging consensus from becoming established. Kierkegaard's suspicion that the intention has been to keep at a safe distance the Bible's existential relevance and demand is exaggerated. Even in his day intentions varied from the devout to the anti-Christian. There have always been scholars who lived by God's word as they

heard it in Scripture just as earnestly as they studied the texts. But in all honesty it has to be acknowledged that biblical scholarship does pose a temptation, both for scholars and those who read their books: the temptation to substitute study for faith and action.

Kierkegaard here adumbrates an application to the process of academic biblical studies of the kind of hermeneutic of suspicion that many contemporary interpreters are ready enough to apply to the Bible itself but not to themselves or to their guild. The desire to postpone responding to Scripture is only one, probably not among the most important motivational factors which have been deeply at work beneath the surface of apparent objectivity. But it is this objectivity itself that is Kierkegaard's second complaint against biblical scholarship. That objectivity in historical study and exegesis of the biblical texts is problematic has, one way or another, become increasingly obvious in recent biblical studies, not least because of the obvious failure of the enterprise to achieve agreed and stable results. Few now claim or expect to establish the objective facts of the matter in the way German historical scholars of Kierkegaard's time often did. Most acknowledge the importance of the interpreter's own perspective in determining scholarly results. Approaches run all the way from a chastened historical realism, for which objectivity must remain the ideal at which historical method aims, however modest one must be about the achievement, to extreme postmodern relativism. But Kierkegaard's complaint against the biblical scholarship he knew is quite different. It is that in 'objective' study of the texts one is not relating to them as Scripture at all. It 'makes God's Word into something impersonal, objective...instead of its being the voice of God that you shall hear' (Kierkegaard 1990a:39). This is observing the mirror instead of seeing oneself in it. Kierkegaard does not ask the scholars to abandon their work, only to distinguish it from the reading of Scripture:

If you are a scholar, remember that if you do not read God's Word in another way, it will turn out that after a lifetime of reading God's Word many hours every day, you nevertheless have never read—God's Word. Then make the distinction (in addition to the scholarly reading), so that you will also really begin to read God's Word or at least will confess to yourself that you, despite daily scholarly reading of it, are not reading God's Word, that you do not want anything to do with it at all.

(Kierkegaard 1990a:33)

What matters here is not the extent to which true objectivity may or may not be achieved in scholarly work, but the fact that one relates to the text with critical detachment, as an object of study and discussion, rather than with what Kierkegaard calls the 'subject's personal, infinite, impassioned interestedness' (Kierkegaard 1992: 27). This is the 'subjectivity' in which one stands before the text as a moral and religious person whose deepest concerns are at stake in the text. For the person who expects of the scholar's researches results which will speak to these concerns, 'Luther's rejection of the Letter of James is alone enough to bring him to despair' (Kierkegaard 1992: 26), since it presaged the way all such issues about the Bible come to be treated in biblical research as perpetually open and debatable. Even were the questions biblical scholarship asks to be conclusively answered, the methodological exclusion of subjectivity makes the results of no relevance to reading Scripture as Scripture. In order to see oneself in the mirror, one must ask different questions, interested questions, questions in which one is passionately engaged:

when you read God's Word you must (so that you actually do come to see yourself in the mirror) remember to say to yourself incessantly: It is I to whom it is speaking; It is I about whom it is speaking.

(Kierkegaard 1990a:35)

If God's Word is for you merely a doctrine, something impersonal and objective, then it is no mirror—an objective doctrine cannot be called a mirror; it is just as impossible to look at yourself in an objective doctrine as to look at yourself in a wall. And if you want to relate impersonally (objectively) to God's Word, there can be no question of looking at yourself in the mirror, because it takes a personality, an I, to look at oneself in a mirror; a wall can be seen in a mirror, but a wall cannot see itself or look at itself in a mirror. No, while reading God's Word you must incessantly say to yourself: It is I to whom it is speaking; it is I about whom it is speaking.

(Kierkegaard 1990a:43–44)

One aspect of the way Kierkegaard puts this must be immediately guarded against misunderstanding. Kierkegaard's extreme emphasis on the individual reader of Scripture—rather than on reading in

community—derives from the imperative he felt to enable people otherwise submerged in the unreflective and irresponsible mass to realize their personal subjectivity in relation to God. It does not exclude the kind of interpersonal subjectivity in which he relates to his ideal reader, and so it need not exclude the interpretation of Scripture in a community in which all share in impassioned interestedness in their hearing or reading of Scripture—the kind of community Scripture itself usually expects as its hearers.

So the first step is to see oneself in the mirror so as to hear oneself addressed by the text. The second is to put what one learns into practice—promptly, before, like the person in James' parable, one forgets (Kierkegaard 1990a:44). In this way one becomes, as James urges, not merely a hearer but also a doer of the word. So one only reads Scripture as Scripture if one takes it to heart and lives it: 'where God is concerned, knowing entails doing' (Polk 1997:83). Again Kierkegaard insists that action need not wait on learned interpretation of the text. After all, there are plenty of requirements in the Bible whose meaning is perfectly clear. Typically, Kierkegaard instances some of those which seem the most difficult and demanding to obey, including one from James (1:2: 'whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy'), in order to make the point that the difficulty lies in fulfilling these demands, not in understanding them (Kierkegaard 1990a:34–35). He is not, of course, claiming that all biblical texts are of this kind. There are obscure passages. His point is that there are enough perfectly clear ones to keep one busy without having to wait for the conclusions of biblical research before one can live as a Christian. The point can be supported by the fact that scholarly comments on such passages often make no evident contribution to believing and the obedient practice of them, regarding this dimension of the text as simply obvious or the domain of homiletics, while focusing instead on issues such as literary sources or literary forms which biblical scholars' training has equipped them to discuss.

It is worth noticing that Kierkegaard's critique of biblical scholarship is of a piece with his critique of Hegelian philosophy and natural science, in which it seemed to him that pure thought as an end in itself was taking the place of subjective existence. Instead of the kind of self-reflection which begins and ends in the personal immediacy of life, reflecting on it only in a way that plunges the individual back into it with enhanced and enlightened subjective engagement, he feared a kind of academic understanding of ethical

and religious life which substituted for and even counted as superior to the activities themselves (Elrod 1981:63). In the case of biblical scholarship, this kind of substitution of thought for action was all the more insidious in that it was not the professed aim. The professed aim was the study alleged to be necessary as preliminary to faith and action, but in reality, as Kierkegaard judged it, biblical scholarship functioned in the service of humanity's endlessly cunning attempt to evade the text's existential demands.

Could there be a kind of biblical scholarship which would escape this critique and function in the service of Scripture's role as Scripture? It is true that, as in the passage quoted above, Kierkegaard does not require biblical scholars to discontinue their studies, which he elsewhere compares with the wholly admirable scholarly task of preparing an edition of Cicero (Kierkegaard 1992:25–26), but he does not expect their labours to produce anything relevant to faith. Translation, he has to admit, is required, as presumably is textual criticism, but such 'scholarly preliminaries' are 'a necessary evil', to be accomplished as quickly as possible in order to enable Scripture to be read as Scripture (Kierkegaard 1990a:27). David Cain suggests that 'Kierkegaard develops a hermeneutic of humble scholarship (learning serves and aims at true reading, not at replacing it) and an engaged hermeneutic' (Cain 1991:72). This is indeed the only kind of hermeneutic that Kierkegaard could approve, but it is far from clear that he actually develops such a hermeneutic, at any rate not one which gives a place to 'scholarship' or 'learning' of any kind that modern biblical scholarship has nurtured and deployed. Philosophical acumen and psychological insight belong to Kierkegaard's hermeneutic as he practises it, but not historical or literary study.

I would suggest that Kierkegaard's attitude to biblical scholarship is a necessary over-reaction, necessary as a corrective but an over-reaction all the same. The antithesis between 'objective' study of the texts and 'subjective' appropriation of them as God's word is too sharply drawn. The analogy with personal relationships makes this point quite simply: While it is possible to know a great deal about someone without knowing them personally, knowledge about someone is not irrelevant but integral to the experience of knowing them personally. It is true that in the critical distancing from the text which historical and literary studies entail Scripture is not functioning as Scripture, and it is true that such studies cannot in and of themselves lead to the personal

engagement which response to Scripture as God's word requires. But Kierkegaard's real target is the isolation of such studies from subjective engagement with the text—whether as an end in themselves, as in much contemporary academic biblical studies, or as a necessary means to the end, as the biblical scholarship Kierkegaard knew claimed to be—and their elevation, in this splendid isolation understood as scholarly impartiality and objectivity, to the role of determining textual meaning. In this role biblical scholarship comes between the text and its readers, impeding rather than opening the way to personal engagement and appropriation. What is required is a hermeneutical approach which transcends the opposition between learning about the text and hearing the text's address. Within such an approach the relatively objective methods of historical and literary studies need not exclude the passionate interestedness which Kierkegaard rightly expects of anyone who reads Scripture as God's word. The difference which situating historical and literary methods within a hermeneutic of personal engagement makes will be like the difference between learning the life-story of someone one loves and learning the life-story of someone one has never met in order to write a biographical dictionary entry.

The study of James in the following chapters 1 – 3 employs well-established methods of biblical study: historical, literary and canonical (the last a more recent but no longer novel approach). Along with the last chapter, which, starting again from Kierkegaard, adumbrates some ways of relating James to our contemporary context, these chapters aim to open up several dimensions of reading James which complement each other and which, so far from foreclosing the task of interpretation, clear the paths for appropriate interpretation. They can, if the reader so desires, be brought together in the reader's own reading and appropriation of James. In order to see oneself in a mirror, one must look for oneself. No one can do this kind of seeing for another. Scholars cannot supply their readers with the personal engagement without which, as Kierkegaard observes, the Bible remains either 'an obsolete ancient book one puts aside' or 'an extremely remarkable ancient book upon which one spends an amazing diligence' (Kierkegaard 1990a:33). And yet this personal engagement cannot be merely an optional addition at the end of the interpretative process, making no difference to what has been understood up to that point: '*how* one reads is decisive in determining *what* one reads' (Cain 1991:71). Within an 'engaged

hermeneutic' there must be relative space for disciplined study and cool reflection, for looking at the text as well as hearing it, but this space is made within the sphere of passionate interestedness, not outside it. Only then can study be the kind of distanced reflection that informs and enhances the immediacy of faith and action rather than replacing it. If our study is not to be, as Kierkegaard feared, a means of keeping the New Testament at arm's length, then it is important that the text be heard before it is studied. It is important that text be practised as well as studied. It is important that the text be heard again and again while and after it is studied. However much one may need to step back and to stand aside, to discuss and to consider, to appraise and to explain, the point is to see oneself in the mirror and not to forget.

Readers whose interest in James is only as an ancient text which illuminates the history of early Christianity will find this interest well catered for in the first two chapters and much of the third. Not all readers of this book will be believing Christians for whom James is a scriptural text. But I do not subscribe to the currently fashionable view in academic biblical studies that, in order not to exclude those who are not believing Christians, one should speak and write as though no one is. Were I to engage in serious study of, for example, the Hindu scriptures, I should be interested not only in reconstructing their historical origins, if that were possible, but even more in understanding how they have functioned and still function as scriptural texts for those who believe and practise them. Were I to find, in books written about these texts, that sometimes such books address me as though I were a Hindu believer, I should find that helpful, not alienating, taking me, to some degree, inside what I seek to understand. And I should expect even my (in a Hindu sense) unbelieving encounter with these scriptures to have a dimension of personal engagement in which I might at least ask 'Is it I about whom this text speaks?' Academic detachment is a virtue in its place, but a deadly vice when it holds all understanding in its grip.

# An encyclical from James to the Diaspora

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[The words of James 1:17] are by one of the Lord's apostles, and if we ourselves have not deeply perceived their meaning, we nevertheless dare to trust that they are not casual and idle words, a flowery expression of a flimsy thought, but that they are faithful and unfailing, tried and tested, as was the life of the apostle who wrote them.

(Kierkegaard 1990b:32)

For [James] the thought of God's unchangeableness [1:17] is one of pure and unmixed comfort, peace, joy, happiness. And this is indeed eternally true. But let us not forget that the Apostle's joy has its explanation in the fact that the Apostle is the Apostle, that he has already long since wholly yielded himself in unconditional obedience to God's unchangeableness. He does not stand at the beginning, but rather at the end of the way, the narrow but good way which he had chosen in renunciation of everything, pursuing it invariably and without a backward look, hastening towards eternity with stronger and ever stronger strides.

(Kierkegaard 1941:230)

## I EPISTOLARY FORM AND EPISTOLARY SITUATION

Is the letter of James really a letter? It certainly purports to be. It begins with the stereotypical form of letter-opening with which all Greek letters began, consisting of the 'parties formula' ('X to Y') and a salutation ('Greetings!'). But scholars have often challenged

its right to be considered a 'real' letter. Here two different issues, often confused, need to be distinguished: (1) Does James have the form and content of a real letter? (2) Did it function as a real letter, i.e. was it really sent, by the hand of a messenger or messengers, from an author resident in one place to recipients living elsewhere?

With regard to the first issue, James has the only formal feature of the ancient letter form which was essential: the letter-opening. It is true that most ancient letters had both a stereotyped letter-opening and also a somewhat less stereotyped letter-closing (in Greek letters usually at least 'Farewell!'). James lacks a formal letter-closing. But the letter-closing, though normal, was not essential. Some private letters surviving in autograph from the New Testament period lack any letter-closing formula. Like James, they just end. In the case of James, it is also quite possible that scribes who copied the letter for subsequent use, when it no longer functioned as a letter, omitted a conventional letter-closing formula (such as 'Farewell!') which had no interest or function for later readers, while retaining the letter-opening because it identified the author. The important point is that the letter-opening is quite sufficient to make James formally a letter.

As for the so-called 'body' of the letter (everything between the opening and closing formulae), formal characteristics, though identifiable in some letters, were flexible and dispensable. Material of any form or content could be made into a letter by prefixing to it the formal letter-opening which specified that it was being sent by person or persons X to person or persons Y. This means that the content of a letter could belong to another literary genre. If one wished to send a legal document to a person in another place, one merely needed to prefix a letter-opening. The book of Revelation is generically an apocalypse, but it is also a letter, because the author wished to send it as a circular letter to the seven churches of the province of Asia, and by including a formal letter-opening in the introduction (1:4–5a) he made it a letter. James could have been written, without its first verse, as a work of paraenesis (ethical exhortation or advice) or wisdom instruction. It would then have been a work generically comparable to such Jewish and early Christian writings as the Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sira or the Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides or the Didache or the Teachings of Silvanus. It does indeed resemble such works, in form and content, but its first verse makes it also a letter.

It is not, of course, a personal letter, in which an author addresses the specific situation and concerns of a single recipient

or a small group of recipients. Rather it is an official letter or encyclical, in which James as head of the Jerusalem church addresses all of his compatriots and fellow-believers in the Jewish Diaspora. This makes it a different kind of letter from personal letters between friends or relatives, or even from the major Pauline letters which address the needs and contexts of specific Christian communities and so share some of the personal letter's closeness to oral communication between people who know each other. But an official letter or encyclical is no less a 'real' letter, i.e. a document which could have been actually sent, by the hand of a messenger or messengers, from an author resident in one place to recipients living elsewhere. If it was really sent, no doubt several copies would have been dispatched to important communities of Christian Jews in the Diaspora, where further copies would have been made for circulation to other communities.

An appropriate term for the kind of letter James is might be 'paraenetic encyclical'. The usual form of paraenetic letter (a letter offering exhortation or advice on the conduct of life) in the ancient world was addressed to an individual (Stowers 1986:91–124), but Jews and Christians wrote paraenesis in letter-form to communities or to circulate among communities. This is the kind of letter James is. In form and content it is a 'real' letter of this kind, but whether it *functioned* as a real letter is another issue. Its form and content cannot tell us whether it was actually sent from its purported author to its purported recipients. In the ancient world there were both real letters, actually sent from their authors to their recipients, and also fictional imitations of real letters. These might be by an author writing under his own name but using the letter-form as a literary convention, though in fact it is very difficult to distinguish a letter actually sent to its named recipient, but with a view to future publication for a general public in a collection of the author's letters, from a letter in which the named recipient is only a literary convention. In addition to such purely literary letters written under an author's own name, there were also many types of pseudepigraphal letters (Bauckham 1988), written under pseudonyms, usually attributed to illustrious figures of the past. But all such letters are fictitious imitations of real letters. They are formally indistinguishable from real letters.

So the letter of James could have actually functioned as a paraenetic encyclical, sent from James himself to the Diaspora, or the form of the paraenetic encyclical could be a literary convention

adopted either by James himself or by some later author who attributed his work to James. The first alternative is the one that will be adopted here. It cannot be conclusively proved, but it can be shown to be very plausible. An important, usually neglected factor is the plausibility of the epistolary situation which a paraenetic encyclical actually sent from James himself to the Diaspora presupposes. In order to explore this epistolary situation, we need to give more attention to the way the sender and the addressee are specified in the parties formula: 'James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the diaspora' (Jas. 1:1a).

The only natural interpretation of the phrase 'the twelve tribes in the diaspora' is that it refers to all members of the people of Israel who lived outside the land of Israel. The phrase distinguishes from those who lived in the land of Israel, who are not addressed, those who lived in the Diaspora, who are addressed. By this period, as a result of deportations and emigration from as early as the eighth century BCE onwards, a large majority of Jews lived outside Palestine. Jewish writers of this period sometimes claimed, with only a little exaggeration, that there were Jews in every part of the known world. It is these that James addresses.

Two widespread misunderstandings of the phrase need to be dispelled. One is that it could easily be understood as a reference not to Jews but to Christians (including both Jewish and Gentile Christians). It is true that, from the time of Paul (Gal. 6:16) onwards, the term 'Israel', and with it a whole range of Old Testament terminology for Israel, could be used of the church as the new, Messianic people of God, consisting of both Jewish and Gentile Christians. But the terms James uses were not so used. Reference to the tribal constitution of Israel, which had no equivalent in the new Israel, seems inherently unsuitable for transference to the church. The term 'Diaspora' is also unsuitable, since in Jewish usage it was uniformly associated, not simply with the condition of exile, but more specifically with God's scattering of his people as punishment for their sins.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore not surprising that, with only one apparent exception (1 Pet. 1:1), it is never used of the church in the Christian literature of the early centuries (van Unnik 1983, 1993).<sup>2</sup>

While unnatural as a reference to the church, the phrase is a natural way of referring to Israel outside the land. But the second prevalent misunderstanding that needs to be countered is that, in this period, reference to Israel as 'the twelve tribes' was purely ideal. This is based on the erroneous notion that the northern tribes (variously

reckoned as ten or nine and a half by Jewish writers of this period) had long ago disappeared. They had not. Descendants of those who had been deported by the Assyrians in the eighth century BCE were still living in the lands to which they had been deported—north Mesopotamia and Media—and formed an important part of the eastern Diaspora. In the first century CE contact between these people and Jerusalem was well maintained (see Bauckham 1997a). They sent their temple tax to Jerusalem and came themselves on pilgrimage when possible. Rabbi Nahum the Mede—who must have originated from the Israelite communities in Media<sup>3</sup>—was a well-known Pharisaic leader in Jerusalem (m. Naz. 5:4; b. Ket. 105a). The Gentile royal house of the kingdom of Adiabene—which was the most important area of settlement of the exiles of the northern tribes—converted to Judaism at about the same time as the apostle Paul converted to Christianity, and members of this royal house became very well known in Jerusalem.

New Testament scholars and students, and even historians of early Judaism, tend to think of the Jewish Diaspora as primarily the western Diaspora: the Jews who lived in the Mediterranean area, subject to the Roman Empire. But to Jews of the time, the eastern Diaspora in the lands across the Euphrates, to the east of the Roman Empire, was just as important. The western Diaspora consisted largely of descendants of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi, but the eastern Diaspora consisted not only of descendants of these southern tribes, in Babylonia, but also—probably in at least as large numbers—descendants<sup>3</sup> of the northern tribes, in the lands to the north of Babylonia. To encompass the whole Diaspora, ‘the twelve tribes in the diaspora’ was precisely the phrase needed. Of course, ‘the twelve tribes’, with its echo of the ancient constitution of the people of Israel as a whole, could probably never be a purely matter-of-fact term in Jewish ears. In particular, it evoked the hope of the regathering of all the tribes in the land of Israel by God in the Messianic age. But even this hope referred, not to lost tribes, but to known communities of people living in well-known parts of the world. All this suggests that, if James 1:1 does indicate the addressees of a real letter, it must have been intended to circulate in the eastern Diaspora as well as in the west. A letter intended only for the eastern Diaspora would more naturally have been written in Aramaic than in Greek (just as Josephus wrote the first edition of his *Jewish War*, now lost, in Aramaic for the eastern Diaspora). But Greek was well used in the

Parthian Empire, and is the language which would have to be used if the same letter were to circulate to any part of the Diaspora.

James 1:1 does not specify that it is addressed to *Christian* members of the twelve tribes in the Diaspora. Yet the letter presupposes its readers' allegiance to Jesus the Messiah. It is not Christian missionary literature which could be aimed at non-Christian Jews. The reason the addressees are not distinguished as Christians is that early Jewish Christians thought of themselves, not as a specific sect distinguished from other Jews but as the nucleus of the Messianic renewal of the people of Israel which was under way and would come to include all Israel. In a sense they were the twelve tribes, not in an exclusive sense so as to deny other Jews this title, but with a kind of representative inclusiveness. What James addresses in practice to those Jews who already confess the Messiah Jesus, he addresses in principle to all Israel.

From where would anyone address a letter to the twelve tribes in the Diaspora? Of course, from Jerusalem. Jerusalem was that centre from which the tribes had been dispersed throughout the world, to which they made every effort to return on pilgrimage, and to which they confidently expected to be regathered in the Messianic age. It was both geographically at the centre of the Diaspora and religiously the centre to which the Diaspora was bound by a variety of deeply felt spiritual ties. A letter to the Diaspora must come from Jerusalem. A Christian letter to the Diaspora could come from no one more appropriately than from James.

There is no doubt who the James is to whom the letter of James is ascribed, though there is dispute as to whether he is the real author or not. Since James (Jacob) was a common Jewish name, common even among early Christian leaders (cf. Mark 3:17, 18; 15:40), a particular James had usually to be distinguished from others, for example by reference to his father. Only one James was so uniquely prominent in the early Christian movement that he could be identified purely by the phrase: 'James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ' (cf. Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; 1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 2:9, 12). This James was the eldest of the four brothers of Jesus (Mark 6:3). He rose to prominence in the leadership of the Jerusalem church as the twelve ceased to fulfil that role (see Bauckham 1995a). He then occupied a unique position as head of the Jerusalem church for over a decade, from c. 49 CE until his martyrdom in 62. With Peter and Paul, James was one of the three most influential leaders in the first generation of the Christian movement. His position in

Jerusalem gave him a role not only in Jerusalem, but in the worldwide Christian movement, since Jerusalem was the mother church, which for most Jewish Christians (as well as probably for many Gentile converts) occupied the position of centrality and authority they had been accustomed as Jews to attributing to Jerusalem and its temple. Since Paul had an unusual sense of his own apostolic independence from Jerusalem, and since many of the New Testament writings date from after 70 CE, when the Jerusalem church inevitably lost its role in the Christian movement outside Palestine, the impression the New Testament gives most readers does not do justice to the importance either of the Jerusalem church or of James himself in the period before 70. But we can glimpse the prominent role of James occasionally in the New Testament (Acts 15:13–21; 21:18–25; Gal. 2:12; Jude 1; cf. Rom. 15:25–31), and from his remarkable reputation in second- and third-century Christian literature, when his authority was claimed by Catholic, Gnostic and Jewish Christian writers alike (Martin 1988:xli–lxi; Painter 1997). Most of the later traditions about James are at least semi-legendary, but they are nevertheless a reflection of his historical pre-eminence.

When James was given a distinguishing epithet, he was either 'James the brother of the Lord' (Gal. 1:19; Hegesippus, *apud* Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 2.23.4), or (perhaps already before his death, certainly thereafter) 'James the Righteous' (Gospel of the Hebrews 7; Gospel of Thomas 12; Hegesippus, *apud* Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 2.23.4, 7, 16; etc.). The epithet 'servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ' in James 1:1 is not meant to distinguish him from other Jameses, but to indicate his authority for addressing his readers. 'Servant' is here a term for someone called to serve God and his people in a leadership role (cf. Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1; Jude 1; and see Bauckham 1983:23–24). The use of the term is significant, since there was certainly a tendency in Palestinian Jewish Christianity to attribute a special status to relatives of Jesus on the basis of their family relationship to Jesus. In a pseudepigraphal work attributed to James in such circles we might have expected his authority to be indicated by the term 'brother of the Lord'. That this is not the case is a minor pointer in the direction of the authenticity of the letter. The use, instead, of 'servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ' is not due to modesty, as commentators on James and on Jude 1 sometimes suggest, but recognition that natural relationship to Jesus is not a valid basis for authority in the church (Bauckham 1990:125–130).

Luke's account of the Jerusalem council and its ruling on the status of Gentile converts in the Christian mission outside Palestine (Acts 15), though its historical value is widely disputed, probably does reflect accurately the position of authority over the expanding Christian movement which the Jerusalem church leaders exercised in the period of James' leadership in Jerusalem (Bauckham 1995a, 1996a). Paul had reservations about this authority, but there is no reason to think they were shared by the majority of those Christian Jews who spread the Gospel and founded Christian communities throughout the Diaspora. Many of these, such as Peter, Barnabas, Mark, the other brothers of Jesus (1 Cor. 9:5), and Andronicus and Junia (Rom. 16:7), had been members of the Jerusalem church and would naturally maintain close links with it. We should also not forget that the Jerusalem church would have played a unique role in the spread of the Christian Gospel in the Diaspora, not only by sending out its own members as missionaries, but also by preaching to the thousands of pilgrims from all parts of the Diaspora who came to Jerusalem every year for the festivals and who could take the Christian message back to their own communities. The church in Rome is an example of an extremely important Christian community whose origins had nothing to do with the Pauline mission, but probably much to do with the Jerusalem church. Its links with Jerusalem seem to have remained close (Rom. 16:7, 13; 1 Pet. 5:12–13).

Since we have noticed that the letter of James seems to be addressed to the eastern as well as the western Diaspora, it is important also to notice evidence of Jerusalem's connection with the Christian movement there. The connections between the eastern Diaspora and Jerusalem would have ensured that the Christian message travelled east as quickly and easily as it travelled west, though we do not know the story any more than we know the story of the origins of the church in Rome or Alexandria. Already by the time of Paul's conversions there was a Christian church in Damascus (Acts 9; 1 Cor. 11:32–33), first stop on the routes north-east to Edessa and Nisibis, the area where descendants of the northern tribes were living, and east to Babylonia, with its large Jewish communities descended from the exiles of the southern tribes. There is some reason to think that relatives of Jesus were active in the mission to the eastern Diaspora (Bauckham 1990:68–70). But especially interesting is a saying attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas, which reflects the Gospel tradition of the churches in the north Mesopotamian area around Edessa and Nisibis:

The disciples said to Jesus: 'We know that you will depart from us. Who is it who will be great over us?' Jesus said to them: 'Wherever you shall have come, you are to go to James the Righteous, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being.'

(Gospel of Thomas 12)

This is clearly a saying which presupposes the mission of the apostles and gives to James the authority at the centre to which, wherever their missionary travels take them, they are to look. Though it is extremely unlikely to be an authentic saying of Jesus, it must derive from early Jewish Christian circles and probably dates from James' lifetime, in which it makes excellent sense as an expression of the Jerusalem leader's authority over the mission to the Diaspora. Its preservation in the Gospel tradition of the north Mesopotamian region shows that this authority was axiomatic for the mission to the eastern Diaspora.

The relationship we have sketched between James, the Jerusalem church and Jewish Christians in the Diaspora provides a highly plausible epistolary situation for a letter actually sent from James of Jerusalem to the Jewish Christian communities in the eastern and western Diasporas. But to this reconstruction of the epistolary situation we can add one further, important factor: the tradition of letters from Jerusalem to the Diaspora (Taatz 1991; Bauckham 1995a:423–425). This was one way in which the central place of Jerusalem in the religious life of Jews throughout the world took effect. A practice of letters from the authorities in Jerusalem to Jews in the Diaspora, giving directions on cultic and other legal matters, is evidenced as early as the late fifth century BCE by a letter to the Jewish colony at Elephantine in Egypt, giving instructions about the way that Passover and Unleavened Bread are to be observed (Cowley 1923:60–65). Two letters from Jerusalem to the Jews of Egypt (143 and 124 BCE) enjoining the observance of the recently instituted festival of Hanukkah are preserved in 2 Macc. 1:1–10a (the earlier letter is quoted in vv. 7–8), while 1:10b–2:18 provides an inauthentic example of the genre, on the same subject (Goldstein 1983:137–188).

Apparently contemporary with the early Jerusalem church is the letter to the Diaspora ascribed to Gamaliel the Elder, the early first-century Pharisee, declaring the intercalation of a month in that year (Sperling 1982:191–196). It is addressed to 'our brethren, belonging to the exile of Babylonia and belonging to the exile of Media and

belonging to the exile of Greece, and the rest of all the exiles of Israel' (y. Sanh. 1:2 [18d]; cf. t. Sanh. 2:6; b. Sanh. 11a). Since a calendrical matter of this kind would have been the responsibility of the temple authorities, the letter is somewhat problematic, but on the other hand there seems little reason for such a letter to have been invented<sup>4</sup> and good reasons for accepting the authenticity of the group of letters to which it belongs. Perhaps Gamaliel, as a Pharisaic member of the high priest's council (cf. Acts 5:34), writes to Jews of Pharisaic allegiance in the Diaspora.<sup>5</sup> If so, it provides an interesting precedent for letters from Christian leaders in Jerusalem to Christian Jews in the Diaspora. Whether or not this letter as it stands is authentic, we can be sure that such letters were regularly sent, as more general references to communications from the temple authorities to the Diaspora on calendrical and other matters confirm (m. Rosh. Hash. 1:3–4; m. Ohol. 17:5; Acts 28:21).

As well as letters on specific points of cultic or other practice, there may also have been letters of more general advice and paraenesis. The only authentic letter of this type to have survived is the letter from the prophet Jeremiah to the exiles in Babylon (Jer. 29), which inspired some later fictional letters of the kind. Because Jeremiah 10:11 is in Aramaic, not Hebrew, the Targum to Jeremiah transforms it into a letter from Jeremiah to the exiles in Babylon, while the apocryphal Letter of Jeremiah (late fourth century BCE) to the exiles was similarly inspired by such an understanding of the verse.<sup>6</sup> It is a lengthy warning against pagan idolatry. Finally, the Apocalypse of Baruch (late first century CE) concludes with a long paraenetic letter from Baruch (in Jerusalem soon after the fall of the city to the Babylonians) to the nine and a half tribes in exile (2 Baruch 78–86).<sup>7</sup> These fictional letters may reflect a similar genre of genuine letters.

From the early Christian movement we have one example of each of these two types of letters from the centre to the Diaspora. The letter in Acts 15:23–29, which communicates a major halakhic decision of the Jerusalem Christian leadership, assumed to have universal authority on such a matter, to Gentile members of churches in the Diaspora, belongs to the first type (see Bauckham 1995a). The letter of James conforms rather to the second type. It communicates to the Diaspora the teaching of the revered head of the mother church in Jerusalem on how Messianic Jews should live.

Thus, when the letter-opening of James is taken seriously and related to its proper historical context, it can be seen to indicate a historically plausible epistolary situation for precisely the kind of

paraenetic encyclical that James is, addressed not to a specific Christian community in its specific situation, as the major Pauline letters are, but to any and every Jewish Christian community in the Diaspora to which it might circulate. It should be noted that this epistolary situation to a large extent ceased to exist soon after the death of James. Although there were successors to James as Jewish Christian ‘bishops’ of Jerusalem down to the Bar Kokhba war (Bauckham 1990:70–94), their influence outside Palestine must have rapidly waned after the Jewish revolt and the destruction of the Temple. When Jerusalem was no longer in practice but only in symbol and hope the centre of the Jewish world, the frequent communication with the Diaspora which gave the mother church its role in relation to the churches of the Diaspora can hardly have continued. Palestinian Jewish Christianity was on the road to marginality and obscurity, while Jewish Christians elsewhere increasingly found their identity in common with Gentile Christians rather than in relation to the rest of the Jewish community. By the late first century the epistolary situation presupposed by the letter-opening of James could only be a historical fiction, serving no purpose except to set the work back in the period when James was the central authority for a world-wide Jewish Christian movement. In that case, it is surprising, in comparison with other pseudepigraphal works, that the fiction is not further developed. But in any case, when the epistolary situation fits so well both the nature of the letter and the historical position of James, the burden of proof must lie with those who contest the work’s authenticity.

Many modern scholars have considered that James was not written from Jerusalem to the Diaspora, but was written in the Diaspora, either by a Diaspora Jew or by a Gentile with close associations with the synagogue. Martin Dibelius (writing in 1921, though the English translation of Greeven’s revised edition of his work was published in 1975) is probably considerably responsible for the popularity of this position. Its basis was the allegedly Hellenistic character of the letter in language and content. James is written in quite accomplished Greek with some Greek literary features. Its content is wisdom paraenesis, supposed to be more characteristic of Hellenized Judaism in the Diaspora than of Palestine, where a more marked apocalyptic orientation would be expected. Its interpretation of the law—which makes no reference to ‘ritual’ aspects of the law, such as purity rules and cultic requirements—is supposed to reflect Diaspora Judaism’s

emphasis on the moral law at the expense of the ritual law, whereas strict observance of the ritual law would be emphasized by a Palestinian Jewish Christian.

All these arguments rely on distinctions between Diaspora Judaism, regarded as Hellenized, and Palestinian Judaism, supposed not to be Hellenized, which for a variety of reasons have been, since Dibelius wrote, largely disproved (Penner 1996:75–87), though not all writers on James have yet caught up with this. In fact, writers on James have long pointed out that a hard-and-fast distinction between Hellenistic Jews in the Diaspora and non-Hellenized Palestinian Jews is artificial and cannot be used to assign James to the Diaspora (e.g. Chainé 1927:cvi–cvii; Kittel 1942:78–81). But it is the magisterial work of Martin Hengel (1974, 1989) which has changed the face of New Testament scholarship and discredited the way this distinction had habitually been used as a key to understanding early Christian history. Hengel showed that the extent to which Jewish Palestine had been Hellenized, in language and culture, in the period since Alexander made it quite inappropriate to call Diaspora Judaism Hellenistic Judaism, as though Palestinian Judaism were not Hellenized. All Judaism in this period is Hellenized. Now it is debatable whether Hengel presses his case too far. There were degrees of Hellenization, and no doubt differences within Palestine. What can no longer be argued is that a work shows such proficiency in Greek and such acquaintance with Hellenistic culture that a Palestinian Jew could not have written it. And while it is true that Philo of Alexandria has no Palestinian Jewish equal as a Hellenistic intellectual, it is also true that he has no such equal elsewhere in the Diaspora. The author of James was certainly no Philo. Even if Hengel is thought to have somewhat exaggerated the permeation of Palestine by Hellenistic culture, the authorship of James by a Palestinian Jew is easily conceivable.

The contrast of sapientialism in the Diaspora and apocalypticism in Palestine should always have been dubious. Now that previously unknown wisdom literature has been identified among the texts from Qumran (1Q27, 4Q184, 185, 298, 299–301, 412, 415–418, 420–421, 423, 424, 425, 525), and now that the Palestinian Gospel source Q is widely regarded as basically sapiential in character and Jesus himself increasingly characterized as a Jewish wisdom teacher, few doubt that wisdom paraenesis is as characteristic of Palestinian Judaism as apocalyptic literature is. (The Septuagint version of Proverbs, a highly sophisticated Greek rendering of the Hebrew

book, may have been made in Jerusalem: Cook 1997:327.) We shall later have cause also to question some of the distinctions customarily drawn between wisdom and apocalyptic eschatology. As for the allegedly different attitudes to the law in Diaspora and Palestinian Judaism, it is clear that in fact most Diaspora Jews took the whole law seriously and, with due allowance for living away from the temple and outside the land of Israel, observed its 'ritual' aspects (Sanders 1990: chapter IV). No doubt James takes for granted his readers' observance of the whole law, while focusing his attention on its moral demands. There is no reason why a Palestinian Jew should not do this, especially if he were a disciple of Jesus.

Finally, we should notice an argument for a Diaspora location for James which does not rest on distinctions between the kinds of Judaism to be found in Diaspora and Palestine. This is the argument which relies on some close affinities between James and Christian literature of Roman origin—1 Peter, 1 Clement and especially the *Shepherd* of Hermas—to postulate that James itself was written in Rome (Laws 1973, 1980:25–26; Deppe 1989:211–215). However, these affinities can also be explained by the close links between the churches of Jerusalem and Rome we have mentioned above, and the probable formative role of Jewish Christians from Jerusalem in the early development of the Roman church. The letter of James would have been especially valued in Rome, and would have influenced Roman Christian writers both directly and through having helped to form the paraenetic tradition of that church (cf. Deppe 1989:265–276).

If there are no valid arguments against a Palestinian origin for the letter of James, are there still arguments against James himself as the author? Such arguments are actually some of the same arguments which have been commonly used against a Palestinian origin, now deployed more specifically against authorship by James. Firstly, while a Palestinian Jew could certainly be responsible for the good Greek and Hellenistic literary features of the letter, could James, a native of Nazareth, have acquired this degree of Hellenistic literary culture? Secondly, would *this* Palestinian Jew, who in the debates about the law in the early church was a noted conservative, insisting on strict observance of the whole law, have written about the law in a way which ignores its 'ritual' aspects?

On the first point, it is not possible to know what degree of competence in Greek the historical James could have acquired in his native Galilee. How far the villagers of Nazareth would be in touch

with or isolated from the urban Hellenism of nearby Sepphoris is still the subject of unresolved debate. But James lived for some thirty years in the cosmopolitan city of Jerusalem, where, Hengel estimates (1989:10), some 10–20 per cent of the population were Jews whose vernacular or mother tongue was Greek. These were Jews from the Diaspora who had settled permanently in Jerusalem. The so-called ‘Hellenists’ in the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:1) were Christian converts from among these Greek-speaking Jews. The contrasted category of ‘Hebrews’ in the church were not Jews who could not speak Greek, but Jews whose mother tongue was Aramaic. Doubtless most of these could also speak Greek. But in addition to the large proportion of the population of the city who spoke primarily Greek, there were also, for several weeks every year, thousands of pilgrims from the Diaspora, many of whom could speak Greek and little or no Aramaic. Preaching the Christian message to these visitors must have been a significant part of the ministry of the Jerusalem church. James had every opportunity and very good reasons for acquiring good proficiency in Greek. He would be quite used to using the Septuagint Greek version of the Scriptures in evangelism, discussion and worship with Greek-speaking Jews. Finally, in the composition of his letter he could easily have had the assistance of a more Hellenized Jew than himself, a native Greek speaker with a good Greek education, since there were certainly such people in the Jerusalem church.<sup>8</sup> Since Josephus employed assistants to polish his Greek (*Contra Apionem* 1.50)—not because he could not write Greek quite competently, but in order to give his work the extra literary flair and flourish he wanted—there is no reason why James should not have done the same.

Much discussion of the Jerusalem church and of James himself has been distorted by the unfounded notions that the distinction between Hellenists and Hebrews was not just a linguistic difference but corresponded to more liberal and more conservative attitudes to the law, and that James himself was associated with a conservative, rigorist faction in the Jerusalem church. The evidence does not support these popular scholarly positions (see Hill 1992; Bauckham 1995a). There were differences of opinion within the Jerusalem church, but it is a mistake to align them with the linguistic differences. Moreover, it is extremely doubtful whether anyone in the Jerusalem church would have questioned that Jewish Christians should continue to observe the whole law. Debates concerned the relationship of Gentile converts to the law, a quite distinct issue (cf. Acts 15; 21:20–25). The only evidence of

any value for the view that James was particularly a stickler for strict observance of the ‘ritual’ aspects of the law by Jewish Christians is Galatians 2:12. It is impossible to know whether the ‘people from James’, to whom Paul there refers, actually spoke for James or only claimed his authority. But, even supposing James did, in this context, insist that Jewish Christians should not compromise their observance of the law for the sake of table fellowship with Gentiles, he did so in a context where the question had been raised. This is no reason for thinking that in normal circumstances, where it was taken for granted that Jewish Christians continued to observe the whole law, James would have had any interest in making a point of its ritual aspects. There is no difficulty in supposing that, while taking these entirely for granted, he followed Jesus in regarding the moral aspects of the law as its main point and purpose. Such a position makes good sense of the treatment of the law in the letter of James, which is addressed to Jewish Christians who did not question their obligation to the whole law and does not raise the issue of Gentile converts.<sup>9</sup>

In conclusion, there are no serious arguments to weigh against the plausibility of the epistolary situation indicated by James 1:1. The letter can be read as what it purports to be: an encyclical from James of Jerusalem to the Diaspora.

## **2 READING JAMES AS AN ENCYCLICAL TO THE DIASPORA**

Taking seriously the epistolary situation which the letter of James claims for itself means resisting the tendency in some scholarly work on James to envisage a specific ‘community of James’ — whether a single Christian community or a group of such communities—which the work has in view as its audience (e.g. Penner 1996:259–278). Like the attempt to specify and reconstruct the specific community to which allegedly each of the Gospels was addressed (for a critique of this prevalent approach to Gospel audiences, see Bauckham 1997b), this tendency is strongly influenced by the model of the major Pauline letters, addressed to the specific circumstances of specific Christian communities, whose scholarly reconstruction from the evidence of the letters can be expected to aid considerably the task of understanding the letters. (Adamson 1989:113–115, actually compares James with 1

Corinthians, in order to maintain that 'James has an ad hoc character and purpose, though with a somewhat wider encyclical audience in view than Paul' had [114]. He seems implicitly to take the kind of 'occasional' letter that 1 Corinthians is as a kind of standard, measured against which a text addressed to a general Christian audience in general terms would be inferior. This kind of evaluative judgment is connected with the widespread scholarly confusion about what it would mean to call James a 'real' letter.) The model of a Pauline letter is not applicable to James as an encyclical addressed to any and every Jewish Christian community in the Jewish Diaspora. This, as we shall see later, is not the only respect in which study of James needs to step boldly out from under the shadow of Paul where it has too often sheltered.

A number of scholars who argue that the letter of James accurately reflects a first-century Palestinian social, economic and political situation have distinguished the Palestinian context to which the contents of James were first addressed—perhaps as sermons—and the wider audience for which our present text of the letter was prepared, whether by James himself or someone else (Rendall 1927:33; Davids 1982; Martin 1988:lxix-lxxvii). That everything James says is quite appropriate to a setting in first-century Jewish Palestine does not, however, mean that it would not be equally appropriate in Diaspora settings. Of course, James will reflect the context in which he writes, but, living in Jerusalem and in constant contact with Jewish pilgrims from the Diaspora, he will not be ignorant of conditions in the Diaspora or of the Jewish Christian communities in the Diaspora. Whatever the pre-history of his encyclical's contents, he is not likely to have included material so specific to his local context as to be inapplicable elsewhere. The seemingly irrepressible desire of modern historical criticism of the New Testament to specify the contexts of the original audiences of New Testament texts as closely as possible must be resisted, since the character of James as an encyclical contradicts it. We must take seriously the implication that James addresses not specific but typical situations, such as he knows it is quite likely his readers in many parts of the Diaspora might encounter, and rebukes typical failings, such as he might think likely to occur in many Jewish Christian communities in the Diaspora.

In fact, the text is entirely consistent with this necessary character of an encyclical. By contrast with the major Pauline letters, it is remarkable that, after 1:1, James makes no factual statement about

his addressees at all. Everything is hypothetical. He does not begin, 'I know what you are suffering...', but: 'whenever you face trials of any kind...' (1:2). Whatever sort of trials might in the coming years face whatever Jewish Christian community might be reading this text, the advice that follows will apply. In 2:2–3 he sketches a hypothetical scene, one which might well occur in a Jewish Christian meeting. What follows (vv. 4–7) is premised on the hypothesis. In diatribal style James addresses his imagined audience in the community situation imagined in verses 2–3. When, later in chapter 2, he cites views to which he responds, he is, again in diatribal style, in dialogue with imagined, hypothetical opponents (see Chapter 2, section 2.5 below), and does not even refer to them as 'someone among you' (as we might expect from 3:13; 5:13–14, 19) but merely as 'someone' (2:14, 18). Of course, he must expect what he writes in chapter 2 to be relevant to many of his readers (nothing in an encyclical need be equally relevant to all readers), but only in general terms. (After all, even later, Gentile Christian communities have usually found this chapter relevant to them.)

Chapter 4 begins: 'Where do battles and disputes among you come from?' This need not presuppose any factual knowledge of specific local disputes, and nothing that follows requires that. The rather hyperbolic language of verses 1–3 reflects what was often said in moral instruction on the common *topos* envy (Johnson 1983). Knowing what 'the world' (4:4), the values of the dominant society amidst which all Christian communities lived, was like, James can expect that disputes due to competitive envy will take place sooner or later in most communities his letter might reach. For rhetorical reasons he speaks directly, addressing those involved in such disputes, but he says nothing that would not apply to any such dispute. When he turns to address and to denounce the wealthy (whether directly addressing wealthy members of the communities or rhetorically addressing outsiders is left unclear), he simply envisages the two categories of wealthy people to be found everywhere, merchants (4:13–15) and wealthy landowners (5:1–6), and castigates the sins for which each class was notorious. All is manifestly typical or hypothetical.

If James is an encyclical addressing any Jewish Christian community anywhere in the Diaspora in appropriately general terms, it is unlikely to have been occasioned by any specific exigencies. This is another key difference from the major Pauline

letters, which again must not be used as a model to be imposed on James. The teaching James provides does not meet the needs of a particular moment. It is the teaching the Jewish Christians of the Diaspora might need at any time. As we shall see in detail in the next chapter, the letter is a compendium of James' wisdom, arranged in various topical sections and encapsulated in memorable aphorisms. It is a resource for the churches to draw on regularly and whenever necessary. It is wisdom for them to appropriate and live by.

Finally, the address of James to Jewish Christians raises an issue which we shall take up in Chapter 3, section 2. When James is read within its canonical context in the New Testament, does it still address only Jewish Christians or can it be heard also by Gentile Christians as addressed to them?

## The wisdom of James, disciple of Jesus the sage

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The Christian life has aphorisms with their own characteristic quality which falls outside the range of esthetic qualifications.

(Kierkegaard 1975:465)

[The philosopher might say of Jesus:] He has no doctrine, no system, basically he knows nothing; there are a few aphorisms, some maxims, and a couple of parables, which he goes on repeating or revising, whereby he blinds the masses.... One may concede that he is a remarkable subjectivity, and that as a teacher, no matter how you judge his signs and wonders, he does continually repeat the miracle with the five small loaves and sets the whole country in motion with only some lyrics and aphorisms.

(Kierkegaard 1991:48–49)

### I JAMES AS WISDOM PARAENESIS

In Chapter 1 we defined James as a ‘paraenetic encyclical’ communicating to Jewish Christians in the Diaspora James’ teaching on how they should live as Messianic Jews. Jewish paraenesis in this period belongs to the tradition of Jewish wisdom literature, since ‘wisdom’ in the biblical and Jewish tradition meant practical insight and instruction in the conduct of life. So in the present chapter we shall be considering the letter of James as a collection of James’ wisdom. Beginning with the literary characteristics James shares with the tradition of wisdom paraenesis, we shall then move on to consider the character of James’ wisdom teaching, and to attempt to define its relationship both to the Jewish wisdom tradition and to the teaching of Jesus, since Jesus can also be considered a wisdom

teacher. Our thesis will be that James, as a disciple of Jesus the sage, is a wisdom teacher who has made the wisdom of Jesus his own, and who seeks to appropriate and to develop the resources of the Jewish wisdom tradition in a way that is guided and controlled by the teaching of Jesus. More than any other New Testament writer, James is a teacher in the style of Jesus, a creative exponent of the wisdom of Jesus, a disciple who, 'having been fully trained' in his teacher's wisdom, has become himself a teacher of wisdom 'like his teacher' (Luke 6:40).

Jewish wisdom literature, broadly understood, includes works of various genres and varying content, though all owing something to a common tradition of thought. For our purposes there are major works of wisdom, such as Job, Ecclesiastes and the Wisdom of Solomon, which are only of marginal relevance. It is the tradition of wisdom paraenesis that James most obviously resembles (for the genre see especially Gammie 1990a). The paradigm works in this tradition are Proverbs and the Wisdom of Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus), while the Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides (a Jewish work under the name of a pagan sage) and the Teachings of Silvanus (an early Christian work in which Jewish wisdom combines with Hellenistic rhetoric and Gnostic tendencies) continue this tradition in Hellenistic literary form (van der Horst 1978:77–80; Schoedel 1975). The paraenetic passages in the book of Tobit (4:5–19; 12: 6–10) are wisdom paraenesis, as are several fragmentary wisdom texts from Qumran (4Q185, 298, 415–418, 420–421, 423, 424, 525).<sup>1</sup> All these works give instruction in the right way to live, and typically employ short aphorisms—such as proverbs and admonitions or precepts—assembled in collections which vary from the almost random to the carefully composed sequence. The short aphorism is the literary hallmark of the tradition, but longer passages of exhortation, instruction and illustration can occur.

The affinities of form and content between James and such Jewish wisdom literature have often been noticed and discussed (e.g. Mayor 1897:lxxi–lxxii, lxxiv–lxxvii; Halson 1968; Baasland 1982; Martin 1988:lxvii–xciii; Gowan 1993). So has James' indebtedness to the tradition of the sayings of Jesus (e.g. Kittel 1942; Davids 1985; Adamson 1989:169–194; Deppe 1989). What has rarely been done is to bring these two aspects of James together<sup>2</sup> by means of the recognition that in some sense both Jesus and James were Jewish wisdom teachers. The increasing weight which recent study of the historical Jesus has been placing

on the insight that Jesus taught in the manner of the Jewish sapiential tradition (e.g. Stein 1978: 2–3; Borg 1987:97–124; Scott 1990; Witherington 1994: chapter 4) makes it opportune to approach James from this point of view. Hartin (1991, followed by Witherington 1994:236–244) has made the most substantial contribution along these lines, but his work focuses on the relation between James and the primitive Gospel source Q, treated as a work in the tradition of Jewish wisdom literature. Hartin's attempts to prove that James knew the Gospel traditions (primarily, but not only, Q) in the form in which they were transmitted in the Matthean community and to find in James a Wisdom Christology related to those of Q and Matthew, are unsuccessful (Bauckham 1993; Penner 1996:116–120). James does not have a Wisdom Christology (i.e. he does not identify Jesus with the personified figure of Wisdom), and it is not possible to pin down his knowledge of the tradition of Jesus' sayings to particular Gospels or Gospel sources known to us. No doubt he knew the sayings of Jesus in the oral tradition of the Jerusalem church. Although it is significant for the understanding of Jesus as a wisdom teacher to recognize that a collection of Jesus' sayings, arranged thematically in discourses as they were in Q, resembles in some ways collections of Jewish wisdom paraenesis, our argument will give no particular emphasis to Q in distinction from other traditions of the sayings of Jesus. Our interest is in the way in which James, as a Jewish wisdom teacher, has appropriated and continues the wisdom of Jesus.

How does wisdom teaching differ from other forms of Jewish teaching, such as law, prophecy or apocalypse? The difference of literary genre here corresponds to a different concept of the kind of teaching the genre is used to convey. Law is the command of God to his covenant people. Prophecy is a message from God to people at a particular juncture in their history. Apocalypse is the communication of revelations of divine mysteries. Wisdom is the teaching of a sage who instructs with the authority of his own experience, observation, insight and reflection. Typically the sage gives reasons why the behaviour he commends should be adopted. Typically he uses analogies and examples from common experience, which help his hearers to see the world in a certain way. He shares with them a perspective on life and the way to live it.

The differences should not be exaggerated (cf. Murphy 1992: 922–923). Some modern accounts of Old Testament wisdom can

make it sound almost secular and humanistic. But, although wisdom in the Old Testament tradition includes shrewd observation and prudential advice, its perspective on life is religious. Wisdom is God-given, and 'the fear of the Lord' is fundamental to the sage's perspective on the world.

For the study of wisdom in relation to the New Testament, it is also extremely important to appreciate how wisdom changed and developed between Proverbs and the New Testament period. Readers of Proverbs can easily feel themselves to be in a quite different world from that of the law and the prophets. There is no reference to God's saving acts in Israel's history or his revelation of himself to Israel, no reference to law or prophecy. Common human experience and reason are the locus of insight into God's ways and God's world and the proper forms of human behaviour. But from the Wisdom of Ben Sira (early second century BCE) onwards, this changes. All or most of the books of the Hebrew Bible are by this time authoritative scriptures for all Jewish sages. The law of Moses is understood to embody the same divine wisdom as inspires the sages (Sir. 24; Baruch 4:1–4; 4Q525). Ben Sira's wisdom, though very clearly in the tradition of Proverbs, which is its principal scriptural source, also draws freely on the law and the prophets. Both the Qumran Sapiential Work A (see Harrington 1996:48, 58–59) and Pseudo-Phocylides mix precepts drawn from the law with others drawn from the wisdom tradition. Not that the sages propound law as such. Nor do they engage in the kind of legal interpretation which aims to clarify the precise application of the law, such as we find in 4QMMT and later in the rabbinic literature. But the law is an important source from which they draw insights which they communicate in sapiential mode. In the Second Temple period it was inconceivable that any Jewish teaching about how to live could ignore the law. A different development also to be seen in Ben Sira is a more explicit awareness that the sage's wisdom is inspired by God, such that he can even equate it with prophecy (Sir. 24:33).

Wisdom in the later Second Temple period was no longer, even if it had once been, a distinct tradition of thought with a worldview quite different from that found in other types of Jewish literature. Another sign of this is that, after Ben Sira, wisdom literature takes on the eschatological orientation common to nearly all Jewish thought in the later Second Temple period. The old sapiential conviction, prominent in Proverbs, that acts have morally appropriate consequences which work themselves out in the lives of their perpetrators was a conviction

about human life this side of death. Despite the wisdom tradition's own critiques of this notion, Ben Sira still strenuously maintains that justice is done to the wicked in the manner of their death if not before. But Ben Sira is the last Jewish sage who has no concept of life after death. Thereafter, as we can see in the Qumran wisdom texts and in the Wisdom of Solomon, wisdom teaches eschatological judgment as a central feature of its perspective on the world. The Qumran texts, which are the Palestinian Jewish wisdom texts closest in date to the New Testament, are very important in decisively demonstrating this point (Harrington 1997a:250, 254; Collins 1997b:274–276).

This by no means destroys the difference between wisdom paraenesis and apocalyptic literature. Just as wisdom teaching does not propound law, so it does not offer apocalyptic revelations of the eschatological future, as many apocalypses do. These are distinctions of genre and function. But just as later wisdom teaching assumes the authority of the law for Jewish life and bases some of its instruction on the law, so later wisdom teaching views the world in an eschatological perspective and attaches eschatological sanctions to its precepts. Conversely, apocalyptic literature can easily include themes and literary forms (e.g. learning from creation in 1 Enoch 2–5; ethical admonitions in 2 Enoch; the comparisons with nature and human experience in 4 Ezra 4–9; cf. Stone 1991) which are usually thought typical of wisdom. Wisdom itself and related terminology feature prominently in the apocalypses (cf. Nickelsburg 1994). It is essential to realize that in the later Second Temple period, the types of Jewish literature—such as wisdom paraenesis, law, apocalypse—are distinguished by literary genre and religious function, not by world-view. Of course, there is not a monolithic, unvarying Jewish world-view in the literature of this period. But the differences are not between, say, wisdom literature and apocalyptic literature. They are between, say, some apocalypses and others, or between, on the one hand, this wisdom text and this apocalypse, and, on the other hand, that wisdom text and that apocalypse. And in varying ways and to varying degrees, virtually all Jewish thought of the period has an eschatological dimension.

Reconstructions of the history of early Christianity on the basis of the assumption that 'the languages of wisdom and apocalyptic assume different views of the world' (Mack 1993:31) are therefore based on a false premise. The frequently assumed opposition between a wisdom world-view, which stresses immanence, relies on reason and experience, and is wholly this-worldly, and an 'apocalyptic' world-

view, which stresses transcendence, relies on esoteric revelation, and is wholly other-worldly, is a quite artificial construct to which the literature of the period does not conform (Collins 1997a:385–404; Collins 1997b). It would be more appropriate to think of a spectrum with, at one end, more stress on the immanence of wisdom in the world, available to human experience in general, and, at the other end, more stress on the transcendence of wisdom, revealed by God to his faithful people (cf. Johnson 1989:55–109). The former stress goes with a more positive view of the present order of things, which wisdom and eschatological sanctions support, while the latter goes with a more counter-cultural and dualistic attitude, sharply distinguishing the evil world from the community of the righteous and this evil age from the age of righteousness to come. But this model is intended as a way of characterizing a spectrum, not two distinct world-views. The positions which could exist at either extreme of the spectrum probably never actually existed, and so all positions on the spectrum have something in common with all other positions. Wisdom and eschatology are both key categories across the whole spectrum, as is the law, though the understanding of both wisdom and eschatology varies across the spectrum. Finally, the spectrum relates to ideas, not to literary genres. There may well be some degree of correlation with literary genres, but it is certainly not the simple one that wisdom teaching belongs at one end of the spectrum and apocalypse at the other.

Thus attempts, common in the recent history of historical Jesus and Q studies, to recover a purely sapiential Jesus or a purely sapiential first edition of Q by stripping away the so-called ‘apocalyptic’ eschatological material from the teaching of Jesus or from Q, assigning it to a secondary layer because it expresses an ‘apocalyptic’ outlook incompatible with the more original ‘sapiential’ outlook, are wholly misconceived (cf. Harrington 1996:90–91). Similarly, recognizing that James is wisdom paraenesis does not require us to play down the eschatological element in James, nor, conversely, should we insist that eschatology is the dominant feature of James to which wisdom elements are subordinated. Such judgments assume an incompatibility between wisdom and eschatology which did not exist. Generically, James is not an apocalypse; it is wisdom paraenesis. But an eschatological orientation is not therefore anomalous; it is to be expected in wisdom paraenesis from the first century CE. From what we have said in this section, it should be clear that we should expect James to

employ literary forms which belong to the tradition of such works as Proverbs and Ben Sira; to offer sapiential instruction based, among other sources, on the law; and to have an eschatological orientation. All these are true. Just what kind of wisdom, what kind of understanding of the law, and what kind of eschatology James contains are questions we must address later. First we must address the literary questions which are essential to a proper understanding of James as a collection of wisdom instruction.

## **2 LITERARY FORMS IN JAMES**

While the literature on James has given a good deal of attention to the literary structure of the work as a whole, very little attention has been given to the literary forms of the small literary units of which James is composed. This is a gap which it is very important to fill, since one of the features of James which places it within the Jewish tradition of wisdom paraenesis is the importance of the short aphoristic saying. Wisdom paraenesis often consists of compilations of such sayings, often arranged without too much concern for thematic or other links between them. Such aphorisms are meant to be savoured and pondered as individual expressions of wisdom. But even when there is extended treatment of a topic or development of an argument, as in much of James, aphorisms are used to crystallize points in striking and memorable ways. Though placed or composed for their role in their context, they also possess a degree of potential independence of their context. Wisdom paraenesis is a genre in which, to a greater or lesser extent, the small component unit claims attention for its own sake. Of a work such as James, which is certainly no mere anthology but a relatively carefully structured whole, it is true that the whole is more than the sum of the parts. But it is also true of James, as of all wisdom paraenesis, that the parts are more than subdivisions of the whole. It will therefore be appropriate to begin a literary analysis of James with the various types of aphorism it contains.

### **2.1 Aphorisms**

Most aphoristic sayings in James are linked in a sequence of thought either to other aphorisms or to non-aphoristic material. But the

attentive reader, especially the reader accustomed to wisdom paraenesis, easily identifies many sayings which could stand alone. Such sayings, with their special quality of self-containedness and their impression of insight encapsulated in few but carefully chosen words, invite the reader to pause over them, to hold them in mind, to reflect on them. Instead of hurrying the reader on to the next step in a sequence of thought, they slow the reader down with their claim to attention in their own right. They are practical wisdom distilled into forms fit for pondering and for assimilation into life and praxis.

Though the aphorisms in James are sometimes thought to be existing aphorisms taken over by James from other sources, none can be shown to be such, and we shall argue below (section 4) that few of them are likely to be. The role of the wisdom teacher was to distil both traditional wisdom and his own additions to it into aphorisms of his own formulation. No doubt many aphorisms of James had been formulated and used by him in oral teaching before being used in the composition of the letter. But a teacher whose stock-in-trade is the aphorism will tend to frame his thought in aphoristic forms even when composing a larger unit *de novo*. This clearly happens in Ben Sira, for example. So it is impossible to know which of James' aphorisms pre-existed his letter. This makes no difference to their character as aphorisms, with the aphorism's potential for independent life in the reader's mind.

In order to classify the types of aphorisms in James, we shall adopt the scheme used by David Aune (1991) to classify the aphorisms attributed to Jesus in the Gospels. All types in Aune's classification are listed below, so that it will easily be seen that there is only one sub-type (2.1.7d below) of which there is no example in James. To Aune's classification I have added only one type (2.1.9), which could have been considered a form of the wisdom admonition (2.1.6), and two sub-types (2.1.7e; 2.1.7f). I do not think there are any aphorisms in James which Aune's classification cannot accommodate.<sup>3</sup> This fact is in itself significant, as contributing to a major conclusion of our literary analysis of James: that the range of literary forms employed by James closely resembles those employed in the Synoptic sayings of Jesus. In order to give the reader a sense of the continuity between the aphorisms of James and those in both Jewish wisdom paraenesis and the teaching of Jesus, examples of each type from James are followed by examples (in italics) from the sayings of Jesus and from wisdom literature, where such examples are available.

Examples are sometimes also given from other types of Jewish literature. These show, for example, that some forms of aphorisms used in wisdom paraenesis also occur in apocalypses.

### 2.1.1 *Beatitudes (with motive clause)*

Blessed is the man who endures testing because, when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life which he has promised to those who love him (1:12). (Cf. also 1:25; 5:11a.)

*Blessed are the poor in spirit  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* (Matt. 5:3).

*Blessed is the one who sows right seed  
for he shall harvest it sevenfold* (2 Enoch 42:11).

*Blessed also are all people who grieve with you [Jerusalem]  
because of your afflictions;  
for they will rejoice with you  
and witness all your glory for ever* (Tobit 13:14b).

*Blessed is the man who listens to me [Wisdom]  
watching daily at my gates,  
waiting beside my doors.  
For the one who finds me finds life  
And obtains favour from the LORD;  
but the one who misses me injures himself;  
all who hate me love death* (Prov. 8:34–36).

*Blessed is the husband of a good wife;  
the number of his days will be doubled* (Sir. 26:1).

Beatitudes (or macarisms) occur both with and without motive clauses (giving a reason why the person should be considered blessed), but since the beatitude in James has a motive clause, the examples chosen for comparison are in this form. Though beatitudes have an important place in the wisdom tradition,<sup>4</sup> they are also frequent in psalms<sup>5</sup> and in apocalyptic literature.<sup>6</sup> Later beatitudes, like the one in James and those in the Matthew 5:3–11 and Luke 6:20–22, are often eschatological in character, pronouncing people

blessed because of the eschatological blessings they can expect, and often contrast people's present condition with their eschatological condition. Beatitudes are a prime example of the confluence of literary and ideological traditions in early Judaism, especially of the wisdom and prophetic-eschatological traditions.

### 2.1.2 'Whoever' or 'the one who' sayings

Whoever (ὅστις) keeps the whole law but falls down on one point has become guilty in all points (2:10).

Whoever (ὃς ἐάν) wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (4:4).

(Also 4:11; 5:20.)

*Whoever (ὃς ἄν) does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother (Mark 3:35).*

*Whoever (ὃς ἄν) divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her (Mark 10:11).*

*Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death (Exod. 21:12).*

*Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge,  
but he who hates reproof is stupid (Prov. 12:1).*

*Whoever honours his father atones for sins,  
and whoever glorifies his mother is like one who lays up treasure (Sir. 3:3–4).*

This form, a natural one in paraenesis, is frequent both in Old Testament laws and in wisdom paraenesis.

### 2.1.3 Conditional sayings

If any of you (εἴ τις ὑμῶν) lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given to him (1:5).

If anyone (εἴ τις) thinks himself religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, his religion is worthless (1:26).

(Also 3:2).

*If anyone (εἴ τις) would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me (Mark 8:34).*

*If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be rooted up, and be planted in the sea', and it would obey you (Luke 17:6).*

*If a person is not steadfast in the fear of the Lord, his house will be quickly overthrown (Sir. 27:3)*

This form is interchangeable with the preceding form. Aphorisms in either form can be rephrased in the other without change of meaning.

#### 2.1.4 Aphorisms in synonymous couplets

Cleanse your hands, you sinners,  
and purify your hearts, you double-minded (4:8b).

*The one who is not with me is against me,  
and the one who does not gather with me scatters (Luke 11:23).*

*Rejoice, young man, while you are young,  
and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth (Eccles. 11:9).*

*The one who digs a pit will fall into it,  
and the one who sets a snare will be caught in it (Sir. 27:26).*

Synonymous parallelism is one of the standard forms of Hebrew poetry, common in the prophets, psalms and wisdom literature. Parallelism of this and other kinds is not infrequent in the sayings of Jesus (Burney 1925). Most Jewish literature composed originally in Greek makes less use of it, though it is frequent in the Wisdom of Solomon. A significant minority of sayings in James employ it (1:9, 15; 3:9, 12; 2:26; 4:8b, 9b, 10, 11b; 5:2, 4, 5).

### **2.1.5 Antithetical and paradoxical aphorisms**

Let the brother who is lowly boast in his exaltation,  
but the rich man in his humiliation (1:9–10a).

Every species of animals and birds, of reptiles and sea  
creatures, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human  
species, but no human being can tame the tongue (3:7–8a).

*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who  
are sick* (Mark 2:17a).

*Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled,  
and the one who humbles himself will be exalted* (Luke  
14:11; 18:14).

*The LORD tears down the house of the proud,  
but maintains the widow's boundaries* (Prov. 15:25).

*The heart of the wise inclines to the right,  
but the heart of a fool to the left* (Eccles. 10:2).

Aphorisms of this type are sometimes regarded as especially characteristic of Jesus (Williams 1981:60–62), though they are not unique to him. Many of those listed by Aune could also be classified as a category of aphoristic sentence (cf. 2.1.7e below). For other sayings in James dependent on a form of antithesis or paradox, see 2:5, 18b, 24; 3:15; 4:10.

### **2.1.6 Wisdom admonitions (with motive clause)**

Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger,  
for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness  
of God (1:19b–20).

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you (4:8a).

Brothers, do not grumble against one another,  
so that you may not be judged (5:9a).

Above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by  
earth or by any other oath, but let your 'Yes' be yes, and

your 'No' be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation (5:12).

Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed (5:16a).

*Strive to enter in through the narrow door,  
for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able*  
(Luke 13:24).

*When you give alms, do not let your right hand know what  
your left hand is doing,  
so that your alms may be done in secret,  
and your Father who sees in secret will reward you*  
(Matt. 6:3–4).

*In all your ways acknowledge him,  
and he will make straight your paths* (Prov. 3:6).

*Live uprightly all the days of your life,  
and do not walk in the ways of wrongdoing,  
for those who act in accordance with truth will prosper in all  
their activities* (Tobit 4:5b–6a).

*Discipline your son and make his yoke heavy,  
so that you may not be offended by his shamefulness*  
(Sir. 30:13).

Wisdom admonitions, which are either positive exhortations or negative warnings,<sup>7</sup> formulated in the imperative or jussive, with or without motive clauses providing reasons for heeding the admonitions, are frequent in paraenesis.

### **2.1.7 Aphoristic sentences**

According to Aune, wisdom sentences are 'general declarative statements in the indicative mood which encapsulate general insights' (Aune 1991:232), though the final part of this definition is not quite appropriate to all the sayings of Jesus he lists in this category (e.g. Luke 17:30; 11:30, quoted in section 2.1.7b below). Having stated that there are many types of aphoristic sentences,

Aune instances four specific forms (2.1.7a–d below). I have added two other categories (2.1.7e and f below). Almost all aphoristic sentences in James fall into the categories listed below (exceptions are 1:17, 27; 3:17; 5:16b).

2.1.7a *Where/there* aphorisms

Where (**ὅπου**) envy (there is) and selfish ambition,  
there (**ἐκεῖ**) (there is) disorder and every kind of evil practice  
(3:16).

*Where (**ὅπου**) your treasure is,  
there (**ἐκεῖ**) will your heart be also* (Luke 12:34).

*Where (**ὅπου**) the body (is),  
there (**ἐκεῖ**) also will the vultures be gathered together*  
(Luke 17:38).

*Wherever the king resides, there is crown property* (Num. R.  
12:17; Cant. R. 6:4:2).

*Where the king is, there is peace* (Pes. R. 21).

2.1.7b *As/so* correlatives

Just as (**ὥσπερ**) the body without the spirit is dead,  
so also (**οὕτως καί**) faith without works is also dead (2:26).

*Just as (**ὥσπερ**) the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from  
one side to the other,  
so (**οὕτως**) will the Son of man be in his day* (Luke 17:24).

*Just as (**ὥσπερ**) Jonah became a sign to the men of Nineveh,  
so also (**οὕτως καί**) will the Son of man be to this generation*  
(Luke 11:30).

*Just as water reflects the face,  
so one human heart reflects another* (Prov. 27:19).

*Just as you do not know how the breath comes to the bones in the  
mother's womb,  
so you do not know the work of God, who makes everything*  
(Eccles. 11:5)

*As smoke disappears and no longer exists,  
so will evil disappear for ever* (1Q27 Frag. 1 1:6=4Q300  
Frag. 3 5–6).

This form is a form of similitude, and so will be considered again in section 2.2.1 below.

#### 2.1.7c *Future reversal sayings*

Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom he has promised to those who love him? (2:5).

*How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!* (Mark 10:23).

*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God* (Mark 10:25).

*Many that are first will be last, and the last first* (Mark 10:31).

*The haughty eyes of people shall be brought low,  
and the pride of everyone shall be humbled;  
and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day* (Isa. 2:11).

This category seems to be determined by content rather than literary form,<sup>8</sup> and so it is dubious whether it should be included. Because it is one of Aune's categories I have retained it. The theme of this category is also found in James 1:9–10; 4:10, which in form are admonitions, not aphoristic sentences.

#### 2.1.7d *'Better than' sayings* (Tobsprüche)

This form is common in wisdom literature (e.g. Prov. 16:8). There are examples among the sayings of Jesus (e.g. Mark 9:42–48), but none in James.

#### 2.1.7e *Statements of contradiction*

The anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God (1:20).

Friendship with the world is enmity towards God (4:4).

Nor can salt water yield fresh (3:12b).

*What is impossible with humans is possible with God* (Luke 18:27).

*You cannot serve God and Mammon* (Luke 16:13b).

*A city set on a hill cannot be hid* (Matt. 5:14b).

*Figs are not gathered from thorns,  
nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush* (Luke 6:44).

Such sayings deny that something is possible or set up an antithesis of incompatibles.

#### 2.1.7f *Step-sayings* (sorites)

The testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its complete effect, so that you may be complete and perfect, lacking in nothing (1:3–4).

Desire, having conceived, gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death (1:15).

*The one who welcomes you welcomes me,  
and the one who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me*  
(Matt. 10:40)

*The one who seeks will not cease until he finds; and when he  
has found he will be amazed; and when he has been mazed  
he will reign; and when he has reigned he will rest* (Gospel  
of the Hebrews, *apud* Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.*  
5.14.96).

*What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten.  
What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten,  
and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten*  
(Joel 1:4).

*The beginning of wisdom is the most sincere desire for instruction,  
and concern for instruction is love of her;*

*and love of her is the keeping of her laws,  
and giving heed to her laws is assurance of immortality,  
and immortality brings one near to God;  
so the desire for wisdom leads to a kingdom* (Wisd. 6:17–21).

*Zeal leads to cleanliness,  
and cleanliness leads to purity,  
and purity leads to self-restraint,  
and self-restraint leads to sanctity,  
and sanctity leads to humility,  
and humility leads to the fear of sin,  
and the fear of sin leads to piety,  
and piety leads to the Holy Spirit,  
and the Holy Spirit leads to the resurrection of the dead*  
(m. Sota 9:15).

*They that have been born (are destined) to die,  
and they that are dead (are destined) to be made alive,  
and they that live (after death are destined) to be judged*  
(m. 'Avot 4:22).

The sorite is a saying in the form A...B, B...C, C...D, etc. Fischel's thorough study of it (1973; cf. also Dibelius and Greeven 1975:94–99) argues that, although there are some examples in the Old Testament (e.g. 1 Kgs. 19:17; Hos. 2:21–22; Joel 1:4), its use in Jewish and Christian literature from the first century CE onwards is influenced by the major, well recognized forms of the Greco-Roman standardized sorite. James employs a literary form already well assimilated in Jewish literature (and probably oral sayings, since the popularity of sorites was due to their ability to encapsulate a teaching in memorable form). James 1:2–4 is probably James' own variant of a sorite widely employed in Christian paraenesis (cf. Rom. 5:3–5; 1 Pet. 1:6–7).

### **2.1.8 Statements of reciprocity**

Judgment will be without mercy to one who has not shown mercy (2:13a).

[The tongue] sets alight the cycle of existence  
and will be set alight by hell (3:6c).<sup>9</sup>

A harvest of righteousness in peace is sown for those who make peace (3:18).

*With the judgment you pronounce you will be judged,  
and the measure you give will be the measure you get* (Matt. 7:2).

*If you forgive people their trespasses, your heavenly Father also  
will forgive you;  
but if you do not forgive people their trespasses, neither will your  
Father forgive your trespasses* (Matt. 6:14–15).

*The one who closes his ear to the cry of the poor  
will himself cry out and not be heard* (Prov. 21:13).

*Do not turn your face away from anyone who is poor,  
and the face of God will not be turned away from you* (Tobit 4:7).

*The one who takes vengeance will suffer vengeance from the Lord*  
(Sir. 28:1).

*The one who expresses anger to any person without provocation  
will reap anger in the great judgment* (2 Enoch 44:3a).

*In the measure in which a man measures it will be measured to  
him, whether it be a good measure or a bad measure* (Tg.  
Neof. Gen. 38:25).

*The one who is merciful to others, mercy is shown to him by  
Heaven, while the one who is not merciful to others, mercy is  
not shown to him by Heaven* (b. Shabb. 151b).

This is the type of saying which, in its New Testament occurrences, Käsemann (1969) labelled ‘sentences of holy law,’ while Berger (1970–71) preferred to call them ‘sentences of wisdom instruction,’ and Crossan ‘apocalyptic sanctions’ (Crossan 1983:175; 1991: 247–248). These terms are indicative of disagreement whether such sayings are essentially sapiential or ‘apocalyptic’ (prophetic-eschatological) in character. Because he rightly thinks that precisely these sayings ‘render customary distinctions between wisdom and apocalyptic as *[sic]* questionable’ (Aune 1991:234), Aune offers the term ‘statements of reciprocity’ as a more neutrally descriptive term.

Better, because more precise, would be ‘measure-for-measure sayings’.

Such sayings are all formulations of a principle of justice, corresponding to the *lex talionis* (Exod. 21:24; Lev. 21:20), as the principle of divine justice, whether in recompense for good or in retribution for evil. In wisdom literature up to Ben Sira, they express a kind of immanent justice operative within this life and this world. With the development of eschatological thought, in which judgment after death is expected to make up for the inadequacy of justice within this life, they come to express the principle of God’s eschatological judgment, as well as of his interventions in judgment within history. A contrast between a sapiential view of immanent justice at work in the order of the world and a prophetic view of divine intervention in judgment is anachronistic for the New Testament period, in which wisdom and prophetic-eschatological ideas frequently merge. The ‘measure-for-measure’ principle is pervasive in paraenetic, apocalyptic and other forms of Jewish and early Christian literature (see Winston 1979:232–233; Massey 1991: chapter 3; Fiensy 1983; Himmelfarb 1983: chapter 3; Bauckham 1998: chapter 3; chapter 8, section III. 7[b]; Reiser 1997:263–266).

### 2.1.9 Debate-sayings<sup>10</sup>

No one, when tempted, should say, ‘I am being tempted by God’;  
for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one (1:13).

*Do not say, ‘It was the Lord’s doing that I fell away’;  
for he does not do what he hates.*

*Do not say, ‘It was he who led me astray’;  
for he has no need of the sinful (Sir. 15:11–12).*

The form found in Sirach 15:11–12 consists of (a) a prohibition formula: ‘Do not say’; (b) a direct quotation; (c) a refutation introduced by ‘for’. (This form occurs also in Eccles. 7:10; Sirach 5:3, 4, 6; and less complete forms of it are in Prov. 20:22; 24:29; Sir. 7:9; 11:23–24; 16:17–23.) The form in James has been adapted to the context (jussive in place of second person singular) but otherwise preserves the form, as well as its predominant, though not exclusive, use in contexts dealing with theodicy (Crenshaw

1975: 51). In fact, the saying in James comes close to being a reformulation of the thought in the quoted lines of Ben Sira.

## 2.2 Similitudes and parables

A notable feature of James is the number of similitudes it contains.<sup>11</sup> All of these are some form of comparison (*mashal*, παραβολή), but there are several different forms. These are analysed below, and comparable examples are given, as in the preceding analysis of aphorisms, from the Gospels and from Jewish literature. Some of these similitudes could well be classified as aphorisms, but they are included here for the sake of displaying the full range of forms which similitudes in James take. (Possible distinctions between similitudes and parables are discussed in section 2.2.10 below. Such distinctions are not made in the following analysis of forms.) Like aphorisms, similitudes are appropriate to the paraenetic context of wisdom instruction. They appeal to the imagination and the aesthetic sense. They are suitable for pondering and appropriation. They stay in the mind and recur in appropriate circumstances. Like aphorisms, they are compressed and portable wisdom.

In the following analysis of forms, the component parts of similitudes are labelled A (the illustrand, i.e. a reference to the person, thing or event which is illustrated or illuminated by the comparison), B (the comparison itself), C (the application, which explains how the illustrand parallels the comparison), and (in just one case) D (the interpretation, which explains how element(s) in the comparison stand allegorically for the illustrand or aspects of it). The essential element is B. In some cases this is preceded by A, a brief statement of what the illustrand is, which is then usually linked to B by 'is like' or an equivalent expression. In some cases B is followed by C, nearly always introduced by 'so' (οὕτως) or 'so also' (οὕτως καί). Thus similitudes may consist of these elements: AB, BC, ABC, or just B. In one case below (2.2.8), BD is found.

### 2.2.1 Form: Just as B (the comparison), so also C (application to the illustrand)

- (B) Just as (ὡσπερ) the body without the spirit is dead,  
(C) so also (οὕτως καί) faith without works is also dead (2:26).

*Just as (ὡσπερ) the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other,  
so (οὕτως) will the Son of man be in his day (Luke 17:24).*

*Just as (ὡσπερ) the servant who is constantly under scrutiny will not lack bruises,  
so also (οὕτως καί) the one who swears and always utters the Name will never be cleansed from sin (Sir. 23:10).*

*Just as the farmer sows many seeds in the ground and plants a multitude of seedlings,  
and yet not all that have been sown come up in due season, and not all that were planted will take root,  
so also those who have been sown in the world will not all be saved (4 Ezra 8:41).*

This form is quite widely used in wisdom literature, usually in short two-line sayings, though somewhat longer examples are possible (e.g. Sir. 14:18). Most of the similitudes in 4 Ezra are in this form or include it (4:42, 50; 5:49; 7:104b–105; 8:2, 41). The fact that this form is closely tied to the use of poetic parallelism, as even the more extended examples of it (such as the last example above) show, may explain why it is not used for narrative parables either in the Gospels or in rabbinic literature.

### **2.2.2 Form: B (the comparison), so also C (application to the illustrand)**

(B1) If we put bridles into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole body.

(B2) Look also at ships, which, although they are so large and driven by strong winds, are steered by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot decides.

(C) So also (οὕτως καί) the tongue is a small member, but it boasts of great things (3:3–4a).

*The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it,  
but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.  
So (οὕτως) is everyone who is born of the Spirit (John 3:8).*

*Wild asses in the wilderness are the prey of lions;  
likewise (οὐτως) the poor are feeding grounds for the rich*  
(Sir. 13:19).

This form, which differs from the first only in that the comparison appears as a simple statement, functions in wisdom literature as an alternative to the first. But it also accommodates longer parables (Luke 12:16–21; 14:28–33; 15:3–7, 8–10; 4 Ezra 7:3–14; Apocryphon of Ezekiel, quoted in Epiphanius, *Pan.* 64.70). In 4 Ezra 7:3–14, a single application follows a pair of parables, as in James 3:3–4a.

### **2.2.3 Form: A (the illustrand) is like B (the comparison)**

(A) The one who doubts

(B) is like (ἔουθεν) a wave of the sea driven by the wind and tossed about (1:6).

*You are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence*  
(Matt. 23:27b).

*The wicked are like the tossing sea that cannot keep still; its waters toss up mire and mud* (Isa. 57:20).

*The one who builds his house with other people's money is like (ὡς) one who gathers stones for his burial mound*  
(Sir. 21:8).

*The hope of the ungodly is like (ὡς) thistledown carried by the wind and like (ὡς) a light frost driven away by a storm* (Wisd. 5:14a).

### **2.2.4 Form: A (the illustrand) is B (the comparison)**

(A) You are

(B) a mist (ἀτμίς) that appears for a little while and then vanishes (4:14b).

*You are the light of the world* (Matt. 5:14a).

*Naph tali is a doe let loose, that bears lovely fawns* (Gen. 49:21).

*I am smoke (ἀτμίς) from a pot* (words of Moses quoted from unknown source in 1 Clem. 17:6).

This example is an unusual case of a metaphor used where a simile would more commonly be employed.<sup>12</sup>

### **2.2.5 Form: A (the illustrond) is like B (comparison: noun + a short narrative)**

(A) If anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer,  
 (B) he is like (ἔοικεν) a man observing his natural face in a mirror. For he observed himself and went out and immediately forgot what he looked like (1:23).

*Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like (ὁμοιωθήσεται) a wise man who built his house on the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.*

*And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like (ὁμοιωθήσεται) a foolish man who built his house on the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it fell; and its fall was great* (Matt. 7:24–27).

*One in whom there are good works, who has studied much Torah, to what may he be likened?*

*To a person who builds first with stones and afterward with bricks: even when much water comes and collects by their side, it does not dislodge them.*

*But one in whom there are no good works, though he studied Torah, to what may he be likened?*

*To a person who builds first with bricks and afterward with stones: even when a little water gathers, it overthrows them immediately* (ʿAvot R. Nat. 24)

*He whose wisdom is more abundant than his works, to what is he like?*

*To a tree whose branches are abundant but whose roots are few; and the wind comes and uproots it and overturns it.*

*But he whose works are more abundant than his wisdom, to what is he like?*

*To a tree whose branches are few but whose roots are many; so that even if all the winds in the world come and blow against it, it cannot be stirred from its place (m. 'Avot 3:18b).*

The form is the same as the form in 2.2.3, except that the comparison is here a short narrative. The parallels (Matt. 7:24–27; 'Avot R. Nat. A 24; m. 'Avot 3:18b) are of interest as parallels in content as well as form. The parable in James thus seems to be a variation on a common theme. In all three parallels there is a pair of 'geminate' parables, in which each of the pair is the mirror-opposite of the other. Closer inspection of James 1:23–25 suggests that the parable in verses 23b–24 has an implicit twin: If anyone is a doer of the word, he is like a man who looked intently into a mirror and remained and did not forget. But this parable has been subsumed into the application of it in verse 25.

The aorists in James 1:23b–24 are usually translated as English present tenses and explained as 'gnomic aorists,' on the grounds that the description is of typical, not particular events. In fact what the man in these verses does is not obviously what people usually do. It is better to read the verbs as telling a particular story, like the narratives in Matthew 7:24–27. Even though in both cases the events *could* occur often, the comparison narrates a single imagined instance.

This form is used in many Gospel and rabbinic parables, in which the parable is not followed by an application.

### **2.2.6 Form: A (the illustrand) is like B (comparison: noun+a short narrative). So also C (application to the illustrand)**

(A) [The rich person] will disappear

(B) like (ὡς) a flower of the field. For the sun rose with its scorching heat and withered the field and its flower fell and its beautiful appearance perished.

(C) So also (οὕτως καί) the rich person will fade away in the midst of his life (1:10b–11).

*The kingdom of heaven is like (ὁμοία ἐστίν) a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So also (οὕτως καί) it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 13:47–49).*

*Foolish people, compare (οὐμβάλετε) yourselves to a tree. Take a vine. First it sheds its leaves, then there comes a bud, after this the unripe grape, then the full bunch. So also (οὕτως καί) my people has had tumults and afflictions; afterwards it shall receive the good things (Jewish apocryphal work quoted in 2 Clem. 11:3–4).*

*Unto what are the righteous compared in this world? They are like a tree standing wholly in a place of cleanness, but its bough overhangs a place of uncleanness. When the bough is lopped off, it stands entirely in a place of cleanness. Even so the Holy One, blessed be he, brings suffering upon the righteous in this world in order that they may inherit the future world (b. Qidd. 40b).*

This form differs from form 2.2.5 in that an application follows the comparison, introduced, as applications always are, by ‘so also’ or an equivalent phrase. Two long narrative parables in the Gospels (Matt. 18:23–35; 20:1–16) and many rabbinic parables also have this form.

It is worth noting that the image in James 1:10b–11 (a human being compared to a wild flower that flourishes but quickly withers and dies) is not only derived from Isaiah 40:6–8 (alluding *verbatim* to the LXX) but is also paralleled in other texts, including wisdom literature (Ps. 37:20; 90:5–6; 103:15–16; Job 14:1–2; 15:30; 2 Baruch 82:7; 1QM 15:11–12; 4Q185 1:10–12; 6 Ezra 15:50). But the form in which the similitude is cast in James is not paralleled in any of these other texts.

As in the case of James 1:23b–24, the aorist verbs in James 1:10b–11 should probably not be translated as English present tenses, as is usually done, but as past tenses, as above. Though the events are what commonly

happen to wild flowers in Palestine, the similitude narrates the particular fate of one wild flower, just as the Matthean parable quoted above narrates a particular case of what happens on most fishing trips.

**2.2.7 Form: B (comparison: noun+a short narrative). You also C (application to the illustrand)**

(B) Look, the farmer waits for the precious crop from the ground, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains.

(C) You also (**καὶ ὑμεῖς**) must be patient (5:7b–8a).

*From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also (**οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς**), when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates (Mark 13:32–33).*

*But know this, that if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also (**καὶ ὑμεῖς**) must be ready, for the Son of man is coming at an unexpected hour (Luke 12:39–40)*

Other parables in this form attributed to Jesus are Luke 17:7–10; Apocryphon of James 8:16–27; 12:22–31.<sup>13</sup>

**2.2.8 Form: B (comparison)+D (interpretation referring to the illustrand)**

(B) Look how small a fire sets alight how great a forest!

(D) And the tongue is a fire (3:5–6b).

The very obscure and probably corrupt text of James 3:6 hinders understanding of this example. It may be that the original text continued: ‘The world of unrighteousness is a forest.’ The comparison would then be elucidated by an allegorical interpretation of two elements in it. The form would then be a little similar to the allegorical interpretations which two Gospel parables are given (Matt. 13:19–23, 37–43).

### **2.2.9 Form: B (comparison, not explicitly related to the illustrand)**

(B1) Does a spring from the same opening pour out both fresh and brackish water?

(B2) My brothers, can a fig tree yield olives

(B3) or a grapevine figs?

(B4) Nor can salt water yield fresh (3:11–12).

*Can a blind person lead a blind person? Will not both fall into the pit?* (Luke 6:39)

Many short similitudes in the Gospels have, like these examples, no explicit relationship to their illustrand. Often, as in James, the context makes the illustrand clear, but it is not mentioned in the form of the similitude itself.

The three questions in James 3:11–12a could be said to belong to the genre of ‘impossible questions’ (Crenshaw 1980), of which other examples are Proverbs 6:27–29; Job 8:11; Jeremiah 13:23; Amos 6:12a; Sirach 13:2, 17–18; Matthew 7:16.

### **2.2.10 Concluding comments**

In discussions of similitudes and parables in the Gospels, two kinds of distinctions have been made. Sometimes a distinction is made simply in terms of length: the short similitude is distinguished from the long narrative parable. But no absolute distinction is possible on grounds of length. A different kind of distinction is between similitudes, as descriptions of typical conditions, occurrences or activities, and parables, which tell a story (Bultmann 1968:174). The distinction is not entirely easy to make. As usually employed, it is not clearly a formal difference, since a particular case of what regularly or often happens may be narrated as a story (see 2.2.6 above, on Jas. 1:10b–11) and not infrequently is. The Gospel parable of the mustard seed is told in different versions as an account of a single sequence of events (Luke 13:18–19), or as what typically happens (Mark 4:30–32). If the distinction is to be usable, it would be better to apply it strictly to the form of the saying, so that Mark’s version of the mustard seed would be a similitude, Luke’s a narrative parable. A narrative parable, on this definition, can be very short (e.g. Matt.

13:44, 45–46), but it can also be long, whereas a similitude is always relatively short. The differences of form classified in sections 2.2.1 – 2.2.9 above do not make this distinction, but if it is applied to the similitudes in James, then the examples from James given above in sections 2.2.1, 2.2.2, 2.2.3, 2.2.4, and 2.2.7 are similitudes, those in sections 2.2.5 and 2.2.6 are narrative parables.

In comparing James with Jewish wisdom paraenesis and with the sayings of Jesus, we should note that nearly all the forms of comparison utilized in James can also be found in the sayings of Jesus, rather fewer in Jewish wisdom literature. Some of those not paralleled in wisdom literature are paralleled in apocalyptic and rabbinic literature. If we use the distinction advocated in the preceding paragraph between similitudes and narrative parables, comparisons in wisdom literature are almost always similitudes, not narrative parables. But the latter seem to have developed in the kind of oral wisdom instruction which both the teaching of Jesus and the rabbinic parables reflect. (Though the rabbinic parables are much later in date, the many striking parallels in form and in narrative motifs between them and the parables of Jesus show that they must belong to a tradition of Jewish parabolic story telling that goes back to the time of Jesus.) James has two narrative parables (in sections 2.2.5, 2.2.6), but both are short. He does not use the long narrative parables found in the Gospels and rabbinic literature. This is the most striking difference between similitudes and parables in James and those among the sayings of Jesus. In other respects, there are remarkable similarities.

### **2.3 Examples or models (*paradeigmata*)**

On five occasions James holds up to his readers the example of Old Testament figures, as models worthy of imitation: Abraham and Rahab are models of faith complemented and completed by works (2:21–25); the prophets and Job are models of endurance under testing (5:10–11); and Elijah, ‘a human being like us’, is an example of praying in faith (5:17–18). The provision of models for imitation (*paradeigmata*) is a feature of Hellenistic paraenetic literature. Such examples take many different forms.<sup>14</sup> The use of figures from Israel’s history for this purpose is a Jewish usage found in Jewish paraenesis and wisdom literature, where figures from Israel’s history function, usually as positive, sometimes as negative examples (Tobit 4:12; Sir. 16:5–11; 1 Macc. 2:51–61; 4 Macc. 2:17–19; 16:20–22; 18:11–13). There is one case of a negative example

of this kind in the sayings of Jesus (Luke 17:32).<sup>15</sup> (On the lack of *paradeigmata* in the Gospels, see Williams 1990:169.)

## 2.4 Prophetic judgment oracle

James 5:1–6 is in the style of prophetic oracles of judgment. It comprises the essential components of the announcement of judgment (5:1–3) and the accusation (5:4–6) (cf. Westermann 1967). The opening call to the rich to lament because of the judgment that is coming upon them resembles, more or less, such passages as Isaiah 13:6; 14:31; 23:1, 6, 14; 32:9–14; Jeremiah 49:3; Sibylline Oracle 5:214; 6 Ezra 15:12–13; 16:2, as well as Jesus' oracle of judgment in Luke 23:28. The passage lacks the attribution of first-person speech to God, which is normal in judgment oracles in the Old Testament prophets (cf. also 2 Baruch 13:12; 6 Ezra 15:5–11, 20–25, 49–52; 16:48, 74), but this is also true of the judgment oracles in the Gospel tradition, attributed to John the Baptist (Luke 3:7–9) and to Jesus (Matt. 11:21–24; 23:13–36; Luke 19:42–44; 23:28–31). It is also true of the 'woe' oracles against the wealthy oppressors in 1 Enoch 91–108, which differ from James in using the form of the 'woe' oracle but in other respects have much in common with James 5:1–6. We possess too few examples of prophetic speech from the late Second Temple period to know how typical of the form of judgment oracles of the time James 5:1–6 is.

Judgment oracles addressed to the wicked are not characteristic of wisdom literature, though 'woe' sayings occasionally occur (Eccles. 10:16; Sir. 2:12–14; 4Q185 1–2:9–13).<sup>16</sup> So it is worth noting that in combining prophetic and wisdom styles of speech, James notably resembles the tradition of the sayings of Jesus.

## 2.5 Diatribe

The ancient diatribe was not a literary genre (and so should not be employed as an alternative to paraenesis or wisdom instruction in the attempt to classify the genre of James) but a style or 'mode' of exhortation (Malherbe 1986:129) which characteristically employs a number of literary forms. It is a written style which simulates an oral teaching situation. There is much direct address to the audience (and so diatribal style is readily compatible with the genres of letter and paraenesis). Particularly characteristic is

simulated dialogue with imaginary interlocutors, whose objections are anticipated or quoted, and to whom the writer directs apostrophes and responses in the second person singular (Stowers 1981: chapters 2–3; Stowers 1988:74–76). The imagined situation is the classroom in which there might be class discussion, individual students might raise questions or objections, or the teacher might pick out a particular student for dialogue in front of the class. Since the Jewish tradition of wisdom instruction itself had its primary locus in schools of one kind or another, the Graeco-Roman diatribe style coheres easily enough in James with that tradition.

In James diatribal style appears most clearly in the dialogue with an imaginary interlocutor in 2:18–23. The formula introducing the interlocutor's objection (v. 18): 'But someone will say' (ἀλλ' ἔρει τις) is a standard one (1 Cor. 15:35; cf. Rom. 9:19; 11:19; Stowers 1981: 126–129). James then turns to address this interlocutor (cf. Stowers 1981:86–97), using the second person singular down to v. 22, resuming the second person plural address to his readers in general only in v. 24. In v. 19 he anticipates another point the imaginary interlocutor is likely to make ('You believe that God is one'), answers it positively at first ('you do well': καλῶς ποιεῖς: cf. Paul's use of καλῶς in response to an objection in Rom. 11:20), but in a way that proves ironic in the rest of v. 19. The censorious vocative, 'you senseless person' (ὦ ἄνθρωπε κενέ), is typical of the diatribe (Stowers 1981:85; cf. 1 Cor. 15:36), as are the rhetorical questions (vv. 20–21; Stowers 1981:87–89). It is important to note that in the diatribal style the sharp tone is not polemical and the interlocutor is not treated as an opponent. The tone is that of 'a teacher to his foolish student' (Bultmann, quoted in Stowers 1981:81). 'The dialogical style...is pedagogical and hortatory, rather than polemical' (Stowers 1988:81). The aim is persuasion. It is also important to note that the interlocutor in a diatribe is genuinely imaginary. He is not a real person among the addressees, or even representative of some party or tendency among the addressees. He is a rhetorical device who enlivens the process of argumentation and helps to move it forward.<sup>17</sup> Thus in this case it is not at all necessary to suppose that the objections voiced by the interlocutor were actually being raised in contexts James was addressing or reflect a form of Christian teaching that James is refuting. They need be no more than objections James imagines might be raised to his claim in v. 17, were he to assert it orally in a teaching situation. Their function is to give him the opportunity to substantiate that claim, which is then

conclusively restated in v. 26. For the passage to be relevant to James' audience, it is only necessary to suppose that there was the danger of people professing faith without practising it in charitable acts. Such people will be the better persuaded of the necessity of works if they hear James refute possible defences of their neglect (cf. Watson 1993a:120–121). Thus on two counts recognition of the diatribe style in this passage renders reference to Paul or Paulinist teachers dubious: (a) the interlocutor is not imagined as an opponent; (b) his role in the imaginary dialogue need not be that which anyone is playing in a real situation.

There are probably two further points in chapter 2 at which James anticipates an objection and refutes it. In v. 8 a conditional clause is followed by the same phrase as is used in v. 19, though in the plural: 'you do well' (**καλῶς ποιεῖτε**). Probably James imagines that an audience might respond to the severe indictment by rhetorical questions in the preceding verse by claiming that they do fulfil the law as summarized in the commandment to love the neighbour. As in v. 19, the 'you do well' is ironical, since James immediately shows that, if they show partiality, they are not in fact fulfilling the law. Again in v. 14 Paul supposes someone might respond to the preceding argument by protesting that, although he or she does not 'have works', he or she does 'have faith'. This hypothetical position taken by an imaginary individual<sup>18</sup> serves to take the argument into a further stage. Whereas in vv. 8–13 James imagines an audience who accept the necessity of works but have not taken seriously their failure to honour the poor, in vv. 14–26 he imagines someone responding to his demonstration that this failure will incur judgment by questioning whether works are necessary at all and falling back on faith alone. What is usually neglected in discussion of this chapter is that, formally, every step in the argument from v. 2 onwards is based on hypothesis: the situation to which the whole chapter is response is hypothetical (2–4) and the succeeding argument is advanced by imagining hypothetical objections (8, 14, 18), each in turn refuted.

The diatribal style is adopted in those parts of James which pursue argument, upbraiding the readers and persuading them to change of heart and practice: especially in chapter 2, but extending to some degree also to chapters 3 and 4. The second person singular verbs in 4:11b–12 (following an admonition in the second person plural and an aphorism in the third person singular) address an imagined individual, in terms very similar to Romans 14:4, 10 (Stowers 1981: 100, 115). Other features are characteristic, though

not distinctive of diatribe: rhetorical questions (2:5–7, 14–15, 20–21, 25; 3:11–12; 4:4–5);<sup>19</sup> use of examples in argument (2:21–25); brief questions addressed by and answered by the author (5:13–14; cf. Ropes 1916: 12); brief admonitory addresses to the audience (1:16; cf. Dibelius and Greeven 1975:99; 1:19a; cf. 1 Cor. 15:33); maxims, similitudes and quotations (4:5–6; cf. Stowers 1981:132). But 5:1–6 is in prophetic oracular (see section 2.4 above), not diatribal style (contra Ropes 1916:13).

That the diatribe style is highly hospitable to aphorisms is worth emphasizing with reference to James:

Besides the advantages they offered to exhortation generally, maxims were compatible with the simple terse sentences and sharp, pointed style characteristic of many diatribes. They also provided suitable ammunition for the diatribe writers on account of their memorable formulation and accessible subject matter.

(Wilson 1991:54–55)

So, for example, within chapter 2 of James, aphorisms appear at vv. 10, 12, 13a, 13b, 20b(?), 26.

Finally, it is also worth noticing Stowers' argument that dialogue with an imaginary interlocutor is frequently, in Graeco-Roman diatribe, connected with 'the problem of moral inconsistency' (Stowers 1981:116), i.e. inconsistency between profession and behaviour or inconsistency of behaviour. Attacking such inconsistency is a method of exposing the error, overcoming hypocrisy and persuading to moral reformation. The inconsistent are often characterized as pretentious and arrogant, claiming qualities they do not really possess (Stowers 1981:100–110). Moral inconsistency and hypocrisy (which in James characterize the double-minded and the double-tongued) are pervasive issues in James. His imaginary interlocutor in 2:18–24 functions to expose the inconsistency of professing faith without works; 3:13–14 insists on consistency of profession with the reality of heart and deeds, warning those who harbour evil desires not to contradict them in lying and boastful professions of wisdom. The striking coincidence between 4:12 and Romans 14:4, 10 can be understood as a diatribal commonplace, since in both cases it is the arrogance of the one who presumes to judge others that is attacked. It is often moral inconsistency that James' rhetorical questions expose (2:6–7; 3:11–12; 4:4, 12). It is a theme on which diatribe and Jewish wisdom converge.

### 3 LITERARY STRUCTURE OF JAMES

While there has been very little study or discussion of the forms of the small literary units in James, there has been a great deal of discussion of the overall literary structure of the work. (Recent discussions of the structure of James are Frankemölle 1990; Crotty 1992; Elliott 1993:71–72; Johnson 1995a:11–15; Thurén 1995; Edgar 1995: chapter 2; Penner 1996: chapter 3; Wall 1997:34–38.) A very wide variety of different structural analyses of James have been offered. Not only have these worked with different methods of determining literary structure. Even scholars using the same method have produced differing results. After so much discussion, there seems to be not even the beginnings of a consensus. One suspects that something must be wrong with the goal that is being attempted.

Most discussion is still attempting to refute Dibelius (whose commentary on James first appeared in 1921), who argued that it was in the very nature of paraenesis, the genre to which he attributed James, to lack coherent order. ‘The entire document’, he claimed, ‘lacks continuity of thought’ (Dibelius and Greeven 1975: 2). He did not mean that there are no *sections* of James which show continuity of thought: he did find this in three sections he called ‘treatises’ (2:1–13; 2:14–26; 3:1–12). But outside these sections sayings or expanded sayings are typically strung together by means of catchwords or because they had already been combined in the tradition, without any necessary connections of thought between them. There are no overall principles of ordering which give the whole work a coherent structure. Nor do the various sayings and sections have any coherence of content, since they are largely unoriginal, drawn from diverse sources, and collected without any attempt to adapt them into a coherent whole. Naturally, in that case, they do not address any specific context. James is a ‘storehouse’ (Dibelius and Greeven 1975:11), into which all kinds of diverse materials have been gathered, so that readers can help themselves to whatever might be useful to them for their own purposes. All this, claimed Dibelius, is entirely typical of paraenetic literature.

Most scholars since Dibelius have sought greater coherence in James, and it is virtually indisputable that in general they have demonstrated that there is more continuity of thought and more thematic coherence than Dibelius could see. However, there are problems with much of the discussion. It seems not to have been sufficiently recognized that carefully composed structure and coherence of thought are in principle

distinct. Even if it were the case that James consists of sayings and short sections assembled in a completely random manner, they could still be coherent in content. If composed by a single author (or even by a school), they could show consistency of concerns and ideas. Pascal's *Pensées* are an obvious example. Many have thought that the sayings of Jesus, though not originally arranged in the ways found in the Gospels, have considerable consistency. In reaction against Dibelius, not a few scholars seem mistakenly to have supposed that, in order to validate the consistency of thought and concerns which they have rightly detected in James, they need to demonstrate a closely conceived structuring of the whole work. Moreover, they have sought a structure which corresponds to some kind of overall continuity of thought, something approaching a sequential argument progressing through James. This is the mistake, in my view, made by recent attempts to solve the problem of the structure of James by the application of rhetorical criticism, conforming James to the patterns found in speeches which pursue an overall argument (Wuellner 1978; Frankemölle 1990; Thurén 1995). (More successful are the arguments of Watson 1993a, 1993b, that rhetorical criticism can illuminate the structure of argument within each of three rhetorical units: 2:1–13; 2:14–26; 3:1–12. Similarly and in more detail: Wachob [forthcoming] chapter 3, on 2:1–13.) They fail because in the end they seem to be locating in the structure a sequence of argument which cannot be found in the words. Also mistaken, in my view, is the trend, following Francis (1970), to find major elements of letter structure in James. This relies on very forced resemblances between James and letters which have the features in question, and tends to confuse the issue of James' relation to the letter genre. For James to be a 'real' letter, in the sense of a document actually sent from a sender to addressees, it need only have the formal letter-opening which James has (1:1). No other features of the structure of letters are necessary for this.

The attempts to retrieve James from the incoherence to which Dibelius assigned it look too much like attempts to approximate James as far as possible to a Pauline letter. In my view we need, first, to recognize that Dibelius was wrong about the lack of coherence of thought in James, but right to recognize that James does not exhibit the kind of coherence that is provided by a sequence of argument or logical progression of thought encompassing the whole work. He was right to see that paraenetic literature, which James does in general resemble, rarely has that kind of coherence of thought and structure. He exaggerated the incoherence and haphazard character of paraenetic

literature. In works in the tradition of Jewish wisdom instruction to which James belongs, such as Ben Sira or Pseudo-Phocylides, there is more structure than Dibelius' account of paraenetic literature allows, but the structure is relatively loose, since it is primarily a way of arranging paraenetic material on a variety of topics. (See Harvey 1993 and Collins 1998:45–46, on Ben Sira; van der Horst 1995 and Collins 1998:160–161, on Pseudo-Phocylides.) We need, secondly, in my view, to be clearer than many discussions of this subject have been about the function of the structure we seek to discern in James. The kind of literary structure with which I am here concerned is the kind that helps readers to read. It enables readers to find their way through or around the text in such a way as to understand it. Deeper or more subtle structures may have other functions, but we should not confuse them with this one. This kind of structure usually requires reasonably clear formal markers as well as steps or changes in theme or argument. If we are to give weight to structure in interpretation of James, the structure must be such that the first readers could be reasonably expected to recognize.

The structure I propose divides James into three unequal parts:

- A Prescript (1:1).
- B Introduction (1:2–27).
- C Exposition (2–5).

The first part is uncontroversial: it is the formal letter-opening, in the standard style of Greek letters, which makes James a letter. There is a formal difference between B and C which is easily discernible to most readers. Whereas B consists largely of aphorisms, sometimes briefly expanded, sometimes linked together in sequences covering two or three verses, C consists largely of longer sections in which a line of argument or a train of thought is easily followed. They are topical sections of the kind that are frequently found in paraenetic literature (McDonald 1980: chapter 3).

### **3.1 The exposition (2:1–5:20)**

We look first at the subdivisions of Part C:

- (1) 2:1–13: Partiality and the law of love.
- (2) 2:14–26: Faith and works.

- (3) 3:1–12: The tongue.
- (4) 3:13–18: True and false wisdom.
- (5) 4:1–10: A call to the doubleminded to repent.
- (6) 4:11–12: Against judging one another.
- (7) 4:13–17: Denunciation of merchants.
- (8) 5:1–6: Denunciation of landowners.
- (9) 5:7–11: Holding out till the parousia.
- (10) 5:12: Speaking the whole truth.
- (11) 5:13–18: Prayer.
- (12) 5:19–20: Reclaiming those who err.

Most commentators recognize that the most obvious indications in the text of chapters 2–5 divide it in this way. While some do not recognize some of these divisions, probably each of these divisions is recognized by a majority of commentators, and most of these divisions by almost all. This division into twelve sections therefore builds on considerable exegetical agreement, which is largely a recognition of the fact that each of these sections is internally unified by content. It is worth noticing that the number twelve is an appropriate number of sections in a letter to the twelve tribes in the Diaspora. More important, however, is the fact that these divisions are signalled by strong formal indicators of opening and closure.

The beginnings of the twelve sections are marked as follows:

- (a) ‘My brothers and sisters’ (**ἀδελφοί μου**) (2:1, 26; 3:1; 5:12, 19) or ‘brothers and sisters’ (**ἀδελφοί**) (4:11; 5:7) opens seven of the twelve sections.
- (b) A question (2:2–4; 3:13) or questions (2:14–16; 4:1; 5:13–14) open five of the sections. In two of these cases, a question is combined with the address: ‘my brothers and sisters’ (2:1–4, 14–16), while, in the other three cases, the questions contain the words ‘among you’ (**ἐν ὑμῖν** in 4:1) or ‘anyone among you’ **τις ἐν ὑμῖν** (in 3:13; 5:13, 14; cf. also **τις** in 2:14).
- (c) The words ‘anyone among you’ (**τις ἐν ὑμῖν**) occur at the beginning of three sections (3:13; 5:13–14, 19), either in questions (3:13; 5:13, 14) or in combination with ‘my brothers and sisters’ (5:19).
- (d) ‘Come now’ (**ἄγε νῦν οἱ**) opens two of the sections (4:13; 5:1).
- (e) ‘Above all’ (**πρὸ πάντων δέ**) distinctively opens one section, in combination with ‘my brothers and sisters’ (5:12).

It will be observed that in most cases more than one of these markers is present. Exceptions are ‘Come now’ (**ἄγε νῦν οἱ**), a distinctive phrase used only in these two verses in James (4:13; 5:1), ‘brothers and sisters’ (**ἀδελφοί**) in 4:11, and ‘my brothers and sisters’ (**ἀδελφοί μου**) in 5:7. Although ‘my beloved brothers and sisters’ (**ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί**) (2:5), ‘my brothers and sisters’ (**ἀδελφοί μου**) (3:10, 12) and ‘brothers and sisters’ (**ἀδελφοί**) (5:9) each occur once in these chapters at points where they do not mark the beginning of a section, it is in each case very clear that they do not.

However, the division into twelve sections does not depend only on the way sections begin. How sections end is probably even more important, since it provides readers with the awareness of closure even before they discover a new beginning in the succeeding section. Eight of the sections end with an aphorism that rounds off or sums up the section (2:13, 26; 3:12b, 18; 4:10, 17; 5:12, 20; for this function of aphorisms, see Wilson 1991:49–50; Crossan 1983: 183–226). In each case the aphorism in this position sounds a strong note of conclusion:

- (1) 2:13 consists of two very concise aphorisms linked by the words mercy (**ἔλεος**) and judgment (**κρισις**).
- (2) 2:26 is a powerfully symmetrical comparison summing up the conclusion which has already been argued.
- (3) 3:12b, is a short aphoristic statement, with striking assonance (**ἀλυκὸν γλυκύ**). Following the two rhetorical questions (3:11–12a), it effectively brings the reader to a stop.
- (4) 3:18, by picking up ‘fruits’ (**καρπῶν**) and ‘peaceable’ (**εἰρηνική**) from the previous verse, repeating ‘peace’ (**εἰρήνη**) and ending with this word, gives a strong sense of completion.
- (5) 4:10, with its contrastive parallelism, ends a passage, which, beginning with the quotation in verse 6, proceeds by admonitions employing parallelism (rare in James), and leads to the climax in verse 10, where reference to God’s action forms an *inclusio* with the quotation in verse 6.
- (7) 4:17, in proverbial and third-person form, contrasts with the second-person address of verses 13–16.
- (10) In 5:12, apart from the introductory words, the whole section is the aphorism, given special emphasis by the opening ‘above all’ (**πρὸ πάντων**).
- (12) In 5:20, the aphorism which concludes the whole work ends with a biblical allusion (Prov. 10:12) which was probably

already familiar in the form of a saying employed in Christian paraenesis (1 Pet. 4:8; 1 Clem. 49:5; 2 Clem. 16:4).

This leaves four sections which do not end with an aphorism: (6) The rhetorical question in 4:12b, though not typically aphoristic in form, may well echo a well-known saying, since it is verbally so close to Romans 14:4 (the first five words, omitting **δέ**, are identical: **συ τίς εἰ ὁ κρίνων**; for the form of expression, cf. Rom. 9:20; Job 35:2 LXX; Judith 6:2; 8:12). (8) The accusation in 5:6 forms a clear climax to the prophetic indictment in 5:1–6. (9) 5:11, with its reference to ‘the end of the Lord’ (**τὸ τέλος κυρίου**), and its strong concluding echo of the classic scriptural revelation of the character of God (cf. Exod. 34:6), gives a sense of completion. (11) 5:18, though the least final of all these endings of sections, clearly completes the example of Elijah’s prayer (5:17–18).

It is therefore clear that the twelve sections are carefully crafted as self-contained entities with strong indications to readers that they are to be read as such. Within each section there is an easily discernible movement of thought which is brought to a rhetorically satisfying conclusion at the end of each section. Not only by unity of topic but also by rhetorical effect each section is united within itself and clearly marked out from others. Thus much the most prominent and important structural feature of chapters 2–5 is the arrangement of material into twelve discrete sections. This does not preclude consideration of the way these discrete sections are ordered in a sequence, but it certainly gives priority to the sections as discrete units.

On the whole scholars since Dibelius have not been content with a structure of discrete sections, some much shorter than others, and have tried to impose a more unified pattern of sequential development across these chapters. Thurén has recently voiced the rationale for seeking this. Against Dibelius, he maintains that paraenesis need not be a loose connection of disconnected statements, but can have a specific overall purpose of influencing and persuading people, a purpose which cannot be served by a mere collection of diverse material. Observing James’ good command of Greek and of rhetorical style, he concludes ‘it would be unnatural if the author lacked a clear message or disregarded elementary requirements for organizing his speech’ (Thurén 1995:264; note the unargued assumption that James can be regarded as a ‘speech’). The mistake is to suppose that James must have a single communicative goal which he pursues by means of a

sequential argument moving in rhetorically effective order through the whole of his work. James does have an overall aim: to move his readers towards 'perfection' (1:4; 3:2) through fulfilment of 'the law of freedom' (1:25; 2:8, 10, 12) and through the wisdom God gives (1:5; 3:17). But this does not entail persuading his readers through an argument pursued sequentially through the letter. It entails providing his readers with a compendium of wisdom instruction on a varied range of topics relevant to fulfilling the law, implementing the wisdom from above, and attaining perfection. In so far as James has a coherent vision of the way he and his readers should live, there will be thematic connections between his treatments of these various topics, but this kind of coherence of thought should not be confused with the notion of sequential development.

The rhetorical structure of James' work is skilfully designed and implemented, but he has a different kind of rhetorical aim and strategy from that envisaged by Thurén and others. Only within each section is he concerned to lead the reader on through a continuous train of thought. Much of the rhetorical strategy is to bring the reader to pause and ponder. Aphorisms can be used to move an argument on (e.g. 2:10) but even then their effect is just as much to encourage the reader to slow down and to reflect on the meaning encapsulated in the aphorism. The aphorisms (and some other devices) which end the sections in chapter 2–5 are designed to effect closure and to invite reflection on the topic thus completed or summed up by the aphorism. For James' communicative aim it is the construction of each discrete section as a rhetorical unit that matters. The way in which these sections are placed in a sequence is of much less consequence. In this respect, James resembles other examples of Jewish wisdom instruction. In such works as Ben Sira and Pseudo-Phocylides, it is not difficult to distinguish topical sections, but the rationale for the arrangement of these sections in order is much more obscure. Harvey, who seeks as much order as possible in Ben Sira, but finds more within each section than in the whole, attributes this feature of Ben Sira's work to a postulated origin of the discrete sections as lectures in Ben Sira's teaching cycle in his school (Harvey 1993:61). Of course, the structure of literary works can be affected by the pre-history of their contents. But in this case there is no need to present this as an *excuse* for a less than satisfactory feature of the work. For paraenesis of this kind, whether Ben Sira's or James', it is the structure of the topical sections that is important, while the arrangement of these sections in relation to each other is not

necessarily of any importance for the achievement of the work's communicative goal. We should not confuse an aesthetic preference of our own with the rhetorical requirements of the genre.

I do not mean to argue that the twelve sections in chapters 2–5 are arranged in an entirely random order, only that, *even if* this were the case, it would not necessarily impede James' overall goal in his work. Priority in structure emphatically belongs to the sections as self-contained units. However, there are some principles of ordering at work in the arrangement of the sections.

First, four of the aphorisms which end sections also function as transitions connecting one section with the next (2:13; 3:12b, 18; 4:17). This by no means qualifies their function as closure, since it is only retrospectively, from the perspective of the succeeding section, that they can be seen to anticipate the latter in some way. In 2:13, 'mercy' is both the compassion for the poor which partiality denies them (2:4) and also the practical provision for the needs of the poor which James uses as an example of works in 2:15–16. 3:12b brings to a decisive conclusion the argument that words reveal the heart to be either good or evil, and thus relates to the following verses, which focus on the outward expression in works of what is in the heart (3:13–17). In 3:18 the emphasis on peace rounds off the account of the wisdom from above but also readily provides a contrast with the images of war which open the next section (4:1). Retrospectively, 4:17 can be seen to apply as aptly to the landowners (5:1–6) as it does to the merchants (4:13–16). These transitional aspects of concluding aphorisms therefore indicate that sections (1) and (2) are linked together in a sequence, that sections (3), (4) and (5) are linked together, and that sections (7) and (8) are linked together as a closely corresponding pair. This result correlates well with the links that have often been perceived on other grounds by exegetes. But since indications of this kind connecting other sections are lacking, we should refrain from attempting to extend this pattern of linkage across the whole of chapters 2–5.

Moreover, we should not make too much of the links. They do not mean that a continuous line of thought runs through two or three sections. The beginning of each section is always the beginning of a new train of thought. The links suggest connections rather than straightforward continuity. For example, in the case of sections (1) and (2), the first of these sections argues that in showing partiality to the rich at the expense of the poor the readers are transgressing the law and incur judgment. The second takes a

step back from this argument and raises the question whether works as such are necessary to salvation. Can faith without works not save? Both sections require practical compassion for the poor, but in different ways and by different lines of argument. The first argues that obedience to the law of love entails not discriminating against the poor. The second argues that faith is only completed by works, of which charity to the poor is one. Thus 2:13 is not transitional in the sense of constituting a transitional stage in a continuous argument. It concludes one line of thought, but retrospectively can be seen also to anticipate an aspect of the way the next line of thought, which begins in 2:14, develops. It allows us to see that, while each of sections (1) and (2) is complete in itself, the two sections do share a common concern with compassion for the poor.

Secondly, we can see why the two very short sections (10) and (12) have been placed where they are. 5:12, a demand for total truthfulness in speech with allusion to a saying of Jesus, brings to an emphatic and encompassing conclusion James' teaching on speech ethics which is scattered through preceding sections (3:1–12; 4:11–12; 5:9) (see section 4.7). It has to stand towards the end of the work and, if it is to have the emphasis required by its introductory formula ('above all'), it must stand alone as a section in itself. The section 5:19–20 is designed to conclude the work. It concerns the application of James' teaching to those who most need it: those who have strayed from the right way of living. Since the responsibility for applying James' teaching is a communal, as well as individual, responsibility, James concludes his teaching by encouraging those who hear and obey it also to use it in reclaiming others who have strayed from the way of living his teaching commends. Other elements of rationale in the ordering of the twelve sections may be perceptible, but they are unlikely to be of importance. The structure of chapters 2–5 is very largely designed to help readers read, ponder and assimilate each of the twelve sections in itself.

### **3.2 The introduction (1:2–27)**

This is the section of James which most nearly approximates to Dibelius' understanding of paraenesis as a collection of individual sayings strung together more by artificial means such as catchwords than by topic, and certainly not embodying a linear

sequence of thought. There are certainly collections of sayings, such as parts of Proverbs, of which this is relatively true, even though it will probably always be debated how far such sections exhibit some degree of order. In the case of James 1:2–27, it should be said immediately that, while there are some individual aphorisms which stand alone without syntactical connection to their context (12, 26, 27), most have been adapted or expanded for their context (e.g. 2–4) or given an introductory formula (16–17, 19) or syntactically linked with other aphorisms (e.g. 9–11, 19–20). As we have seen in section 2, there are certainly many aphorisms here, whose aphoristic form is clearly visible and which easily could stand alone as single aphorisms outside the context in which they have here been placed. But most have not simply been placed beside each other; they have been in minor ways expanded and adapted and linked together.

The text does therefore fall into discrete short sections, only some of which consist of a single aphorism. It is possible to discern twelve sections: (1) 2–4; (2) 5–8; (3) 9–11; (4) 12; (5) 13–15; (6) 16–17; (7) 18; (8) 19–20; (9) 21; (10) 22–25; (11) 26; (12) 27. It would certainly be possible to divide the sections a little differently. For example, perhaps verses 16–18 form a single section. It is also possible that the precept (1:1) should count as a section. Thus one might enumerate twelve sections in a somewhat different way from the way I have proposed, or one might count, say, only ten. The number twelve is attractive as a parallel with the sections in chapters 2–5, but there is little to gain by insisting on it. The divisions in the text are not such as to give one the same confidence in distinguishing sections as one can have in chapters 2–5.

The expansions of aphorisms and the syntactical connections between some provide trains of thought which extend a little beyond a single aphorism in many cases, but never further than four verses. One should beware of obscuring the aphoristic nature of the material by supplying trains of thought which are not expressed. For example, there is no train of thought running through verses 26 and 27 together: they are two self-contained aphorisms, both concerned with the definition of true religion, and linked verbally and conceptually by the word ‘religion’ or ‘cultic service’ which concludes verse 26 and begins verse 27. The aphoristic form of each invites the reader to ponder each for its own sake, while the text’s placing of the two beside each other invites further reflection on their relation to each other. This is the

communicative effect of a collection of aphorisms, quite different from that of linear sequence of argument.

The ways in which the aphorisms and sayings are linked together are in fact more varied and complex than a linear progression of thought through the whole chapter would provide. Catchwords, which may create a purely verbal connection or may also embody a conceptual one, can link adjacent aphorisms or sections (e.g. 4–5: *λειπομενοι/λειπεται*; 12–13: *πειρασμον/πειραζομενος/πειραζομαι*; 19–20: *οργην/οργη*; 26–27: *θρησκεια*). Linkwords similarly connect sections which are not adjacent (e.g. 2–3, 12: *πειρασμοις/πειρασμον, υπομεμν/υπομενει, δοκιμιον/δοκιμος*; 15, 18: *αποκλει/απεκλυσην*). There are also conceptual links which do not depend on verbal correspondence (e.g. 13–15, 17–18: what does not come from God and what does come from God; 19, 26: control of speech).

It has quite often been observed that 1:2–27 (part B) introduces virtually every topic that is expounded at greater length in chapters 2–5 (part C). In fact, part B is much more closely related to the sections in part C than these sections are to each other. Again and again, themes and words which occur only in one of the twelve sections of part C are already anticipated in part B. For example:

- In Part C the phrase ‘those who love him’ (*τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν*) occurs only in section (1) (2:5), but is found in 1:12.
- In Part C the phrase ‘the law of freedom’ (*νόμος ἐλευθερίας*) occurs only section (1) (2:12), but is found in 1:25.
- In Part C the tongue (*γλῶσσα*) occurs only in section (3) (3:5–9), but is found in 1:26, where it is connected with the verb ‘to bridle’ (*χαλιναγωγέω*), also used in 3:2.
- In Part C wisdom (*σοφία, σοφός*) occurs only in section (4) (3:13, 15, 17), but is found in 1:6.
- In Part C the term ‘doubleminded’ (*δίψυχος*) is used only in section (5) (4:8), but is found in 1:8.
- In Part C the contrast ‘bring low’ (*ταπεινώω*) and ‘exalt’ (*ὑψώω*) occurs only in section (5) (4:10), but is found in 1:9–10 (*ταπεινός, ταπεινωσις, ὕψος*).
- In Part C the word ‘doer’ (*ποιητής*) occurs only in section (6) (4:11), but is found in 1:22, 23, 25.
- In Part C the notion of the transience of the life of the wicked rich occurs only in section (7) (4:14), but is found in 1:10–11.

- In Part C endurance (**ὑπομονή, ὑπομένω**) occurs only in section (9) (5:11), but is found in 1:3–4, 12.
- In Part C ‘to err’ (**πλανᾶω**) and ‘error’ (**πλάνη**) are used only in section 12 (5:19–20), but ‘to err’ (**πλανᾶω**) occurs in 1:16.

This is not an exhaustive list. The fact that very few such links exist between different sections of part C confirms our argument that the latter are conceived as self-contained treatments of distinct topics, whereas part B is conceived as an introduction to all the topics treated in part C.

It should be noted that the correspondences between part B and part C are not at all systematic. It is not that every section of part C corresponds to a section of B. This is far from being the case. It is very broadly true that the themes of the first six sections of part C are anticipated in the second half of part B, while the themes of the last six sections of part C are anticipated in the first half of part B. This is a roughly chiasmic structure which gives some sense of returning to the themes with which the work started as one nears the end of the work. But this pattern applies only very broadly: there are many correspondences which do not fit that chiasmic pattern.

So it seems clear that part B of James is a collection of aphorisms, carefully compiled in order to introduce all the main themes of part C. It is not easy to find a close parallel to this. According to Johnson, ‘In terms of ancient literary categories, chapter one serves as an *epitome* of the work as a whole’ (1995a:15). Unfortunately this is inaccurate. Ancient epitomes were ‘systematic summaries of larger works or of treatments of subjects’ (Malherbe 1986:85). They seem to have circulated as independent works. Johnson proposes the Sentences of Syriac Menander as an example of a work in which an epitome precedes the main body of the work (Johnson 1995a:37). But he has been misled by the presentation of the material in Baarda’s translation (Baarda 1985:591–592), where the Epitome is printed first, followed by the Florilegium. But the two do not appear together in any manuscript (as is clear from Baarda 1985:583–584). The Epitome circulated separately from the Florilegium, and did not function as a literary introduction to the latter. Moreover, unlike James, the Epitome consists of a number of sayings selected from the Florilegium and reproduced largely *verbatim*. While ‘epitome’ is an otherwise appropriate term for part B of James, to use it would not conform to ancient practice.

Perhaps the closest analogy to the role of part B in James is found in the *Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides*, which begins with a paraphrase of the Decalogue (lines 3–8), no doubt because the Decalogue is understood as a summary of all God's moral requirements. But the passage does not have the close connections with the rest of the work that part B of James does with part C. The Wisdom of Ben Sira begins with a poem about the origin of wisdom (1:1–10), to which James has no equivalent, followed by an acrostic, expanding on Proverbs 1:7 and expounding the relationship between wisdom and the fear of the Lord (1:11–30). But the second half of this passage (1:22–30) contains a variety of moral exhortations, presumably intended as representative of outworking of wisdom and the fear of the Lord. However, they are very far from being an epitome of the rest of the book. Finally, we shall observe later (chapter 3, section 2) that James probably saw Leviticus 19 as an epitome of the whole law (not in the specific ancient sense of the term 'epitome' discussed above), and so it is possible that this provided him with a model for composing his own exposition of the law in form of an epitome and fuller exposition.

Finally, a significant aspect of the arrangement of the sections of part B is that the first section is so placed because it is designed to highlight the overarching theme of the whole work: 'perfection', **τέλειος** ('perfect', 'complete') is used twice in verse 4, reinforced both with the near-synonymous **δλόκληρος** and with the phrase 'lacking in nothing.' James has probably adapted a current Christian saying about sufferings producing endurance (cf. Rom. 5:3–4; 1 Pet. 1:6–7) precisely for this purpose of introducing the notion of perfection as the inclusive goal of Christian life and of his instruction in the practical wisdom of living in the right way. (It is surely not accidental that the **τέλειος** ['perfect,' 'complete'] word-group occurs in James seven times, two of them in this first statement [1:4 (*bis*); 1:17, 25; 2:8, 22; 3:2]. Seven is the number of perfection or completeness, which is also why the 'wisdom from above' is summed up in seven attributes in 3:17. Compare the fact that 'the fear of the Lord', which for Ben Sira is the beginning and end of wisdom, occurs twelve times in his work: Skehan and Di Lella 1987: 143.) If we take the 'end' which James has in view throughout his work to be 'perfection', then we may apply to the order of his work what Pascal said, against the charge 'that Scripture has no order', about the order of Scripture: it 'consists principally of digression on each point which is related to the end so as always to show it' (*Pensée* 298, quoted in Williams 1981:82).

#### 4 JAMES, JESUS BEN SIRA AND JESUS OF NAZARETH

There is now good reason to think that the oldest collections of sayings in the Israelite wisdom tradition (Prov. 10–31) are largely compilations of proverbs which, like the proverbs of other pre-literary societies, originated in and were transmitted orally in the everyday life of ordinary people (Westermann 1995; Golka 1993; cf. Fontaine 1982; Schneider 1992:85–92). Perhaps some proverbs of popular origin are also transmitted by Qohelet, who collected as well as composing proverbs (Eccles. 12:10–11), and, less probably, by Ben Sira.<sup>20</sup> But for the most part wisdom sayings in the Second Temple period were invented by sages and wisdom literature composed by them. Even the early collections, whatever their origins, were preserved as attributed to sages, sometimes anonymous (Prov. 22:17 LXX; 24:23), most often named (10:1; 25:1; 30:1; 31:1). In the Jewish wisdom tradition, wise sayings were not generally regarded as traditional folk wisdom but as originating from sages who invented them (1 Kgs. 4:32; Prov. 1:6; 10:1; 24:23; 25:1; 30:1; 31:1; Eccles. 12:9–11; Sir. 8:8; 39:2; 47:17; 4Q298 1 1–2:1:1). The transition from oral folk wisdom to the wisdom teaching of sages should not be envisaged as a departure from orality. While long didactic poems and treatises were no doubt literary compositions, aphorisms were surely coined orally, used in oral teaching, and memorized. The continued use by wisdom teachers of older proverbial forms, as well as other types of short saying, must have been due in part to their value for oral teaching and memory. Literature functioned in the context of orality. Sayings did not pass out of orality when committed to writing, but could gain new leases of oral vitality through writing. Much ancient literature lived on the verge of orality, and aphorisms are a prime case of a form that was essentially oral as well as literary.

In the Second Temple period some individual wise teachers authored books of their own. Some of these wrote under pseudonyms: the authors of Ecclesiastes (which is probably implicitly attributed to Solomon, though not by name), the Wisdom of Solomon (which also does not name Solomon but unmistakably assumes Solomon's persona) and the Sentences of (Pseudo-)Phocylides (an ancient Greek sage).<sup>21</sup> So far as we can tell from the fragments of the Qumran wisdom texts, they were written by authors who speak in the first person but are not named. As far as

we know, the first and almost the only Jewish sage in Antiquity to put his own wisdom in writing under his own name was Jeshua ben Eleazar ben Sira, usually known as Ben Sira. Ben Sira's wisdom is attributed to himself in the book he wrote himself. As a named sage of the post-Old Testament period to whom wisdom teaching is attributed, Ben Sira is comparable with Jesus, whose wisdom was transmitted orally as teaching attributed to him and collected in writings by others, and comparable also to some extent with the pre-rabbinic and rabbinic sages whose (less extensive) sayings are collected in *Pirke 'Avot* and the *'Avot de Rabbi Natan*. But if we are correct in supposing the letter of James not to be pseudonymous, then Ben Sira and James are the only two ancient Jewish sages who collected their own wisdom in written works attributed to themselves.

This suggests that some comparison of the two may be fruitful. In a later section we shall observe some contrasts in content between the wisdom of Ben Sira and the wisdom of James, but in this section we shall observe an important respect in which the two are alike. This concerns the way in which their own wisdom teaching relates to its sources in the tradition.

Ben Sira saw himself<sup>22</sup> standing at the end of a long line of wisdom teachers:

Now I was the last on watch;  
I was like one who gleans after the grape-gatherers;  
by the blessing of the Lord I excelled,  
and like a grape-gatherer I filled my wine press (33:16–17).

In the initially modest role of gleaner, gathering up, through his study of the Scriptures and other wisdom traditions, what his predecessors had left behind them, Ben Sira made such progress that he succeeded—as gleaners usually do not—in filling a wine press himself, just as his predecessors had done. In other words, from his study of the tradition he was able, by God's blessing, to produce his own wisdom teaching, indebted to the tradition, but very much his own contribution. In a parallel image (24:30–31), he sees his role as a student and teacher of wisdom in the first place as a water channel, irrigating his garden with water channelled from the river of traditional wisdom, but his channel then becomes itself a river and finally a sea.

The scriptural sources of wisdom, not only in what we know as the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible, but also in the Torah

and the prophets, Ben Sira clearly studied intensively, as he depicts the ideal scribe doing:

How different the one who devotes himself  
to the study of the law of the Most High!  
He seeks out the wisdom of all the ancients,  
and is concerned with prophecies;  
he preserves the sayings of the famous  
and penetrates the subtleties of parables...  
If the great Lord is willing,  
he will be filled with the spirit of understanding;  
he will pour forth words of wisdom of his own...  
(38:34b–39:2, 6).

The role therefore involves passing on the accumulated wisdom of the tradition, but also penetrating its meaning, drawing out its insights, developing it in new ways. Truth is fundamentally what is inherited, but the student who has entered thoroughly into the tradition and himself become a sage (cf. 6:32–37; 18:29), inspired with the divine gift of understanding (cf. 24:33), is a *creative* exponent of the tradition, interpreting it in fresh formulations of his own. In his whole career, both in his oral teaching in his school (51:23–26) and in the incorporation of that teaching in the composition of his book of wisdom, Ben Sira did himself on a grand scale what he says of the wise person:

When an intelligent person hears a wise saying,  
he praises it and adds to it (21:15a).

It is entirely in keeping with this conception of his role as a sage that Ben Sira, despite his enormous indebtedness to the book of Proverbs, never *quotes* a saying (a verse) from it. Only three times does he reproduce word-for-word as much as half a verse from Proverbs, leaving himself free to develop it creatively (Sir. 1:14a=Prov. 9:10a; Sir. 27:26a=Prov. 26:27a; Sir. 28:8b=Prov. 15:18a). Elsewhere sayings clearly inspired by Proverbs may take over a word or phrase from their source, but, even when they reproduce precisely the idea in the source, they reformulate it in a new way. Sometimes a new saying corresponds in concept quite closely to one in Proverbs without any verbal resemblance.

Or a saying of Ben Sira may give a further twist to an idea found in Proverbs. What is true of Ben Sira's use of his major biblical source, Proverbs, is true also of his use of the Torah, the psalms and the prophets. Some examples will illustrate the point:

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might  
(Deut. 6:5).

With all your soul fear the Lord, and revere his priests.  
With all your might love your Maker,  
and do not neglect his ministers  
(Sir. 7:29–30).

[God] raises the poor from the dust,  
and lifts the needy from the ash heap,  
to make them sit with princes,  
with the princes of his people  
(Ps. 113:7–8; cf. 1 Sam. 2:8).

The wisdom of the poor man lifts his head high,  
and seats him among princes (Sir. 11:1).

Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity,  
and the rod of his anger will fail  
(Prov. 22:8).

My son, do not sow in the furrows of injustice,  
and you will not reap a sevenfold crop (Sir. 7:3).

He who finds a wife finds a good thing,  
and obtains favour from the LORD (Prov. 18:22).

A good wife is a great blessing;  
she will be granted among the blessings of the man who fears the Lord (Sir. 26:3).

Grey hair is a crown of glory,  
and it is gained in a righteous life (Prov. 16:31).

Rich experience is the crown of the aged,  
and their glory is the fear of the Lord (Sir. 25:6).

A stone is heavy, and sand is weighty,  
but a fool's provocation is heavier than both (Prov. 27:3).

Sand, salt, and a piece of iron are easier to bear than a stupid person (Sir. 22:15).

Better is a man of humble standing who works for himself  
than one who plays the great man but lacks bread (Prov. 12:9).

Better is a man who works and has an abundance of everything,  
than one who goes about boasting but lacks bread (Sir. 10:27).

Toward the scorners he is scornful,  
but to the humble he shows favour (Prov. 3:34).

The greater you are, the more you must humble yourself;  
so you will find favour in the sight of the Lord (Sir. 3:18).

Whoever loves pleasure will suffer want;  
whoever loves wine and oil will not be rich (Prov. 21:17).

Do not revel in great luxury,  
or you may become impoverished by its expense.  
Do not become a beggar by feasting with borrowed money,  
when you have nothing in your purse (Sir. 18:32–33).

Sometimes a number of different passages in Proverbs or other sources have come together in Ben Sira's study and contributed to a passage indebted to them all (e.g. Sir. 27:32–27; cf. Prov. 10:10a; 6:12–19; 26:23–28; Eccles. 10:9; Ps. 9:15–16; Theognis 93–96).<sup>23</sup> Often a saying from Proverbs or elsewhere provides a theme which Ben Sira develops at much greater length (e.g. Prov. 3:27–28: Sir. 4:1–5; Prov. 14:20: Sir. 13:21–23; Prov. 14:21: Sir. 10:19–24, 30–31; Prov. 18:24: Sir. 6:5–17; Exod. 20:12: Sir. 3:1–6).<sup>24</sup>

As well as his biblical sources, Ben Sira probably drew on some non-Jewish sources of proverbial wisdom, of which two have been plausibly identified: the Greek poems of Theognis, and the Egyptian wisdom of Phibis, preserved in *Papyrus Insinger*.<sup>25</sup> Although the parallels are sufficiently close to make a literary relationship possible, Ben Sira no more *quotes* from these sources than he does from his biblical sources. He has derived insight from them, but he formulates it in new ways of his own. As with his biblical sources, he may rephrase while keeping quite close to the thought and occasionally adopting a word or phrase of the original, or he may simply be inspired to a completely different expression of the same idea. The following are two examples in which he comes as close as he ever does to repeating his source:

Many become comrades dear  
beside the bowl,  
but few in a grave matter  
(Theognis 643–644: Sanders  
1983:30).

There is a friend who is a table  
companion,  
but will not stand by you in  
your day of trouble (Sir. 6:10).

Do not draw near, if it is not  
 time for it,  
 else your lord will hate you;  
 (but also) do not be far removed,  
 lest one must seek you  
 and your cause stink in the heart  
 of your lord (*P. Ms.* 10:12–13:  
 Sanders 1983:92).

Do not draw close,  
 lest you be put at a distance,  
 and do not remain at a distance,  
 lest you be hated (*Sir.* 13:10  
 Hebrew).

In summary, since the appropriate response of a sage to a wise saying is to add to it (21:15a), since a sage's skill is shown in creating apt proverbs (18:29), since the role of a sage is to express *as his own wisdom in his own formulation* the wisdom he has gained from his intensive study of the tradition, Ben Sira transmits and develops the tradition *without simply repeating it*. This reformulation and development of the tradition is, of course, in part contextual. Old wisdom needs to be adapted to new contexts and to be developed in line with fresh developments of thought. But it is important to notice that Ben Sira's avoidance of repetition cannot by any means be fully explained by such contextual adaptation and development. Even where the old wisdom would, in Ben Sira's eyes, have been wholly applicable as it stands (and indeed remains wholly applicable as it stands, since he did not aim to replace the book of Proverbs), still he reformulates the old wisdom, because it is the role of the sage to make the old wisdom his own and to express it as his own wisdom. Many of the proverbs in Ben Sira seem so traditional we readily suppose they must have come down to him in the tradition, but in reality they are traditional in content, traditional in style of formulation, but in their actual formulation newly minted by Ben Sira himself.

It follows that in most cases where verbal echoes of his scriptural sources occur, we should probably not regard these as *allusions* to Scripture, in the sense of deliberate intertextual pointers, meant to call the scriptural text to the reader's mind. Informed readers, students of wisdom like Ben Sira himself, would recognize the profound continuity between scriptural wisdom and his work, but not more so when he happens to pick up words from his source than when he does not. Only very occasionally should we identify something more like a citation of Scripture. When Ben Sira echoes the words of the well-known Deuteronomic commandment to love God (*Sir.* 7:29–30, quoted on p. 77), he

surely expected his readers to recognize the allusion and to understand him as interpreting the commandment by adding, as an implication he sees in it, the duty of respecting God's priests. When he quotes, at the outset of his work (1:14a), Prov. 9:10a ('the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom'), and makes this statement the starting-point for a poem on the connection between wisdom and the fear of the Lord (1:14–20), he is far from merely repeating the statement. But he surely means the reader to see that he is making this watchword of the biblical wisdom tradition (cf. also Prov. 1:7; Ps. 111:10; Job 28:28) the principle of his own work, in which the fear of the Lord is as prominent as wisdom.<sup>26</sup> Here he makes explicit the continuity which for the most part it is more appropriate to his own role as a sage to leave implicit.

Finally, our observation of Ben Sira's self-consciousness and practice as a sage enables us to question the way in which a distinction is often made between traditional wisdom, handed down anonymously with the authority of collective and ancestral wisdom, and the wisdom of the aphorist who formulates his own insights in sayings characterized by a recognizably individual voice (e.g. Scott 1990). As we shall see later, this distinction has been used to distinguish traditional Jewish wisdom from the teaching of Jesus as a sage, as well as to align James with the former rather than the latter. It is true that wisdom before Ben Sira was usually transmitted anonymously or under the pseudonymous aegis of Solomon as the fount of Israelite wisdom, though it is also true that the author of Ecclesiastes speaks with a highly individual voice which he attributes to his Solomonic literary persona. No doubt traditional sayings continued to be handed down orally and anonymously after Ben Sira's time, certainly in the form of popular proverbs, which embody the folk wisdom of all traditional cultures, and perhaps also as traditional sayings handed down in circles of scholarly scribes. But with Ben Sira we encounter the sage whose wisdom at its most traditional is also self-consciously his own. His wisdom is both old and new. His work as a whole certainly manifests some quite distinctive traits which are his own characteristic contribution to the wisdom tradition, but while they shape the whole they are certainly not evident in many of the parts. Many of his sayings, had we found in them in Proverbs, we should not have thought out of place there, but if we considered these sayings less distinctively his own than those in which he breaks fresh ground we would misunderstand the nature of his

continuity with the tradition. He has made the tradition his own, such that when he reformulates old wisdom and when he develops new wisdom from the old, the whole is attributable to him, and the overall shape of the whole is distinctively his.

Ben Sira, then, represents the sage whose wisdom, however traditional, is his own and is attributed. In that culture, as in most, tradition and innovation, conventionality and individuality are not alternatives but are interdependent. Only the balance varies. It may be true that the wisdom of Ben Sira is more traditional and conventional, that of Jesus more innovative and individual. But in both cases the wisdom is emphatically the sage's own and is therefore attributed. Ben Sira, of course, is unusual as a sage whose wisdom we have in a work composed by himself under his own name. But we encounter the same kind of sage—no mere anonymous tradent of proverbs but someone who formulates and develops the tradition as his own wisdom—in sages whose disciples passed on their sayings orally. Such are the early Jewish sages whose sayings are reported in *Pirke 'Avot*. (Of course, oral tradition does not always attribute sayings accurately, but the practice of attribution is nevertheless important for the reasons we have explained.) The transmission and collection of the sayings of Jesus, in so far as Jesus, though more than a sage, was certainly a sage, should be understood also in this context. And it is against this background that it makes sense to see the letter of James, not as a collection of anonymous and miscellaneous paraenetic traditions, to which the compiler has attached the name of James (so, e.g., Dibelius and Greeven 1975), but rather as a collection of the wisdom of the sage James, who, like Ben Sira, though on a more modest scale, has composed and arranged his own sayings and discourses.

The analogy with Ben Sira can now help us to appreciate the similar way in which James relates to the wisdom tradition before him, both Jewish wisdom in general and in particular the sayings of Jesus, which to some extent occupy for James the position which Proverbs occupies for Ben Sira, as the major source of his wisdom. Here we are concerned not with the extent to which the content of James' wisdom resembles or differs from that of Ben Sira, but with the similar way in which he re-expresses and develops the insights of the wisdom he has learned from the tradition and has made his own. It is true that, unlike Ben Sira, James has several explicit and formal quotations from Scripture: from the Torah (2:8, 11, 23), from Proverbs (4:6) and from

an apocryphal work (4:5). But it should be noted that these occur in argumentative passages, where James employs explicit reference to Scripture to establish points in debate with putative interlocutors. In the parts of his letter which are more typical of traditional Jewish wisdom teaching in style he does not quote. Like Ben Sira, James, even at his most traditional, does not repeat; he reformulates.

The perspective we have gained from Ben Sira must put in a new light the much discussed question of the relation of James to the tradition of the sayings of Jesus. The discussion has established beyond question that James knew a tradition of the sayings of Jesus, in oral or written form, and that a few passages of James are certainly related to specific sayings of Jesus known to us from the Synoptic Gospels. Beyond this, however, the extent to which James knew and used the sayings of Jesus remains unresolved (see Deppe 1989 for the most thorough and reliable study; also Davids 1985; Hartin 1991). But the whole discussion takes for granted an assumption which we must question: that, if James is dependent on the sayings of Jesus, he must *allude* to them. This has the effect of making precise verbal correspondence the centre of attention, and making the judgment whether a resemblance is sufficient or striking enough to constitute an allusion very difficult to make convincingly in many cases: one person's verbal allusion is another person's verbal coincidence. It also poses the question of the function of such 'allusions', where they are admitted, in a misleading way. Is James appealing to the sayings of Jesus as the authority for his teaching and expecting his allusions therefore to be readily identifiable as such? In that case why does he not explicitly cite Jesus by name? An alternative, argued by Deppe (1989:167–188), is that James treats the sayings of Jesus simply as part of the church's paraenetic tradition on which he drew and in which they existed alongside ethical precepts and maxims from other sources. Their authority in this context does not depend on their derivation from Jesus but on their place in the inspired teaching of the church. Whether James' readers or even James himself knew he was alluding to sayings of Jesus is then unimportant.

In the light of our analogy with Ben Sira, we can see James as a sage who has made the wisdom of Jesus his own. He does not repeat it; he is inspired by it. He creates his own wise sayings, sometimes as equivalents of specific sayings of Jesus, sometimes inspired by several sayings, sometimes encapsulating the theme of many sayings, sometimes based on points of contact between

Jesus' sayings and other Jewish wisdom. The creativity and artistry of these sayings are missed when they are treated as allusions to sayings of Jesus. But the indebtedness of James' wisdom to Jesus is much greater than verbal resemblances would show. The extent of his debt to Jesus and the way in which the teaching of Jesus guides his appropriation of other Jewish wisdom we shall see in section 5. Here we are still concerned with showing that James relates to earlier wisdom in formally the same kind of way as Ben Sira does. This is best shown by studying a few detailed examples, chosen from the many that could be studied. The first two examples are of James' creative use of Jewish wisdom sources other than Jesus, the others of his relationship to sayings of Jesus.

#### 4.1 James 1:19

Be quick to hear,  
but slow [or: with patience] to  
answer (Sir. 5:11 Hebrew).

Be quick (ταχύς) to hear  
and with patience give an answer  
(Sir. 5:11 LXX).

Let everyone be quick (ταχύς) to  
hear,  
slow (βραδύς) to speak,  
slow (βραδύς) to anger,  
for human anger does not achieve  
the righteousness of God (Jas.  
1:19).

If you see a man hasty (ταχύς) in his  
words,  
know that the fool has hope rather  
than he (Prov. 29:20 LXX).

If one gives answer before he hears,  
it is his folly and shame (Prov.  
18:13).

A wise man will be silent until the  
right moment (Sir. 20:7a).

Do not be quick to anger,  
for anger lodges in the bosom of  
fools (Eccles. 7:9a).

The one who is slow to anger  
(μακρόθυμος) is better than the  
mighty (Prov. 16:32a).<sup>27</sup>

We cannot be sure from which of the earlier wisdom sayings James has acquired the insights he expresses in the first half of the verse, but it is clear he has formulated a new aphorism of his own. His aphorism succinctly combines the advice previously expressed less concisely and never in a single aphorism. Moreover, his aphorism, despite the remarkable conciseness of its first part, achieves a more precise meaning, by associating rash speech with impetuous anger, the two topics which are the subject of distinct aphorisms in previous wisdom. The motive clause in the second half of the verse (which was most probably formulated originally as an independent aphorism) then gives a reason for the advice without precedent in the tradition. This is a fine example of the way the sage, making the wisdom of the tradition his own, expresses it in an apt proverb of his own formulation, not only transmitting but adding to the wisdom of the tradition.

#### 4.2 James 3:13

The fear of the Lord is the  
beginning of wisdom,  
and good understanding (σύνεσις)  
belongs to all who practise it  
(Prov. 1:7 LXX).

Behold, godliness is wisdom,  
and to abstain from evil is  
understanding (ἐπιστήμη) (Job  
28:28 LXX).

For the fear of the Lord is wisdom  
and instruction,  
fidelity and meekness (πραΰτης)  
are his delight (Sir. 1:27; cf.  
Prov. 15:33 Hebrew).

Child, perform your works (ἔργα)  
in meekness (ἐν πραΰτητι) (Sir.  
3:17a).

Who among you is wise and  
understanding (ἐπιστήμων)?  
Let him show by his good life that  
his works (ἔργα) are done in the  
meekness of wisdom (ἐν  
πραΰτητι σοφίας) (Jas. 3:13).

James here creates his own version of the classic definition of wisdom, which related it to the fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:7; 9:10; 15:33; 22:4 LXX; Job 28:28; Ps. 111:10; Isa. 33:6; Sir. 1:14–20, 27; 19:20; 21:11). ‘Meekness’ (πραΰτης), which is humility before God

as well as people, can be closely associated with the fear of the Lord (Sir. 1:27; and cf. Prov. 15:33; 22:4, where LXX does not have *πραΰτης*). James evidently prefers it as a term which sums up the attitude to God and to people which true wisdom always displays (cf. 1:21; Matt. 5:5; 11:29).

### 4.3 James 1:5–6

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Ask,</p> <p>and it will be given to you;<br/>seek, and you will find;<br/>knock, and it will be opened to you . . .<br/>If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!<br/>(Matt. 7:7, 11)<br/>Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, . . .<br/>even if you say to this mountain,<br/>'Be taken up and cast into the sea',</p> <p>it will be done.</p> <p>And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith (Matt. 21:21b–22).</p> | <p>And I tell you,<br/>Ask,</p> <p>and it will be given to you;<br/>seek, and you will find;<br/>knock, and it will be opened to you . . .<br/>If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! (Luke 11:9, 13).<br/>Have faith in God.<br/>Truly I say to you,</p> <p>whoever says to this mountain,<br/>'Be taken up and cast into the sea', and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass,<br/>it will come about for him.<br/>Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you receive it, and you will (Mark 11:22b–24).<sup>28</sup></p> | <p>If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given to him.</p> <p>But let him ask in faith, doubting not at all, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven by the wind and tossed about (Jas. 1:5–6).</p> |
|---|--|--|

The way in which James in these two verses re-expresses the teaching of Jesus on prayer is very similar to the way in which Ben Sira frequently re-expresses the wisdom of Proverbs. In verse 5 James has taken the first line of Jesus' threefold parallelism and expanded it into a new saying, by (a) specifying what is asked as wisdom, and (b) introducing reference to God's generosity in giving to all. Expansion (b) in effect incorporates into this saying the point which Jesus makes by an *a minore ad majorem* argument in Matthew 7:11/Luke 11:13. Expansion (a) no doubt results from the reflection that, if God gives good gifts to those who ask (Matt. 7:11/Luke 11:13), then pre-eminent among these gifts must be the most needed gift of all: the wisdom from above which enables people to live according to God's will (Jas. 3:17).<sup>29</sup> In this way James is able to connect the saying of Jesus with the wisdom tradition which speaks of wisdom as the gift of God (Prov. 2:6; Sir. 51:17; Wisd. 8:21; 9:17; 4Q185 2:11–12) and emphasizes God's generosity in lavishing wisdom on those who love him (Sir. 1:9–10). James' two verses together succeed in expressing very concisely the major elements in the Jesus' teaching about prayer. This point can be best appreciated when we shift our interest from identifying *allusions* to the sayings of Jesus (which has been the focus of most study in this area) to identifying *creative re-expression* of the wisdom of Jesus by his disciple the sage James.

#### 4.4 James 2:5b

Blessed are the poor  
in spirit,  
for theirs is the  
kingdom of  
heaven (Matt. 5:3).

Blessed are you poor,  
for yours is the  
kingdom of  
God (Luke 6:20).

Has not God chosen  
the poor in the world  
to be rich in faith  
and heirs of the  
kingdom he has  
promised to those  
who love him?  
(Jas. 2:5b).

James does not quote the Gospel beatitude, but has been inspired by it in composing his own saying. (Wachob [forthcoming] chapter 4, sees this saying as 'a Jamesian performance of a saying of Jesus,' i.e. a saying of Jesus adapted by James to suit its rhetorical function in the context of James 2:1–13 and to be identified by readers as an allusion to the saying of Jesus. This gives insufficient weight to the

major differences which make James 2:5b a new saying, reformulating the central thought of the saying of Jesus in such a way that James makes it thoroughly his own.) James has introduced the notion of God's election of the poor and especially the paradox that 'the poor in the world' (probably meaning: poor with respect to those material goods which the world considers wealth) are 'rich in faith' (i.e. in the sphere of faith: cf. the similar paradoxes in Rev. 2:9; 3:17). This paradox brilliantly encapsulates the Jewish tradition of regarding the pious poor as the paradigms of faith, since in their lack of resources of their own to rely on they exemplify the utter dependence on God which true faith is.

#### 4.5 James 2:13

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get (Matt. 7:1–2). Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy (Matt. 5:7). Be merciful, that you may receive mercy . . . As you judge, so you will be judged . . . The measure you give will be the measure you get (Jesus, according to 1 Clem. 13:2).

Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; . . . For the measure you give will be the measure you get back (Luke 6: 37a, 38b).

Judge not, that you be not judged . . . Be merciful, that you may receive mercy . . .

The measure you give will be the measure you get back (Jesus, according to Polycarp, *Phil.* 2:3).

Judgment will be without mercy to one who has not shown mercy.

Mercy triumphs over judgment (Jas. 2:13).

James 2:13 consists of two carefully crafted aphorisms. They do not allude to a specific saying of Jesus, but put into memorable forms of their own an insight characteristic of the teaching of Jesus (see also Matt. 6:12, 14–15; 18:23–35; Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4). Statements of the same or similar ideas could easily be quoted also from other Jewish literature (see section 2.1.8 above; and cf. Sir. 28:1–4; Prov. 17:5 LXX), and James will surely have known this thought, not only from the sayings of Jesus, but also from the Jewish traditions from which Jesus himself drew it. But he knew it as a traditional insight which Jesus had made especially his own, and so James in turn made it his own by coining his own aphoristic expressions of it.

#### 4.6 James 3:11–12

|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
|   | For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit;   | Does a spring from the same opening pour forth both fresh and brackish water? |
| You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles?   | for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. | My brothers, can a fig tree yield olives or a grapevine figs?                 |
| So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit (Matt. 7:16–18).<br>Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. |  | Nor can salt water yield fresh (Jas. 3:11–12).                                |

You brood of vipers!  
 how can you speak  
 good, when you are  
 evil? For out of the  
 abundance of the  
 heart the mouth  
 speaks.

The good man out of  
 his good treasure  
 brings forth good,  
 and the evil man out  
 of his evil treasure  
 brings forth evil  
 (Matt. 12:33–35).

The good man out of  
 the good treasure of  
 his heart produces  
 good, and the evil  
 man out of his evil  
 treasure produces  
 evil; for out of the  
 abundance of the

heart his mouth  
 speaks  
 (Luke 6:43–45).<sup>30</sup>

Besides the Gospel parallels given above, the following parallels from non-Jewish Hellenistic literature need to be considered:

- ‘We do not expect the vine to bear figs, nor the olive grapes’ (Plutarch, *Mor.* 47 2F).
- ‘Good does not spring from evil any more than figs grow from olive trees’ (Seneca, *Ep.* 87.25).
- ‘For how can a vine be moved to act, not like a vine, but like an olive, or again, an olive to act, not like an olive, but like a vine? It is impossible, inconceivable’ (Epictetus, *Diss.* 2.20.18).
- ‘Do you think a sane person would marvel because apples do not hang from the brambles of the woodland? Would he marvel because thorns and briars are not covered with some useful fruit?’ (Seneca, *De ira* 2.10.6).

James 3:11–12 is carefully composed. Two images involving water frame two involving fruit. The first three images are framed as questions, inviting readers to agree, from ordinary experience of nature, that such things are obviously impossible. Putting the final image in the form of a statement then leaves a satisfying conclusive impression.

The sequence of four images functions, not only to support the point made in the previous verse (‘from the same mouth come blessing and cursing...this ought not to be so’), but also to effect a transition in thought to the verses which follow. The first image corresponds precisely to the point in verse 10: it illustrates the

impossibility of a single source producing two different kinds of product, one good, one bad ('good' and 'bad' from the point of view of value to humans). The other three images make the point that a source of one kind cannot produce a product of a different kind. The two images of fruit make this point in a neutral way (all the plants and fruits are equally 'good'), while the final image reintroduces a difference between good and bad: a salt spring ('bad' in the sense of not useful to humans) cannot produce fresh water (a good product). Thus the implication of the metaphors shifts from the initial claim that one person cannot utter both good and bad statements (blessing God and cursing people) to the claim that a person of one kind cannot utter statements of another kind and finally to the claim that a bad person cannot utter good statements. This is an intelligible and logical progression of thought. From the first claim it follows that the blessing and the cursing of a person who utters both cannot be taken equally seriously. The blessing of God by such a person must be only an empty liturgical act, while the cursing of people proceeds from the real nature of the person. A person whose real nature is shown by their cursing to be evil cannot utter genuinely good statements. This conclusion then provides a close link with the following verses, which focus on the outward expression of what is in the heart (3:13–17).

The idea that a plant of a particular kind can only produce fruit of its own kind was a common metaphor or simile in the Graeco-Roman world.<sup>31</sup> The quotations given above from Plutarch, Epictetus and Seneca are chosen as the examples which come closest to the Gospel saying (Matt. 7:16; Luke 6:44) and James 3:12. Though it appealed to Stoic writers, such as Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, it was certainly not a peculiarly Stoic idea.<sup>32</sup> The examples of trees and fruits used to make the point vary among a small number of possibilities obvious in the Mediterranean area. The quotation from Seneca, *De ira*, given above, shares with the Gospel saying the particular thought: useful (edible) fruits are not produced by useless plants such as thorn bushes and brambles. The other quotations from Greek and Roman writers given above share with James 3:12 not only the examples of figs, olives and grapes, but also the thought: one kind of useful tree produces only its own kind of fruit, not that of another kind of useful tree. Thus the Gospel saying and James 3:12 are recognizable variants of the widespread motif.

In the light of this evidence, there is no scholarly agreement on whether James is here dependent on the Gospel saying.<sup>33</sup> If the

issue is posed as the question whether James *quotes or alludes* to the Gospel saying, the answer has to be no. Only the word 'figs' is common, and the two images in James are different from, though parallel to, those in Matthew and Luke. On the other hand, there is good reason not to conclude that the Gospel sayings and James 3:12 are wholly independent examples of a widespread motif. The motif is used in Graeco-Roman literature to make a wide variety of points. Plutarch, for example, is arguing that a person should be content with the role in life to which he or she is naturally suited, and not expect to be able to be, for example, both a military commander and a philosopher. The only instance which comes at all close to the use of the motif in the Gospels and James is Seneca's very general point: 'Good does not come from evil' (*Ep.* 87.25). By comparison, the applications of the motif in the Gospels and James are impressively similar. In Luke 6:43–45 (probably preserving the original sequence of Q material, which Matthew has divided between two contexts) the point is that good people speak good which derives from the wealth of goodness in their hearts, whereas evil people speak evil which derives from the wealth of evil in their hearts (Luke 6:54 parallel to Matt. 12:34–35). This is precisely also the point in James, who in the wider context of the metaphor shares with the Gospel passage reference both to the mouth and to the heart (Jas. 3:10, 14; Luke 6:45; Matt. 12:34b).

James is not *quoting or alluding* to the saying of Jesus, but, in the manner of a wisdom sage, he is *re-expressing* the insight he has learned from Jesus' teaching (Luke 6:43–45; Matt. 12:33–35; 7:16–18). He plays a standard variation on the images of plants and fruit, and adds the novel images of water.<sup>34</sup> Just as Ben Sira, even when he repeats the thought of Proverbs, deliberately refrains from repeating the words, so James creates an aphorism of his own, indebted to but no mere reproduction of the words of Jesus. In the nature of such cases Ben Sira's debt to Proverbs and James' to Jesus cannot be conclusively proved, but in both cases other evidence for each author's familiarity with the source makes it probable.

#### 4.7 James 5:12

Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.' But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.

Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one (Matt. 5:33–37).

... for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned (Matt. 12:37).

Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear either by heaven

or by earth

or with any other oath,

but let your 'Yes' be yes, and your 'No' be no,

so that you may not fall under condemnation (Jas. 5:12).

Since James is not in the habit of reproducing sayings of Jesus as such, it is very doubtful whether James 5:12 can be used, as it often has been, to reconstruct an alternative traditional form or a more original form of the saying of Jesus in Matthew 5:33–37. Certainly James' reason for not swearing ('so that you may not fall under condemnation'), though it may well be inspired by the saying of Jesus in Matthew 12:37, should be seen as James' own addition to the prohibition of oaths. Yet, although even this verse of James is not a quotation of a saying of Jesus, it comes closer to being that than any other verse in James does. In this case, readers familiar with this saying of Jesus would surely find an unmistakable allusion to it.

We might compare this case of a deliberate allusion to a saying of Jesus, in a verse to which emphatic attention is called ('Above all, my brothers and sisters...'), with Ben Sira's deliberate quotation of the well-known saying about wisdom ('the fear of the Lord is the

beginning of wisdom') in the introductory section of his work (1:14a). Just as the latter serves explicitly to claim continuity with the religious heart of the wisdom tradition, so the former functions to bring to nearly, if not quite fully explicit attention the roots of James' wisdom in that of his teacher Jesus. That James does this at this point and with reference to this particular saying of Jesus is appropriate. This verse of James concludes the teaching about speech ethics which has been a major feature of the letter from 1:19 onwards (cf. 3:1–12; 4:11–12; 5:9). By alluding to a saying of Jesus it shows that in developing this theme James has been developing a concern of the teaching of Jesus. Moreover, the saying of Jesus to which allusion is made is a highly distinctive one, in which Jesus takes the traditional Jewish concern for truthfulness in speech (for which, see Baker 1995) to a novel extreme, demanding such unqualified truthfulness in all speech that the use of oaths must be given up completely.<sup>35</sup> By making unusually transparent reference to this particular saying of Jesus, James aligns himself with one of the most distinctive of his master's instructions, claims the latter as the source of the extremity of his own teaching on speech ethics, and brings his whole treatment of the topic of speech to a conclusion which sums it all up as comprehended in Jesus' uncompromising demand for total truthfulness in speech.

## **5 THE WISDOM OF JESUS AND THE WISDOM OF JAMES**

In previous sections we have compared the wisdom of James with that of Jesus in a largely formal manner. We have shown that the literary forms of aphorisms and similitudes in James not only reflect those used in the tradition of Jewish wisdom instruction, but correspond remarkably closely to the range of literary forms in which the aphorisms of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels are cast. We have also shown that James' indebtedness to the tradition of the sayings of Jesus should not be understood in terms of allusion, but in terms of creative appropriation and re-expression. James has so made the wisdom of Jesus his own that what he brings out of his treasury of wisdom are not only things old and things new, but also things which are at once old and new. However, many scholars would question whether, whatever might be James' debt to sayings of Jesus, his teaching is really consonant with the character of Jesus' teaching. For example, Ben Witherington discusses at some

length James' dependence on sayings of Jesus, especially in the Q tradition, but he concludes that nevertheless, if one asks the 'more important questions' of '*how* and *to what ends* James is appropriating' the Jesus tradition, it becomes clear that

James has chosen either to draw on the more conventional parts of the Jesus tradition, or to use the often unconventional teaching of Jesus for some very conventional and traditional purposes, or to remain silent about certain aspects of Jesus' teaching that inculcated a counter order of things.

(Witherington 1994:244, 246)

Behind this challenging judgment on James lies a view of the form which wisdom takes in the teaching of Jesus, to which we must first turn before we can gauge the extent to which James is faithful or unfaithful to it.

If the teaching of Jesus is recognizably wisdom instruction, belonging in some sense to the Jewish wisdom tradition, it is also recognizably different from the major tradition of wisdom paraenesis, represented by Proverbs, Ben Sira and Pseudo-Phocylides. One influential way of characterizing this difference has been the distinction between the 'wisdom of order' and the 'wisdom of counterorder' (Williams 1981, followed by Witherington 1994:161–164; and cf. Crossan 1983; Scott 1990). It is this contrast which Witherington is adopting in the judgment on James which we have just quoted. The typology of two kinds of wisdom teaching was used by Williams to contrast, on the one hand, the conventional wisdom of Proverbs and Ben Sira, and, on the other hand, the critical and innovative wisdom of Qohelet (Ecclesiastes) and Jesus, while acknowledging that Qohelet and Jesus represent very different forms of the wisdom of counterorder. Whereas the wisdom of order appeals to the collective authority of tradition and affirms the conventional values and structures of society, the wisdom of counterorder speaks from the experience of the individual and questions and negates conventional wisdom in antithetical and paradoxical forms of aphoristic speech. But there are considerable problems with the use of this typology to characterize the teaching of Jesus. It depends too exclusively on a number of very radically expressed aphorisms which contradict conventional values (e.g. Mark 8:35; 10:31; Luke 9:60; 12:37; 14:11). Important as these are, they cannot

be treated as criteria for regarding as inauthentic the Gospel sayings which evince more continuity with traditional wisdom (Winton 1990:166; Aune 1991:215). Williams in fact acknowledges a 'dynamic tension of continuity and discontinuity' in the teaching of Jesus (1981:55), but his typology does not permit an adequate understanding of the relationship of elements of continuity and discontinuity. Moreover, the description 'wisdom of counter-order' is misleading because it stresses only the negative critique of conventional order, whereas Williams himself recognizes that Jesus was concerned with disruption and discontinuity—not for their own sake but only for the sake of the new divine order he announced (Williams 1981:52, 60). Much of Jesus' teaching does not explicitly oppose conventional order, but positively commends the new divine order—the values and structures of the kingdom of God. A less prejudicial description might be 'the wisdom of the kingdom' (Winton 1990: chapter 6), but we shall need a better characterization of its relationship to conventional wisdom if we are to understand how James relates to both.

We may begin with one preliminary indication that the wisdom of Jesus does differ significantly from the main tradition of Jewish wisdom paraenesis and that the wisdom of James can be aligned with that of Jesus in this difference. A remarkable number of features and topics of traditional Jewish wisdom are wholly absent from the wisdom of both Jesus and James. Purely prudential advice on how to behave so as to avoid suffering disadvantage, which appears in traditional wisdom alongside moral instruction (e.g. Prov. 11:14–15; Sir. 8:1–3, 14–19; 11:29–34; 13:8–13; 30:21–25; 33:20–24; 4Q416 2:2:4–6), is absent from both Jesus and James. Exhortations not to be idle, to work hard and to earn one's own living (Prov. 6:6–11; 10:4–5; 20:4; 24:30–34; 26:13–16; 28:19; Eccles. 10:18; Sir. 7:15; 22:1–2; 40:28–30; Ps.-Phoc. 153–174), advice about friends (Prov. 18:24; 27:6, 10; Sir. 6:5–17; 9:10; 12:8–9; 22:19–26; 37:1–6; Ps.-Phoc. 91–94; 4Q424), on good and bad wives (Prov. 21:19; 25:24; 27:15; 31:10–31; Tobit 4:12–13; Sir. 7:19, 26; 23:22–27; 25:8, 16–26:9; 26:13–27; 36:26–30; 40:23; 42:6; Ps.-Phoc. 199–204; 4Q416 2 3:20), upbringing of children (Prov. 10:1; 13:1, 24; 15:20; 19:18; 22:15; 23:14; 29:15; Sir. 7:23; 16:1–4; 22:3; 30:1–13; Ps.-Phoc. 207–214) and management of daughters (Sir. 7:24–25; 22:3–5; 26:10–12; 42:9–14; Ps.-Phoc. 215–217), and on the treatment of slaves (Prov. 29:21; 30:10; Sir. 7:20–21; 33:25–33; Ps.-Phoc. 223–227), are examples of topics prominent in traditional wisdom but wholly absent from the teaching of both Jesus

and James. Discussion of family relationships in general, and discussion of rulers and government (Prov. 8:15; 16:10–15; 20:28; 21:1; 25:1–6; 29:4, 14; 31:3; Eccles. 10:4, 16–17, 20; Sir. 7:4–5; 9:17–10:14; Wisd. 6:1–11, 21), are both rare in the sayings of Jesus and completely absent from James. Neither, it seems, has much to say about how to exercise or to live under the conventional authority structures of society.

Carlston (1980) provides a useful and extensive catalogue of topics which are standard in the aphoristic wisdom of the ancient world, both Jewish and pagan, but are absent from the aphorisms of Jesus. He summarizes: 'education, personal character and habits, friendship, women and family relationships, ethnic matters, politics, and prudence are all missing from the proverbial material in the surviving Jesus-tradition' (98–99). Practically all the topics he notes as absent or almost absent from the aphorisms of Jesus are equally absent from James. Apparent exceptions are warnings against anger and the advice that listening is better than speaking (both in Jas. 1:19). But the former is in fact present in the sayings of Jesus (Matt. 5:22, which perhaps Carlston does not count as an aphorism), while the latter is an aspect of speech ethics, on which there are sayings of Jesus (Matt. 5:33–37; 12:33–37; 15:10–20; Luke 6:43–45). The admonition to seek wisdom, which Carlston rightly says is basic to the whole wisdom tradition (92), does have an equivalent in James (1:5), as it does not in the extant sayings of Jesus; but James is not wholly conventional on this topic: instead of the typical emphasis on a long and intensive search for wisdom (Prov. 2:1–5; 8:34; Sir. 6:18–37; 39:1–7; Wisd. 6:9–16), his advice is that God gives it for the asking (but cf. Wisd. 7:7). So, by this criterion of topics omitted, James is scarcely any closer to the concerns of the mainstream Jewish wisdom tradition than Jesus is, while the range of topics omitted by each corresponds rather closely. On the evidence provided by this criterion alone, it seems unlikely that Witherington's charge against James—that despite his dependence on sayings of Jesus he is in fact reverting to conventional Jewish wisdom (Witherington 1994:236–247)—can be sustained.

However, this purely negative point, striking as it is, does not take us very far in understanding what is distinctive about the teaching of Jesus, or the extent to which James reflects this distinctiveness. The negative point could be complemented by a positive demonstration of the extent to which the themes which do feature in the sayings of Jesus are, for the most part, traditional

concerns of the Jewish religious tradition, many found in wisdom paraenesis, others in the law and the prophets and elsewhere. However, what is needed is an explanation of the way the sayings of Jesus appropriate and develop the tradition, accounting for his total neglect of many themes, his unusual emphasis on and distinctive development of others. Only this will enable us reliably to judge whether James has really made his own Jesus' distinctive version of the Jewish religious tradition.

In what follows we offer a brief sketch, in five sections, of the distinctive characteristics and emphases in the Synoptic sayings of Jesus. (Naturally, no attempt can be made here to argue issues of authenticity, but the broad characteristics sketched below are well attested in the various strands of the Gospel traditions.) There is no claim that particular themes are unprecedented in Jewish tradition. This is in fact rarely the case. The distinctiveness of Jesus' teaching lies to a large extent in selection and emphasis, focus and development, priorities and concerns. This sets us the difficult and delicate task of determining to what extent the distinctiveness of James' teaching is faithful to this kind of distinctiveness in the teaching of Jesus.

1 Jesus' ethical demands are more radical than those of the Torah, as conventionally interpreted, or of Jewish wisdom paraenesis. This difference results from taking as seriously as possible the central moral requirements of God's will for his people Israel and pressing their implications as far as possible. From this approach come some of the most distinctive of Jesus' teachings: love for enemies, non-retaliation, prohibition of divorce, prohibition of all oaths. Such teachings represent an extension of a moral demand of the Torah as far as possible or an intensification of such a demand as much as possible. Two characteristics of Jesus' teaching, which distinguish it to some extent from conventional wisdom paraenesis, are connected with this. The first is its extreme character (see especially Harvey 1990). Hyperbole is employed to bring home the radical demands of God's will. There is no moderation, no compromise, no concern for conventional practicality. As a teaching style this is quite different from the more moderate tone and practical approach of the Jewish sages from Proverbs to Pseudo-Phocylides. Secondly, there is a special concern with the heart as the source of words and actions (Borg 1984:237–247). This is not a concern for inwardness in contrast to outward behaviour, but a radical concern to trace good and evil to

their sources in the good or evil heart. As a theme this is not at all foreign to the wisdom tradition, but as an emphasis it takes the place of the tendency of wisdom paraenesis to focus on the wise person's control over words and actions as principal locus of ethical concern.

2 Jesus envisages a society under the rule of God which contrasts radically with the hierarchical structures of existing society (Bauckham 1996b). All forms of social status are rejected. There are no privileges of fathers over children, since none are to be called father (Matt. 23:9) and disciples are to be brothers and sisters and mothers, but not fathers, to each other (Mark 10:30). There are no privileges of men over women, since a man can commit adultery against his wife no less than a woman can against her husband (Mark 10:11). There are no privileges of masters over slaves, since the greatest will be the servant of all (Mark 10:44). Those to whom the kingdom paradigmatically belongs are children (Mark 10:14), who had no social status, and the destitute (Luke 6:20), who were at the bottom of the social scale. Others can enter the kingdom only by accepting the same radical lack of status. Jesus privileges the least in order to deprive all others of privilege. Some of the paradoxical aphorisms which inspired Williams' (1981) characterization of Jesus' wisdom as 'wisdom of counter-order' express this feature of Jesus' teaching, but it is more than just a rejection of conventional order. This aspect of Jesus' religious vision has some roots in the law and in the prophetic-apocalyptic tradition, and even some contacts with the wisdom tradition's commendations of humility rather than boasting and arrogance, but it is probably the point at which Jesus differs most strikingly from traditional wisdom paraenesis, which takes for granted the existence of hierarchical structures in society and devotes much attention to proper behaviour in the roles they dictate. Jesus' silence on so many of the traditional topics of wisdom instruction stems to a large extent from his concentration on the new, non-hierarchical form of social relationships he commends and initiates.

3 God's eschatological action, in judgment or vindication, is the criterion for judging right or wrong acts, rather than the socially accepted view or the consequences for oneself in the natural course of events. As we have noticed already (section 1 above), this appeal to eschatological sanctions is, by this date, not at all foreign to the wisdom tradition, but Jesus focuses on it to the exclusion of other features of that tradition: the concern for action that enhances one's

standing in society, which emerges especially clearly in Ben Sira's concern for honour and shame (e.g. Sir. 5:13–6:1; cf. Collins 1998: 34, 76–77), and the traditional wisdom appeal to immanent processes of reward and retribution. In this Jesus comes perhaps closer to the prophetic-apocalyptic tradition than wisdom paraenesis had already done. By his particular use of the traditional themes of eschatological *ius talionis* (e.g. Matt. 7:1–2) and eschatological reversal of status (e.g. Matt. 20:16; Luke 14:11; 16:19–31) Jesus appeals to God's criteria of judgment against conventional attitudes and structures. The eschatological orientation of many of Jesus' sayings is a form of the radical theocentrism which informs all his teaching. It is a form of insistence on God's will and God's values as what ultimately count. It is therefore not inconsistent that Jesus can also argue from God's activity in the created order of nature (Matt. 5:45; 6:26–30), in the manner of the wisdom tradition. His conclusions from this run as radically counter to conventional attitudes as do his appeals to God's eschatological action.

4 The understanding of God as compassionate, gracious and generous takes precedence over God as the dispenser of distributive justice, giving the deserving what they deserve. The latter principle, deep rooted in the tradition, is not rejected, but Jesus privileges the form of it which promises God's mercy to those who show mercy. The compassion, grace and generosity of God were already central to the Jewish religious tradition. Jesus is distinctive only in the radical seriousness with which he takes them. Forgiveness for sinners, welcome for outcasts, succour for the sick and the destitute are God's activity, which should be reflected in his people's activity. Assurance of the goodness and generosity of God makes it possible to live with radical trust in his provision, free of anxiety and the quest for security. Jesus' characteristic teaching on prayer—the simple conviction that those who ask receive—stems from his understanding of God as the generous giver of good gifts. Thus Jesus' radical focus on the compassionate and generous nature of the God of Israel puts certain themes, none of them wholly new, in the centre of the stage, such that they crowd out other matters with which traditional Jewish wisdom had been concerned.

5 Finally, Jesus is concerned with the renewal and reconstitution of Israel as the people of God. The community of the renewed Israel, of which his disciples are the nucleus, and for which his wisdom instruction is designed, are those who already live under the rule of God. As such they contrast with the Gentiles. They are

called to be different in the radical seriousness with which they take God's will, the reflection of the mercy, compassion and inclusive love of God in their own activity, their radical trust in God, and the mutual service and brotherly-sisterliness which replaces hierarchy and status in their relations with each other. This demanding distinctiveness creates a kind of dualism in Jesus' religious vision. This is not the exclusivism of the righteous elect distinguished from the reprobate majority, for the community's role in the world is to be a city set on a hill, a light to which others will be drawn (Matt. 5:14–16). But it means that as the wisdom of the kingdom of God, Jesus' wisdom instruction is directed to forming and informing a counter-cultural community, which differs from the world because it pioneers the life of God's coming kingdom. Though traditional wisdom had its own dualism of wisdom and folly, the way to life and the way to death, which Jesus can take up into his own vision (Matt. 7:13–14, 24–27), it lacked the sense of a prophetic call to demanding distinctiveness which characterizes Jesus' teaching.

This summary of the distinctive characteristics of the Synoptic sayings of Jesus will now provide the basis for comparison with James. In five sections corresponding to the five just completed, we shall expound those features of James which correspond to the aspects of Jesus' teaching we have sketched. Our concern is not with James' indebtedness to specific sayings of Jesus, but with the evidence that James' wisdom has been decisively shaped by the distinctive character and emphases of Jesus.

1 Like the teaching of Jesus, that of James lacks the moderation, practical compromise, and alignment with social convention that are often characteristic of the Jewish wisdom tradition, focusing rather on the Torah's demand for perfection, understood as extensively and intensively as possible. Three aspects of James are especially relevant here. The first is the theme of wholeness or perfection which is the overarching theme of the letter, conveyed in part by the **τέλειος** word group, of which James is fond (1:4, 17, 25; 2:8, 22; 3:2), but also in other ways. Wholeness requires wholehearted and single-minded loyalty to God (1:8; 4:8), the fulfilment of the whole law (2:8–12), not only hearing but also doing (1:22–25), not only saying but also doing (2:16), not only believing but also doing (2:22), consistency in living out all the qualities of God's grace (1:17; 3:2, 9–10, 17), as well as the wholeness of a community united by peace rather than divided by

ambition (3:14–4:1, 11). Opposed to wholeness is the divided loyalty, the vacillation between loyalty to God and loyalty to the world (4:4), the half-heartedness in devotion to God, for which James uses the term ‘double-minded’ (1:8; 4:8). So the emphasis on obedience to the whole law, not picking and choosing which commandments to obey (2:8–11; 4:11–12), is far from simply a quantitative demand for obedience to every commandment; it is a requirement to act from the wholehearted love of God which the *Shema* demands (Deut. 6:5; 11:13; cf. Jas. 2:19; 4:12) and to live out all the implications of the love of neighbour (Lev. 19:8; Jas. 2:8–9; 4:12).<sup>36</sup> All this is especially close to the Matthean version of the teaching of Jesus (Matt. 5:19–20, 48; 19:21), but also to Jesus’ privileging of the two love commandments (Matt. 22:34–40; Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:25–37) as the primary interpretative key to the law. The insistence on doing as well as hearing is characteristic of Jesus (Jas. 1:22–25; Matt. 7:21–27; Luke 6:46–49; Matt. 21:28–31; Mark 3:35), as is the impossibility of divided loyalties (Jas. 4:4; Matt. 6:24; Luke 16:13).

Secondly, James’ distinctive concern with speech ethics (1:19, 26; 3:1–12; 4:11–12; 5:9, 12) culminates in his most explicit ‘allusion’ to a saying of Jesus (5:12; Matt. 5:34–37), probably the only real allusion in the sense of an echo readers are expected to hear (see section 4.7 above). Like the Gospel saying it closely resembles, 5:12 is in effect a demand for total truthfulness in all speech (cf. also Josephus, *BJ* 2.135; Philo, *Dec.* 84). Oaths, which guarantee the truth of particular statements, imply that other statements are less reliable. They are forbidden here because all speech is to have the truthfulness that oaths require. And since James regards speech as the index of a person’s whole moral being, this instruction serves in effect as a requirement of perfection (3:2). Thus, in relation to a topic of special concern in James, he explicitly adopts a dominical teaching which applies to speech ethics Jesus’ characteristic pressing of the moral demands of the Torah to their limit.

Thirdly, James shares Jesus’ special concern with the heart as the source of words and actions. Again this can be seen, for example, in his treatment of speech ethics. The extreme difficulty of bridling the tongue (3:7–8), which James portrays in a way unparalleled in other treatments of the tongue in the Jewish wisdom tradition, shows that perfection cannot be a matter of mere outward obedience, but only of consistent behaviour springing from a heart that is wholly devoted to God. It is the

mixed motives and divided loyalties of the 'double-minded' that are exposed by their double-tongued speech, flattering God with their lips while cursing their neighbour from the same mouth (3:9–12). This close relationship between the heart and its expression in speech, traditional in Jewish thought (e.g. Ps. 15:2–3; Sir. 27:4–7), explains how James can regard control of the tongue as the key element in attaining perfection (3:2–4). That it is 'out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks' and that therefore speech reveals the true state of the heart is affirmed also by Jesus (Matt. 12:33–37; Luke 6:43–45). But James' concern with the heart goes beyond speech ethics (1:14, 21, 26; 3:14; 4:1, 5, 8; 5:5, 8). Outward profession of wisdom is arrogant falsehood if it does not correspond to both the heart within and the deeds which spring from it (3:13–14). The qualities of true wisdom from above are manifested in the heart and behaviour (3:17). The 'pure religion' of practical caring action (1:27) requires not only clean hands but also a pure heart (4:8; cf. 3:17; Matt. 5:8), purified by repentance (4:8), recipient of the implanted word (1:21), obedient to the law of freedom (1:25; 2:12).

2 The teaching of James, like that of Jesus, is paraenesis for a counter-cultural community, in which solidarity, especially with the poor, should replace hierarchy and status, along with the competitive ambition and arrogance (3:14, 16; 4:1–2, 16) and the exploitation of the poor (5:1–6) that characterize the dominant society. Hence, whereas traditional Jewish wisdom literature typically addressed an individual as 'my son',<sup>37</sup> James addresses the whole community as his brothers and sisters. Fictive kinship relationships of equality and mutuality replace hierarchical ones. The language of shame and honour, the predominant social values to which Ben Sira, for example, often appeals (e.g. 5:13–6:1, in relation to speech), is absent from James, with one exception (2:6) that itself encapsulates his radical rejection of social status. Behaviour which accords special honour to the rich at the expense of the poor is condemned as partiality (2:1–9) and dishonouring of the poor (2:6). This inverts current social attitudes, in the same way as the explicit theme of reversal of status (1:9–11; 4:10) does,<sup>38</sup> both in James and in Jesus' teaching (Matt. 20:16; 23:12; Luke 6:20–21, 24–25; 13:30; 14:11; 16:19–31; 18:14). (Such an approach was not entirely without precedent in Jewish wisdom tradition [cf. Prov. 14:21 LXX; Sir. 10:14], but the closest parallels also show that, by contrast, that tradition did not really challenge the existing social order [Sir. 10:30–31].)

James does not require all his readers—most of whom, like most people, were neither poor nor rich—to become destitute like the poor, though he does expect them to share what little they have with the really poor (2:15–16). What he requires is behaviour consistent with God's choice of the poor as heirs of the kingdom (2:5; cf. Matt. 5:3; Luke 6:20). The poor are the paradigm heirs of the kingdom, paradigmatic both in their lack of social status and economic security and in the wholehearted dependence on God in faith that accompanies it. This requires of others a kind of identification with the poor, which appears in James' language of 'lowliness' (**ταπεινός** and cognates: 1:9–10; 4:6, 10), together with that of 'boasting' (**καυχάομαι** and cognates: 1:9–10; 3:14; 4:16). This is language of social status. The poor are those who cannot put themselves above anyone else, who cannot take advantage of others, who find their status solely in God's evaluation of them. Others can find salvation only in renunciation of status and social advantage, together with the arrogance before others and before God which status promotes. All must make themselves lowly before the Lord (4:10), which means to put themselves on the same level as the poor, so that none may set themselves above others or take advantage of others.

James' radical rejection of status and the competitive, self-seeking, avaricious and arrogant ethos that goes with it make it wholly necessary that he reflect none of the wisdom tradition's frequent concern with fitting well into, using advantageously, or even behaving modestly and charitably within established social structures. In this sense, like Jesus' wisdom, his is a 'wisdom of counter-order', and, like Jesus, James surely fully deserves Witherington's appellation: a 'sage from below' (Witherington 1994:165; cf. the very qualified application to James on p. 245).<sup>39</sup> However, this terminology is unfortunate with reference to James, because for James wisdom 'from below' is that of the existing social order, while true wisdom is 'from above' (3:13, 17) —that is, from God. It is God who chooses the poor and overturns status (1:9–11; 2:5; 4:10), and so it is the wisdom God gives that opposes privilege and presumption (cf. 4:5–6) in solidarity with the exploited and the murdered (5:4, 6). According to James, not dissimilarly from Jesus, it is not to those who consider themselves 'wise and understanding', but practise only the wisdom of the world in their competitive status-seeking (3:13–15), that God gives wisdom from above, but to the lowly and the meek (1:21; 3:17), whom Jesus called 'little ones' (Matt. 11:25; Luke 10:21; cf. Hoppe 1977:139).

(For James as ‘anti-traditional’ or ‘subversive paraenesis’, see especially Perdue 1990:26, 29 n.21; Johnson 1995b:193–196; Johnson 1995a:81–83.)

3 James writes with the imminent coming of Jesus in view (5:7–8). The judge is already standing at the doors, about to enter (5:9; cf. Mark 13:29). Not only does eschatological judgment threaten the wealthy oppressors (5:1–5), it is also a reality with which James and his readers must reckon (2:12–13; 3:1; 4:12; 5:8–9, 12), as is the prospect of eschatological reward (1:12; 3:18). As in the teaching of Jesus, God’s eschatological judgment is the overriding sanction and motivation for righteous living, to the exclusion of other considerations which often feature in the wisdom tradition. (Compare, for example, James’ treatment of speech ethics with Sir. 6:5; 20:5–8, 13, 27.) Judgment is the prerogative of God, who alone has the ultimate power to save or to destroy (4:12). In other words, the wisdom of James, like that of Jesus, is wisdom radicalized by eschatology and at the same time rendered radically theocentric. Arguably, it is to a large extent the radicalizing of wisdom and Torah by theocentric eschatology which gives the wisdom of Jesus and of James their distinctiveness and commonalty. Their ‘wisdom of counter-order’ is not intelligible without the eschatology that informs it.

The counter-cultural values by which James’ readers are called to live are validated by the eschatological belief that they are the values of God’s rule, a rule which is going to prevail universally. The far-reaching implications of the theme of reversal of status in James, already discussed, depend on the expectation that God’s judgment is going to exalt the lowly and bring low the exalted (1:9–11; 4:10). The eschatological *ius talionis* is invoked, much as in Jesus’ teaching, in both negative and positive forms (2:13; 3:6, 18; see section 2.1.8 above). But the effect is not solely reserved for the future. That God has chosen the poor means that their status in his eyes and in those of faith (2:5) is already changed. Honouring the poor is the radical transvaluation of values already incumbent on the Christian community (2:1–9). Peacemaking, contrary to the values of the world, is sowing already the seed of the eschatological harvest of peace (3:18). Endurance (1:3–4, 12; 5:8–11) is not mere waiting for the Parousia, but courageous resistance in living by the values of God’s counter-cultural rule until it comes in power. The eschatological expectation enables

this patient resistance, which can wait God's time and not relapse into despairing compromise with the dominant system.

4 The God of James, as of Jesus, is pre-eminently the giving, generous (1:5, 17–18; 4:6), merciful and compassionate one (2:13; 5:11). From the conviction that God is the generous giver of all good gifts comes the expectation, shared with Jesus, that those who ask will receive, provided they ask in faith, not with divided loyalties and self-seeking motives (1:5–7; 4:2–3; 5:15–18; cf. Matt. 7:7–11; 21:21–22; Mark 11:22–24; Luke 11:9–13). The attitude envisaged is that total and trusting dependence on God of which the poor provide the paradigm (4:7, 15) and of which the arrogant self-sufficiency of the rich is the opposite (4:13–16). God's reliable goodness is such that he could never be the source of evil (1:13, 17). That God's mercy will be shown in showing mercy to those who themselves have shown mercy to others (2:13), a principle already found in Jewish wisdom tradition (Sir. 28:1–4; Prov. 17:5 LXX), is especially characteristic of Jesus' teaching (Matt. 5:7; 6:12, 14–15; 18:23–35; Mark 11:25). Put otherwise, from the abundant mercy of God flows the abundant mercy shown by his people (3:17), especially to the needy (1:27; 2:15–16), and from the generous giving of God comes the generous giving of God's people to those in need (2:15–16). God's judgment is not to be imitated (4:12; cf. Matt. 7:1–5), but his mercy and generosity are.

5 When James writes to 'the twelve tribes in the diaspora' (1:1) he addresses the Jewish Christian communities as the nucleus of the ongoing Messianic renewal of the people of Israel and, by evoking the hope of restoration, incorporates them in the Messianic programme of redemption Jesus initiated when he appointed twelve apostles. Furthermore, this Messianic renewal of Israel has the Messianic redemption of the world as its goal. This is clear from 1.18, where those Israelites who have received new birth as children of God are called 'a kind of first fruits of his creatures'. They are the first sheaf of the eschatological harvest, offered to God in thankful assurance of the full harvest to come. The renewal of Israel is the representative beginning of God's new creation of all things. As such, the Jewish Christian communities must live with the demandingly distinctive values and lifestyle, reflecting the coming rule of God and at odds with the dominant values of society, which we have already indicated. The requirement of wholehearted devotion to God in a counter-cultural community entails, as in the teaching of Jesus, a certain sort of dualism.

James' readers can be friends with God (4.4), like Abraham (2.23), or they can be friends with 'the world' (4.4), but the choice must be made. The distinction cannot be fudged. The compromise which the 'double-minded' (4.8) attempt, dividing their loyalties between God and the world, is in reality not possible. In this sharp contrast the dualism is fundamentally one of value-systems. One lives either by God's values or by that dominant value-system which James calls 'the world' (1.27; 2.5; 4.4; cf. 3:6). 'Friendship' (4.4) has connotations of loyalty and sharing of values. Hence friendship with both God and the world, indicating opposed systems of values to live by, is impossible. The image of marriage and adultery (4:4) is used to the same effect: God's people who compromise with worldly values are adulterous women, attempting the impossible task of combining marriage to God their husband, who requires exclusive loyalty, and liaison with another partner, the world. This dualism between God and the world appears also in 1.27, where religion that is undefiled in the eyes of God involves keeping oneself unstained by the world. The latter phrase does not imply avoiding contact with outsiders, but refusing to comply with that approach to life which is inconsistent with God's values. That the issue is primarily one of values is very clear in another manifestation of James' dualism: the contrast between two kinds of wisdom, one of which is 'earthly' (i.e. of earthly origin rather than coming from heaven), 'natural' (i.e. purely human rather than inspired by the divine Spirit) and 'demonic' (i.e. associated with the evil spirits who inhabit this earthly realm), while the other is 'from above' (i.e. from God; cf. 1.17). The former is characterized by competitive self-seeking (3.14), the latter by the love which respects and seeks the good of others (3.17). As Johnson puts it, James portrays 'a community defined and constituted by gift-giving and solidarity in the face of a dominant culture defined by envy and acquisitiveness' (1995a:164).

It is important to notice that the dualism involved in this vision is evidently not designed to draw a sociological boundary between insiders and outsiders in order to reinforce the Christian community's sense of identity. There is no discussion of how the readers should relate to non-Christian neighbours, household structures or political authorities, such as is found in several other New Testament letters. The only 'outsiders' to whom reference is made are the rich, but whether they are outsiders or (sociologically) insiders is notoriously hard to determine, since James' concern is rather that the values they

espouse are those of the world, not of God's kingdom (cf. Johnson 1995a:88). The concern is not with sociological boundaries but with values. It is not for the sake of distinguishing themselves from outsiders that the double-minded should purify their hearts (4.8), but in order that they should be 'complete,' wholehearted in their loyalty to God, living out God's values consistently. To infer a community defensively barricaded against the world (cf. Witherington 1994:246) is no more justified than it would be in the case of Jesus' own rigorous demand for undivided loyalty to God and consistent practice of the values of God's kingdom (e.g. Matt. 6:19–21, 24; 7:13–14). It is because they are the first-fruits of the new creation that uncompromising perfection is demanded of James' readers. (On the dualism in James, see especially Johnson 1985; 1995a:83–85, 87–88.)

In conclusion, our account of the way James' wisdom corresponds to the major characteristics and points of focus and emphasis which give the Synoptic teaching of Jesus its distinctiveness has included virtually every significant topic and concern in the letter of James. This is not to say that the balance of topics is the same in both cases (in fact, it is not the same in the three Synoptic Gospels, or in putative Gospel sources). James has his own particular concerns, but in the case of the most obvious of the topics he develops at greater length than Jesus—speech ethics—he is, as we have seen, in fact remarkably close to what there is in the sayings of Jesus on this topic (Matt. 5:33–37; 12:33–37; Luke 6:43–47; cf. Matt. 15:10–20). Where he appropriates and develops the theme of the evils and control of the tongue as it is found in traditional Jewish wisdom, it is in a way that leaves aside what is unlike the wisdom of Jesus (prudential and self-interested considerations, honour and shame, observation and manners rather than ethics) and develops what is (the tongue's expression of the heart, denunciation of hypocrisy and slander), while he himself contributes the hyperbole, the extremeness, and the exposure to the eschatological judgment of God that especially align James' speech ethics with the general character of Jesus' ethical teaching.

In the tradition of modern New Testament scholarship James has often been considered more Jewish than Christian. In 1894 Adolf Jülicher called it 'the least Christian book of the New Testament' (quoted in Johnson 1995a:150), a verdict repeated by James Dunn in 1977. 'The most Jewish, the most undistinctively Christian document in the New Testament', he calls it, in the context of an argument that

the Jewish Christianity James represents inevitably became a kind of dead-end in the history of religions, marginalized by Pauline Christianity because it remained too conservatively Jewish, insufficiently Christian (Dunn 1977:251). The appropriate response to this is that James' relationship to Judaism simply parallels Jesus' relationship to Judaism. There is nothing un-Jewish in the teaching either of Jesus or of James. What is distinctive of Jesus' teaching is not merely those particular elements which, so far as our evidence goes, appear to be novel, but rather the characteristic emphases, selection and configuration of traditional themes, the characteristic ways of developing the tradition, the distinctiveness that emerges in the overall scope and shape of the teaching. This is the kind of distinctiveness which James mirrors, in the way that he appropriates and re-expresses both the teaching of Jesus and other Jewish traditions. The wisdom of Jesus functions for James as the focus and principle guiding his appropriation of other Jewish traditions. His wisdom is the Jewish wisdom of a faithful disciple of Jesus the Jewish sage. He is the disciple of whom Jesus said: 'The disciple is not above his master, but every one when he is fully taught [or more literally: 'made complete'] will be like his master' (Luke 6:40).

## **6 READING JAMES AS A COMPENDIUM OF THE WISDOM OF JAMES**

Our argument in this chapter provides significant indications of appropriate ways of reading James. James is not a sequential argument, to be read in a linear manner, as recent attempts to demonstrate the unity and coherence of the work have tended to suggest, but nor is it a haphazard collection of heterogeneous paraenetic traditions, as Dibelius' approach suggested. It is a compendium of James' wisdom, arranged, after an introductory epitome, in a series of discrete sections on various topics. Linear progression of thought is largely confined to each section. Coherence must be sought at a deeper level. The form and structure of the work are well suited to its purpose, which is to provide a resource for acquiring the wisdom that is expressed in obedience to God in everyday life.

Prominent in this compendium of James' wisdom are the aphorisms which encapsulate much, though not all, of that wisdom. Reading aphorisms appropriately is an art that came easily to ancient

readers and hearers, but comes less easily to modern readers. There is, to be sure, a major tradition of aphoristic writing in modern western literature, running from Francis Bacon and La Rochefoucault to Elias Canetti and Ben Okri. In some ways these modern literary aphorisms function similarly to those of Ben Sira, Jesus and James: they encapsulate a thought in a strikingly apt and concise way, which, while not poetic, often heightens the language of prose; and they require pause and provoke reflection. But they belong to a purely literary, not an oral genre. A few such modern aphorisms have become well-known sayings, often quoted in ordinary speech, but the vast majority have not and have never been expected to do so. Though their form often enables them to stick in the mind, memorization is not in view. For those who devise them and those who enjoy them they belong in the pages of books. By contrast, the aphorisms of ancient Jewish and Christian wisdom live, like many ancient literary genres, on the interface of textuality and orality. They are always close to—and often formally indistinguishable from—that quintessentially oral genre: the proverb.

In the New Testament period literature functioned in a predominantly oral context and in a constant two-way interaction with orality. In a 'rhetorical culture' of this kind, 'writing...imitates both speech and writing, and speech...imitates both speech and writing' (Robbins 1994:80). Aphorisms of the kind we find in James are a form that moves particularly easily between orality and textuality. In James, which is not a mere collection of aphorisms, they are integrated—sometimes syntactically—into a large literary context in relation to which they function in this text. As we have seen, one such function is to sum up and round off a topical section. They are readily identifiable and stand out from the text—more so for ancient readers and hearers than for us. They slow the reader down. This must surely have been true even of the reader who read aloud to others in the communal context in which most readings of James will have occurred. Aphorisms invite pause and encourage reflection. And for ancient hearers they particularly prompted and enabled the memorization which was very much easier and more routine than it is in modern cultures. They are wisdom to be savoured, remembered and frequently reappropriated. So, as well as the literary context in which they will have been first and often again heard, many of James' aphorisms would live a life of their own, functioning in many different ways in various oral contexts. They are designed for this. This is how, as

crystallizations of wisdom, they can prove transformative of life and practice.

It is not important to us whether any or all of James' aphorisms pre-existed his composition of the text of the letter. It is highly probable that he had devised many of them for use in oral teaching, but there is no way of determining this in any instance. In any case, they have the autonomy of the true aphorism which, however well suited to its literary context it may be, can also survive very well apart from it. In pre-literate societies, such as the early Israel in which many of the sayings in Proverbs probably originated, proverbs are one of the most important vehicles of traditional wisdom, passed on by word of mouth, effortlessly memorized, frequently applied to all manner of circumstances in everyday life. In the still largely oral societies in which such proverbs might be collected and augmented in writing, the aphorisms which a wise teacher formulated in the same style as such traditional proverbs would function similarly. Even in the small circle of the educated élite for whom Ben Sira coined his apt sayings, their oral life in his teaching and his pupils' memories and recitals was primary. Collecting and elaborating them in writing served to enhance and to perpetuate their oral currency and availability. So also with James. In the rhetorical culture of the communities to which he wrote, the purely oral wisdom of traditional proverbs still played a large part. (The durability of proverbs even in modern western cultures is suggestive of the much greater power they must have retained in the first-century Roman world.) James' aphorisms offer a different kind of wisdom in a way that can come to function in the emerging culture of a Christian community much as proverbs did in the wider popular culture, or as the quotable maxims of the wise did in the more literary culture of the élite. (It may be that the many echoes of James' language in the early writings of the Roman church—1 Peter, 1 Clement, and especially Hermas—is evidence of the success of James' aphorisms in entering and influencing the oral discourse of the Christian community in Rome.)

Ben Sira and James collected their aphorisms and incorporated them in written compositions. Jesus did not, though his followers did. But, given that the writing of aphorisms was in the service of their oral appropriation and currency, this difference is not very significant. Nor does the considerable difference between the social location of Ben Sira's wisdom and that of Jesus and James

invalidate a formal comparison of how orality and textuality relate in these instances. Despite real differences—Ben Sira teaching in his school, Jesus with his disciples, James teaching in the Jerusalem church or among pilgrims from the Diaspora, James' letter read aloud and considered in Diaspora communities of Jewish Christians—all share a predominantly oral context in which aphoristic wisdom has a special capacity for planting itself in minds and informing life. The modern reader, by contrast, must learn to notice aphorisms, to take notice of aphorisms, to pause and to ponder. What Westermann says of proverbs applies also to such wise aphorisms: 'If one does not reflect at length on a proverb, it remains inaccessible' (Westermann 1995:8).

Attending to the aphorisms of James as autonomous sayings does not entail neglecting either their context in James or the context of James' wisdom in the literature of the biblical canon. James' wisdom, we have suggested, is a creative re-expression of significant aspects of the wisdom of Jesus, which draws also on the tradition of Jewish wisdom, especially in Proverbs and Ben Sira. Put differently but compatibly, James' wisdom is a creative development of the Jewish wisdom tradition decisively inspired and shaped by the wisdom of Jesus. This gives James special canonical connections with the wisdom literature of the Old Testament and with the Synoptic teaching of Jesus. (These connections are more important, more appropriate to the character of James, than the issue of James' relation to the Pauline letters, which has dominated so much consideration of James in canonical context.) In the light of our understanding of James' practice, which like Ben Sira's avoids repeating, quoting or alluding to the wisdom of the sages he reveres, preferring instead to make it his own and formulate it in new ways, we should not focus on the narrowly conceived task of detecting literary allusions to Old Testament wisdom or the Gospel sayings of Jesus in James. The special three-cornered relationship between Old Testament wisdom, Jesus and James invites exploration in much broader and deeper ways.

## James in canonical context

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There appeared a man from God and with faith, Martin Luther; with faith (for truly this required faith) or by faith he established faith in its rights. His life expressed works—let us never forget that—but he said: A person is saved by faith alone. The danger was great. I know of no stronger expression of how great it was in Luther's eyes than that in order to get things straight: the Apostle James must be shoved aside. Imagine Luther's respect for an apostle—and then to have to dare to do this in order to get faith restored to its rights!

(Kierkegaard 1990a:16)

[Luther] himself best disproves his conception of the Bible, he who throws out the epistle of James. Why? Because it does not belong in the canon? No, this he does not deny. But on dogmatic grounds. Therefore he himself has a point of departure superior to the Bible.

(Kierkegaard 1975:77)

In the process of reception by which the Christian churches of the second to fourth centuries came to recognize as canonical the various early Christian writings that now compose our New Testament, James was one of the slowest to gain general recognition.<sup>1</sup> Although the reasons for this can only be inferred, it is likely that two were important. The first is that James appears to contradict Paul on the issue of faith and works in justification. The second is that James is addressed exclusively to Jewish Christians (see chapter 1 above), which may well have made it seem irrelevant to the increasingly Gentile church of the second and third centuries. The eventual recognition of James must mean that

within its canonical context James was understood not to be incompatible with Paul's teaching, and may well mean (though this cannot be known with quite as much assurance) that it was understood to address Gentile as well as Jewish Christians. These two issues will be taken up respectively in the first and second sections of our present chapter. James' relationship with Paul will here receive disproportionate space, not because it is intrinsically the most important issue in understanding James' place in the canon of Scripture, but because it has received disproportionate attention in the history of interpretation down to the present day and so has acquired a complexity that must be addressed here. In the second part of the chapter we shall be able to build on the results reached in chapter 2 with regard to James' relationship with the Jewish wisdom tradition and the teaching of Jesus.

## **I JAMES AND PAUL**

### **I.1 The Pauline perspective on James**

For scholars who write about the reading of James as Christian Scripture within its canonical context in the canon of the Scriptures it seems inevitable that the relationship of James and Paul should be the primary issue (Chester 1994:46–53; Wall 1997:25–26; cf. Childs 1984:436). This is not because it is at all obvious that James' relationship with the Pauline literature is the most important of its relationships with other parts of the canon. From the perspective a reader gains from reading James' letter itself, its most important canonical relationships would be likely to be with the teaching of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, with the Torah, especially Leviticus 19, and with Proverbs (and Sirach among the deuterocanonical works). Yet James' relationship with Paul has in fact dominated the history of the reception and interpretation of James. This is because James has so often been read from a Pauline perspective, i.e. a perspective which gives the Pauline letters priority over the other collection of letters in the New Testament, the seven so-called 'catholic' letters, among which James usually appears first.

This Pauline perspective on James goes back to a very early date. The fact that James was one of the slowest of the New Testament works to gain general acceptance as canonical probably had much to do with the fact that in 2:14–26 James appears flatly to contradict

Paul's doctrine of justification by faith. The Pauline collection (excluding Hebrews) and the four Gospels were the parts of the New Testament canon which were first firmly established in general recognition (by the end of the second century). That James appeared to contradict a central tenet of Pauline teaching was bound to be a handicap to its reception into the canon alongside Paul. On the other hand, we should note that the inclusion of James, with the other 'catholic' epistles, in the canon well exemplifies one of the principles of canonicity which guided the canonization process from Irenaeus onwards. In the mid-second century Marcion had supported his radical version of the Christian Gospel by appealing to only one true apostle, Paul (the other apostles in Marcion's view corrupted the Gospel by Judaizing it), and a canon consisting only of ten letters of Paul and one Gospel, that of Paul's companion Luke. In reaction against Marcion, Irenaeus understood the true Gospel to be that which had been taught by all the apostles and supported a canon embodying that principle: four Gospels, Acts, and several apostolic letters along with Paul's. Acts (which the Muratorian canon pointedly calls 'the acts of all the apostles') was valuable because it portrayed Paul in general agreement with the Jerusalem apostles. The status of James for Irenaeus himself is not clear, but the eventual reception of James by the whole church is consistent with his principle. Thus the canon is so constituted as to ensure that the Christian message is not understood exclusively in Pauline terms. However different the works of the other apostles may be, the canon presupposes that there is no fundamental contradiction in placing them alongside Paul's. It is the common apostolic message to which they all witness in their different ways. We can speak of 'apostolic pluralism' in the canon, provided the term 'apostolic' carries its Irenaean and canonical sense of fundamental agreement in a common message.

However, it can easily seem to readers accustomed to the order of the books in Protestant and Roman Catholic bibles that the canon subordinates James to Paul. After the four Gospels which tell the story of Jesus and the Acts of the Apostles which tells the story of the early church come the writings of the great apostle who dominates the second half of that story, Paul. The rest of the New Testament can seem little more than an appendix, which ordinary readers and biblical scholars for once concur in neglecting. But Robert Wall, who has given more thought than anyone else to a canonical reading of James and certainly does not want James to be neglected, actually argues that the order of the New Testament letters in the canon—

Pauline corpus *followed* by the non-Pauline corpus—indicates that the non-Pauline letters play a subordinate role, keeping Pauline letters in proper check-and-balance. Thus, the relationship between the canonical Paul and the canonical ‘pillars’ [James, Peter and John] should begin with the discernment that God’s message ‘begins’ with Paul and then moves to the other apostolic witnesses to correct any interpretations of Paul which might lead to dangerous results for faith and practice.

(Wall and Lemcio 1992:176–177; cf. also Wall 1997: 25–26)

Similarly Childs, who does recognize that James’ relationships to Jesus’ teaching and to the Old Testament give it canonical roles besides that of providing ‘a check against a misunderstanding of Paul’ (Childs 1984:438), nevertheless insists that ‘both from a canonical and a modern historical perspective, James functions within a post-Pauline context’ (Childs 1984:436).

This notion that the order of the letters provides canonical authority for treating Paul as primary and the catholic letters as secondary is based on an apparently unquestioned assumption that the western canonical order in which the catholic letters follow Paul is the only canonical order. It is not. The Orthodox churches arrange the same New Testament canon in a different order: Gospels, Acts, James and the six other catholic letters, Pauline letters, Revelation. This is the order found in the oldest extant canonical list in which precisely our 27 New Testament books form the canon: the 39th Festal Letter of Athanasius (367). Since then it has been the standard eastern order. The pioneers of modern critical editions of the Greek Testament—Tischendorf, and Westcott and Hort—restored this ancient order in their editions, but failed to establish it in the western scholarly tradition, so appropriately does the western order seem to confirm the canonical centrality of Paul in modern New Testament scholarship.

The western order may be as old as the eastern. It presumably results from the fact that the Pauline corpus was an already fixed category in the canon when the contents of the category of the catholic letters was still not fully agreed. It is therefore the order in the Muratorian canon and in Eusebius, for both of whom the number of the catholic letters was not yet fixed. Its obvious logic is not that it ‘recognizes the triumph of Pauline Christianity (or the canonical interpretation of it) within the catholicizing church’ (Wall

and Lemcio 1992:176): catholic Christianity was as much Petrine and Johannine as it was Pauline. Its obvious logic is that Paul's letters are placed immediately after Paul's story, as told in the second half of Acts. But the eastern order has its own logic which is certainly not inferior. After Acts, the story of the apostles, it gives priority to those who were apostles before Paul. It even has its own appropriateness to the story of the early church as Acts tells it. In the early chapters of Acts, Peter is the leading figure, both at the centre, in the mother church in Jerusalem, and in taking the Gospel out from the centre and pioneering the Gentile mission. In Acts 12–13, James and Paul succeed respectively to these two roles of Peter: Paul, as the apostle to the Gentiles, embodying the Gospel's movement out from the centre, James as the leader who remains at the centre. The order which places the catholic letters (with James at their head) before the Pauline corpus maintains the priority of the centre over the movement out from the centre, as well as Paul's own formulation of priority in the Christian mission: 'to the Jew first and also to the Greek' (Rom. 1:16).

The existence of these two different canonical orders forbids us from allowing either to prescribe one form of canonical reading, either one which gives primacy to Paul or one which gives primacy to the catholic letters. In any case, Wall's assumption that readers of Protestant and Roman Catholic bibles will read the New Testament in its canonical order, thus finding in James a new perspective which adds to 'what has already been read and accepted from Paul' (1997:26), is surely mistaken in its understanding of the function of a canonical order. It can hardly have been the intention of those who placed the books in order that they should necessarily be read in that order. For most of their Christian contemporaries, the order of liturgical reading would have been the order in which they mostly heard Scripture. A canonical order is a form of classification of the canon's contents, not a prescription for reading. A first-time reader of the New Testament might be well advised to read, for example, 1 John before Romans. Moreover, most reading of Scripture is not first-time reading and so has no order of the kind Walls implies. Nothing about the canon requires us first to learn what Christianity is from Paul and then to see what James and others have to add.

Of course, a theological tradition which originated with Martin Luther subordinates James to Paul in a much stronger sense than do those who now advocate a canonical reading. Luther famously

deplored James' contradiction of the Pauline (though, for Luther, not only Pauline) doctrine of justification by faith alone which *is* the Gospel (Luther 1960:395–397; 1967:424–425), and relegated James to a virtually apocryphal status on the margin of the canon ('I will not have him in my Bible to be numbered among the true chief books, though I would not thereby prevent anyone from including or extolling him as he pleases, for there are otherwise many good sayings in him'<sup>2</sup>). Other early Lutheran theologians, such as Philip Melancthon (Kawerau 1889; Tappert 1959: 141–143; Maxcey 1980), strongly dissented from Luther's perception of opposition between James and Paul. Reformed theologians, also strongly committed to the Reformation principle of justification by faith alone but more willing than Luther to allow the law a positive role in Christian life, had less difficulty with James. Calvin commented that, although James 'seems more sparing in proclaiming the grace of Christ than it behoved an Apostle to be, it is not surely required of all to handle the same arguments' (Calvin 1855:276). Calvin thus recognizes that, within the canonical context, books should not be judged for what they do not say, since the principle of the canon is the complementarity of its component works. That Paul supplies what James lacks does not detract from the value of James, who conversely may supply what Paul lacks. Had Luther not read James as flatly contradicting Paul on justification he might have been more tolerant of James' omissions.

Though few major theologians and exegetes in the sixteenth century were as negative about James as Luther was, Luther continued to influence the Lutheran tradition in this as in other respects. His placing of James, along with Hebrews, Jude and Revelation, at the end of the New Testament continued in German bibles down to the present century. Probably more important is the fact that Luther's principle of a canon within the canon, determined by discriminating among the New Testament books as to which of them clearly convey the Gospel of Christ, remained extremely influential in the German Lutheran tradition and therefore also in much of modern New Testament scholarship which is heavily indebted to the work of German Lutheran scholars. In effect (though Luther himself ranked John and 1 Peter along with several Pauline epistles) this canon within the canon has come to consist primarily of the major (the now undisputed) Pauline epistles. They have been, for many in and influenced by the tradition of German

New Testament scholarship, the standard against which other New Testament writings have been measured and often found wanting. (This is really Marcion in modern Lutheran dress.) Inevitably this has meant that discussion of James has focused with overwhelming emphasis on the passage in which James appears to contradict Paul on justification (2:14–26). This subordination of James to Paul — evaluating James’ theological and Christian value by the standard of Paul—has therefore also given one part of James’ work and concerns a disproportionate prominence which the study of James for its own sake is unlikely to have produced. Just as, in the Lutheran tradition at least, justification by faith alone has been understood as the heart of Pauline theology, so it has seemed that, correspondingly, James’ alternative teaching about justification (2:14–26) must be the theological heart of James’ work.

Luther’s judgment on James was based largely on theological comparison of James with Paul. In nineteenth-century critical scholarship, with its much more historical interests, the issue of comparing James with Paul became a historical issue concerning James’ proper place in a reconstruction of the historical development of early Christianity. This has remained the context for much discussion of James down to the present. It does not, of course, mean that theological evaluation was abandoned. Historical reconstructions have often embodied theological judgments, especially the evaluation of Paul’s authentic teaching as the authentic form of the Christian Gospel, compared with which other Christian approaches contemporary with Paul are immature, and from which later developments of Christianity after Paul are a decline. One highly influential historical model of early Christian history has been a conflictual one, first promoted by F.C.Baur and the Tübingen school. Baur portrayed a dialectic in which Paul’s (Gentile) Christianity evoked the fierce opposition of the Jewish Christianity of the Jerusalem apostles. Early Catholicism eventually emerged from this dialectic in the late second century. Despite the refutation of much of the interpretation of the evidence on which Baur’s theory was based, a permanent legacy has been a predilection for detecting conflict and hostility between various Christian groups, especially between Paul and Jerusalem—not only by some scholars who explicitly and enthusiastically continue Baur’s approach (Lüdemann 1989; Goulder 1994) but also by many others who are still deeply influenced by his legacy. Thus the historical James, leader of the Jerusalem church, is still standardly portrayed, against the evidence

(see Hill 1992; Bauckham 1995a), as a very conservative Jewish Christian opposed to Paul and his Gentile mission.

Within such a scenario, the letter of James can be understood as an authentic writing of James of Jerusalem aimed directly at Paul (so Hengel 1987). But the fact that the letter makes no reference to the issues of circumcision, food laws and other distinctives of the Mosaic law that are supposed to have been the focus of contention between Paul and the historical James makes this position difficult within the conflictual model. Baur himself, following F.H.Kern, saw it as pseudonymous, and a late 'catholicizing' attempt from the Jewish Christian side to reconcile the Pauline and Petrine parties, opposing not Paul himself but later Paulinism (see Johnson 1995a: 147–148). James can be considered indebted to a Jewish Christian tradition of anti-Paulinism and to have misunderstood Paul (Lüdemann 1989:140–149). Many who have wished to defend the letter from the charge that it opposes Paul have adopted the view that the opponents are radical Paulinists who have seriously distorted Paul's teaching in an antinomian direction. Such an approach can give a positive account of James from a Pauline perspective, but its agenda is still that which requires James to be explained by placing it in a historical position relative to Paul and Paulinism. This is certainly a legitimate subject of enquiry about James, but it should be questioned whether it should dominate discussion of James to the extent that it has done. (As Luke Johnson complains [1995b:191], 'scholars continue to read whatever is different from Paul with reference to Paul, rather than allow it to stand simply as different'.)

At the very least one must agree with Adolf Schlatter: 'It does not make any sense to compare James with Paul before at least James has been understood' (quoted in Childs 1984:434). In the next section we shall attempt to understand James on faith and works without reference to Paul, as some others have also done (e.g. Adamson 1976; Davids 1982; Baasland 1982; Watson 1993a; Johnson 1995a; Penner 1996:47–74). The historical question — whether James is responding to Paul or Paulinism — is in principle distinct from the canonical question: are James and Paul in fact contradictory and incompatible? But they are connected. A negative answer to the first question clears the ground for the second. From the point of view of a canonical reading of James, it is also important to take account of what James has in common with Paul, much of it regularly neglected in the concentration on the apparently contradictory positions on justification (cf. also

Johnson 1995a: 58–64). In all this we are conceding that the history of interpretation has made the relationship of James to Paul one that has to be treated at length, but we shall not concede that James must be subordinated to Paul.

## 1.2 James on faith and works

In order to understand James' argument about faith and works in 2:14–26 it will help to begin with relevant meanings of the words translated 'to believe' and 'faith' (cf. Jepsen 1977:292–323; Lindsay 1993). The Greek word-group **πιστ-** (**πιστεύειν**, **πίστις**, **πιστός**), especially in Jewish usage influenced by the Septuagint, corresponds quite closely to words from the Hebrew root **אמן**. The verb **πιστεύειν** can refer to purely intellectual belief that a statement is true, that something is the case (as can the Hiphil of **אמן**, though perhaps with a stronger implication of the trustworthiness of what is believed). It can also refer to trust in and commitment to someone or something, as can the Hiphil of **אמן** (**אמנתי**). **πίστις** can be the content of what is believed, or faith in the sense of trust and commitment, or faithfulness. **πιστός** can mean 'believing', but more often means 'faithful', as does the Niphal participle of **אמן** (**אמנים**). It is important to note, in both Greek and Hebrew, the closeness of faith (trust) and faithfulness, which in modern English are not often associated, despite the obvious etymological connection. Faithfulness is trust and commitment maintained, over time and through testing circumstances. In contexts where the issue is not coming to faith, but continuing to live by faith, 'faithfulness' may often be a more appropriate English rendering than 'faith'. Whereas faith implies the trustworthiness and reliability of what or whom is believed or trusted, faithfulness suggests also the trustworthiness of the one who is faithful. In this sense, therefore, faithfulness can be ascribed not only to those who believe in God but also to God himself. God does not believe or trust, but he does remain faithful to his promises and his covenant commitments to his people.

In James' discussion all of these three dimensions of faith are present: assent to true statements, trust and commitment, faithfulness. In genuine faith (faith that is alive and productive, to use the metaphors in 2:17, 20, 26) all three dimensions are present, and, as we shall see, James cannot envisage separation—or perhaps even distinction—between the second and the third dimensions. True faith

involves beliefs about God, but also the wholehearted trust in God (the meaning of 'faith' also in 1:5; 5:15) which is maintained in ongoing loyalty to God even when faith is severely tested. In discussing whether it is possible to have faith without works (acts of obedience to God), James recognizes only two possibilities. Faith which can exist without works, faith which does not produce works, is the kind of belief which even the demons have (2:19b). When James addresses, in diatribal style, his imaginary interlocutor, he refers to the latter's belief that God is one (2:19a). This is belief in the statement of the *Shema*: 'YHWH our God, YHWH is one' (Deut. 6:4). These words, recited daily by pious Jews as part of the recitation of the *Shema* were the nearest thing to a Jewish creed, stating the belief in YHWH as the one and only God which most obviously distinguished Jewish religion from all other religious cults of the time. Even in these words, by referring to YHWH as 'our God', the *Shema* actually requires more than mere assent to the proposition that God is one, while the rest of the *Shema* requires total commitment and devotion to God in the whole of life. But James here reduces the faith of the *Shema* to mere intellectual assent in order to characterize the only kind of faith which can exist without producing works. It is like the words to the brother or sister in need, which express the right sentiments but issue in no action (2:15–16). By itself belief that God is one is a mere profession of belief which makes no difference to the life of the person who makes it. Hence the demons are more than a rhetorical flourish (though the onomatopoeic **φρίσσουν** is well-chosen for its oral and imaginative effect). The demons also know that there is only one God, and therefore, unlike humans who suppose they can rely on mere profession of belief to spare them God's judgment, the demons fear the judgment of God which they know their deeds must incur.

Besides this dead and useless kind of faith, there is also faith which is effective and productive. This faith works along with (**συνήργει**) works (2:22a: the word-play involves not only **συνήργει** and **ἔργων**, but also **ἀργή**). This means not just that faith accompanies works, but that it actively collaborates with them. In other words, such works are works done in faith, works of faith. James also says that this faith is completed (**ἔτελειώθη**) by works (2:22b). It is not merely that faith needs to be supplemented by works (as 2:24 alone might suggest) but that faith is fulfilled in works. Works are the necessary completion of faith which faith itself requires, if faith is understood as wholehearted commitment to God

and God's will. James' argument slips unobtrusively between these two meanings of 'faith', but it is clear enough that it does so. He defines the faith of the person who claims to have faith without works in verse 19, but this mere intellectual assent is certainly not what James, quoting Genesis 15:6, attributes to Abraham (2:23), or what he himself describes elsewhere in the letter (1:5). While the latter includes intellectual assent, it consists in a trust in God that encompasses and informs the whole life of the believer. Faith 'by itself' (2:17) or 'alone' (2:24) cannot save (2:14) nor be the basis of God's declaration that a person is righteous ('justify': 2:24), because the only kind of faith which can exist 'by itself' or 'alone' is mere intellectual assent. James can imply, in quoting Genesis 15:6 (2:23), that Abraham was justified by faith, but also assert that Abraham was justified by works (2:21, cf. 24), because Abraham's faith was the kind that produces works and Abraham's works were the product and completion of his faith. Works demonstrate faith (2:9b).

The point can be further clarified by focusing on the example of Abraham, picking up James' allusions to the Genesis narrative and reading them in the light of the Jewish interpretations of Abraham's faith which form the background and context of James' discussion. That James uses the example of Abraham to prove his point is not surprising but virtually predictable, since for Second Temple Judaism Abraham was *par excellence* the exemplar of faith in God. One aspect that is not irrelevant to James' argument is that Abraham was widely regarded as (after the primeval history) the first monotheist, who amid the idolatry of his home in Chaldea, came to believe in the one and only God, thus pioneering and exemplifying Israel's faith in the one God (Jub. 12:1–21; Apocalypse of Abraham 1–8; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.154–157; Philo, *Virt.* 212–216). So Abraham, like James' imaginary interlocutor, believed 'that God is one' (2:19), but his faith was plainly more than intellectual assent. It entailed a life of faithful obedience to God.

Two key points in this life are singled out by James. In Genesis 15:4–5 God promises Abraham, whose wife is barren, a son and heir through whom Abraham will have innumerable descendants. There follows the verse James quotes: 'Abram believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness' (Gen. 15:6 LXX). Allusions to this verse are frequent in Second Temple Jewish literature (Neh. 9:8; Jub. 14:6; 1 Macc. 2:52; Philo, *Leg. All.* 3.228; *Quis Her.* 90–95; *Mig.* 43–44; *Quod Deus* 4; *Mut.* 177–178, 186; *Abr.* 273; *Virt.* 216; cf. LAB 23:5–6). It could be applied both to earlier (Philo, *Virt.* 216;

LAB 23:5) and to later (1 Macc. 2:52; cf. Jub. 17:15–18; 18:16; 19:8–9; Sir. 44:20) events in Abraham’s life, because it was taken to characterize Abraham’s relationship with God throughout his life, but this does not mean that its context in Genesis 15 was neglected. There it characterizes Abraham’s faith as unswerving confidence in God’s promise in spite of all appearances.

The second event in Abraham’s life to which James refers (2:21) is the Aqedah (Gen. 22), equally well-known in Jewish literature. Following Genesis 22:1 (‘God tested Abraham’), it was considered the most difficult and most important of the tests (sometimes reckoned as ten: Jub. 17:15–18; 19:8; m. ’Avot 5:3) to which God subjected Abraham to prove his faith and obedience (Judith 8:26–27; Sir. 44:20; Jub. 17:15–18:16; 1 Macc. 2:52; LAB 40:2, 5; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.223, 233; Philo, *Som.* 1.194–195; Heb. 11:17). It was often related to Genesis 15:6 (1 Macc. 2:52; Philo, *Quod Deus* 4; *Abr.* 273). The command to sacrifice Isaac tested severely Abraham’s trust in God’s promise of innumerable descendants. But unhesitatingly he obeyed the command, and consequently (‘because you have done this thing’, ‘because you have obeyed my voice’) God renewed the promise (Gen. 22:15–18). By means of this ‘work’ Abraham’s faith in God stood the test. This explains what James means by saying that in the Aqedah (2:21) Genesis 15:6 was ‘fulfilled’ (2:23). The Aqedah was the supreme instance of Abraham’s faith working along with his works and being completed by them (2:22). God had already declared Abraham righteous on account of his faith in Genesis 15:6, but this verdict is confirmed when his faith is tested and proves itself in Genesis 22. This is why 1 Macc. 2:52 can refer to the Aqedah as one of the ‘works’ (ἔργα) of the forefathers (2:51) and cite Genesis 15:6 with reference to it: ‘Was not Abraham found faithful when tested ἐν πειρασμῷ εὐρέθη πιστός: (precisely the same phrase occurs in Sir. 44:20), and it was reckoned to him as righteousness?’ In this sense Abraham was ‘justified by works and not by faith alone’ (Jas. 2:24).

We could say that Abraham’s works, by which he passed God’s tests of his faith, proved his faith to be faithfulness. That Abraham was ‘found faithful’ (ἠνῆ, πιστός) can be said both with reference to Genesis 15:6 (Neh. 9:8: ‘you found his heart faithful before you’) and with reference to the Aqedah (1 Macc. 2:52; Sir. 44:20; 1 Clem. 10:1) and other tests (Jub. 17:18; 19:8, 9). In all these cases the phrase is fundamentally an interpretation of ‘Abram believed (ἠνῆ, ἐπίστευσεν) God’ in Genesis 15:6. There is no real distinction between faith and

faithfulness here. Abraham's wholehearted and unwavering trust in God's promise is maintained in testing circumstances and thus proves to be faithfulness to God. But this means, in James' terms, that it is active and effective faith, producing works. Without works this paradigmatic faith of the first believer would simply not be itself.

That James is here in close touch with traditional Jewish interpretation of Abraham is, finally, confirmed by the way he continues the quotation from Genesis 15:6: 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness, and he was called the friend of God (φίλος θεοῦ)' (2:23). This title for Abraham (whose scriptural sources are Isa. 41:8; 2 Chr. 20:7, but not in LXX) was closely connected in the tradition with the series of tests of which the Aqedah was the greatest, or more specifically with the Aqedah, when Abraham was willing even to sacrifice his beloved son because of his love for God (Jub. 17:16; Philo, *Abr.* 271). In his faithfulness to God under test Abraham proved his love for God (m. 'Avot 5:3; 1 Clem. 10:1; cf. CD 3:2–3): 'he was found faithful and he was recorded as a friend of the Lord in the heavenly tablets' (Jub. 19:9; cf. 17:18; 30:19–20). Thus James' last statement about Abraham alludes to the love of God in which his faith was expressed, and so portrays Abraham as exemplifying the faith of the *Shema* in its true and full dimensions, by contrast with the mere profession of monotheism by the interlocutor (2:19). Abraham's faith as it was understood in Jewish tradition and by James could in fact be aptly summed up in the Pauline phrase: 'faith working through love' (Gal. 5:6).<sup>3</sup>

The Jewish tradition of looking to Abraham as the exemplar of faith sufficiently accounts for James' choice of him as an example in his argument. But Rahab (2:25) seems a much less obvious choice. It is, in fact, rather remarkable that this relatively minor character in the Old Testament story, though one who played a significant part in the success of the Israelite invasion of Canaan (Josh. 2:1–21; 6:25), should appear not only here, but also as the last of the examples of faith to be given individual treatment in the great catalogue of Hebrews 11 (11:31), and as an example of someone saved by faith and prefiguring Christian believers in 1 Clement 12:1–8. The reason does not seem to have been noticed (even by Hanson 1978). It is that in Joshua 2:12 Rahab, who is about to help the Israelite spies escape after sheltering them in her house, asks them to give her 'a sign of faith' אַתָּה אֱמֶנָה: (though אַתָּה usually means 'truth', LXX six times renders it as πιστός) by which

she can know that she and her family will be spared when the Israelites destroy Jericho. The Septuagint version, which differs considerably from the Massoretic Hebrew in this passage, omits the sign from verse 12, but introduces it into verse 18, where the scarlet cord that Rahab is to tie in her window to identify her house as the one the Israelite army is to spare, is called a sign (*σημείον*). Evidently there was a tradition of interpretation which took the 'sign of faith' which Rahab requests to be her scarlet cord. It was understood as a sign attesting her faith in the God of Israel, which she had expressed in verse 11 (this tradition must also lie behind 1 Clem. 12:7). Hence Rahab could be said to have been saved by her faith. She was perhaps the only Old Testament figure other than Abraham of whom this could be said on the basis of the Old Testament text itself. So, if one were going to make a case for faith as a sufficient alternative to works, the kind of case that James is refuting, Rahab would be the obvious choice, after Abraham, for arguing such a case. She therefore serves James' purpose in that he can show that, important as was her faith, it was not by faith alone that she was justified, since her faith, like Abraham's, was completed by works, in her case her assistance to the spies.

As we have seen, everything James says about Abraham follows very closely the widely attested Jewish interpretation of Abraham's faith. However, in none of the Jewish texts we have cited is Abraham's example used in argument against the possibility of being justified by faith without works. We still need to consider why James should have raised this possibility and refuted it. It is important at this point to recall our discussion of James' use of diatribe style in 2:14–23 (chapter 2, section 2.5). The imaginary interlocutor with whom James debates in these verses is a standard rhetorical device for developing and enlivening an argument. Such an interlocutor is not imagined as an opponent, but as a student slow to grasp his teacher's point. So we should certainly not suppose that James here confronts a dangerous doctrine taught by Christian leaders he considers proponents of error. But, furthermore, recognition of the diatribe style makes it quite unnecessary to suppose that anyone is actually voicing the claims that James attributes to the hypothetical person in verse 14 and to the dim-witted interlocutor in verse 18.

Of course, James must suppose the argument to have some kind of relevance to his readers or hearers (or to many of them). But for this to be true we need only suppose that James was aware of the

danger that some of his readers, complacently priding themselves on their monotheistic belief, neglected practical works of charity. They need not have professed the doctrinal view that their faith was sufficient to justify them, but they behaved as though this were the case. So James voices for them the theological claim that could express their attitude and behaviour in order to show them that these cannot be defended.

People who profess religious belief while neglecting their charitable duties to those in need are too common a phenomenon to require any special explanation in this case. But there may be particular significance in the fact that James quotes the monotheism of the *Shema*<sup>4</sup> as the belief they profess (2:19). The general point James is making was more often expressed as the danger of hearing but not practising (Ezek. 33:30–32; Philo, *Praem.* 79; Matt. 7:24–27; Luke 6:46–49; Rom. 2:13; cf. m. *ʿAvot* 5:14; Josephus, *Ant.* 20.44). James himself calls attention to this danger elsewhere (1:22–25). Another form of inconsistency is telling others what to do without doing it oneself (Matt. 23:2–4; Rom. 2:17–24; cf. m. *ʿAvot* 1:17). Also quite common in ancient literature, Jewish and pagan, is the danger of practising piety before God without righteousness towards people (Verseput 1997b). This brings us quite close to James (especially in view of 1:26–27), but the specific attitude to which James calls attention in 2:14–19 is not reliance on cultic service of God without practice of righteousness but relying on *belief* without practice. This is more unusual, but it is readily intelligible. Especially in the Diaspora, Jews were very conscious that their belief in the God of Israel as the one and only God—a belief they professed daily in reciting the *Shema*<sup>4</sup>—sharply distinguished them from Gentiles. It would be easy for some to pride themselves on this belief as distinguishing them, the nation favoured and privileged by God, from all the nations who do not believe in God.

Some passages from the Jewish literature of the Second Temple period can help us imagine the fideistic complacency James attacks. In LAB 23:12, God tells Israel that as a result of the exodus

your land will be renowned over all the earth, and your seed special among all the peoples, who will say, ‘Behold a faithful (*fidelis*) people! Because they believed in the Lord, therefore the Lord freed them and planted them.’

In 4 Ezra 3:31–32, Ezra, unable to comprehend why Babylon (used here as a type of Rome) should have been allowed to destroy Jerusalem, asks

Are the deeds of Babylon better than those of Zion? Or has another nation known you besides Israel? Or what tribes have so believed the covenants as these tribes of Jacob?

Later he protests about the fact that

those who opposed your promises have trampled on those who believed your covenants (5:29).

In the Letter of Aristeas, the Jewish high priest is depicted explaining the Torah to a group of friendly and respectful pagans. He began by demonstrating that there is only one God, the God worshipped by Israel, and ‘proceeded to show that all the rest of mankind (“except ourselves”, as he said) believe that there are many gods’ (134). He continues with a typical Jewish account of the stupidity of idolatry.

Of course, these writers are very far from encouraging neglect of works of charity, but they illustrate how Israel’s privileged position could be associated with Israel’s distinctive belief in the one God. That some Jews should behave as though this belief were enough to guarantee their salvation would not be surprising. It is this belief which James attacks as useless unless it is the kind of wholehearted trust in the one God that produces good works.

### **1.3 Is James responding to Paul or Paulinism?**

In the previous section we have shown that James’ discussion of faith and works is entirely intelligible and explicable, against a Jewish background, without reference to Paul. We can now add some further considerations which make the hypothesis that James’ teaching here is a reaction against Paul’s teaching on faith and works implausible.

In the first place, the kind of faith which James envisages as existing without producing works and as unable to save is plainly not the kind of faith to which Paul refers when he speaks of

justification by faith. Faith as mere intellectual assent is never under consideration in Paul's discussions. Faith for Paul is precisely the kind of wholehearted trust in God that James maintains produces works. The nearest Paul gets to defining faith is when he describes Abraham's faith (Rom. 4:19–21) in terms which are close to James 1:6 and very distant from the kind of faith that even the demons share, according to James (2:19). If James 2:14–26 is opposing Paul's understanding of justification by faith, it misses its target by a long way. However, it is not inconceivable that Paul's teaching could have been misunderstood in this way, even by the historical James if we assume that the account of his relations with Paul in Acts (15:12–21; 21:18–25) is unhistorical.

Secondly, it has often been pointed out that what Paul usually opposes is justification by works *of the law*, whereas James speaks simply of works and fails to mention law at all. Again, the point is hardly decisive. James no doubt takes it for granted that the works to which he refers are acts of obedience to the law, at least in the sense of the commandment to love the neighbour, which for him, as for Paul, sums up the law (2:8). Moreover, Paul can refer simply to justification 'by works', as he does in one of the two texts which are verbally closest to James (Rom. 4:2–6: see p. 129 below). The context is still in discussion of the law, but outside the primary Pauline discussions of justification in Galatians and Romans the issue can be generalized, as in Ephesians 2:8–10, Titus 3:4–7 and in the echo of Paul's teaching in 1 Clement 32:4.

Thirdly, however, the question of the law acquires more significance when we recall that in Galatians and Romans Paul discusses justification with immediate reference to the issue of Gentile membership of the eschatological people of God. The question is whether, in addition to faith in Christ, Gentile Christians must do 'works of the law', with primary reference to such Jewish distinctives as circumcision, Sabbath and food laws. This is the only context in which we have any evidence of debate about Paul's teaching on faith and works (cf. also Acts 15:1). It is incredible that anyone countering Paul's teaching at the time when he was propounding it should discuss the issue without reference either to Jews and Gentiles in the church or to the law. The debate was about precisely the Jew/Gentile issue and the law. Is James 2:14–26 more credible as opposition to Pauline teaching at a later date, after the deaths of both Paul and James? It is true that Ephesians 2:8–10, if it is post-Pauline, appears to generalize the matter, but even here

the Jew/Gentile issue and the law are not far away (2:11–16). Moreover, in Ephesians 2:8–10, as in Titus 3:4–8 and 1 Clement 32:4–34:4, where the Jew/Gentile issue is no longer in view, nothing could be clearer than that the faith which alone justifies is not unproductive of works. Such examples of later Paulinism leave little scope for the kind of misunderstanding that James 2:14–26 must represent if it is a polemic against Paulinism. Nor is there any evidence at all of some kind of radical Paulinism which might justify or invite such a polemic. The tendency in Christian literature after Paul is to keep faith and works in close relationship, as James does (Titus 3:8; Ignatius, *Eph.* 8:2; 14:1–2; 1 Clem. 9:3–4; 10–12; 31:2; 32:4–34:4), but with no indication of countering an antinomian danger of reliance on faith without works. After Paul the issue was not controversial, while during Paul's lifetime it was controversial precisely in relation to the question of Gentile Christians and the law, which James ignores. In neither period is there a credible context for James 2:14–26 understood as a polemic against Pauline teaching.

If we conclude, then, that in all probability James wrote without any reference to the Pauline discussions of faith and works, how are we to explain the striking coincidences of language, especially in the following passages?

**James 2:21–24:**

Was not *Abraham* our father *justified by works*, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar?

You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works, and *the scripture* was fulfilled which says, '*Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness*' [Gen. 15:6]; and he was called the friend of God.

You see that *a person is justified by works* and not by *faith* alone.

**Romans 4:2–3:**

For if *Abraham was justified by works*, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

For what does *the scripture* say? '*Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness*' [Gen. 15:6].

**Galatians 2:16:**

yet we know that *a person is justified* not *by works* of the law but through *faith* in Jesus Christ.

That James and Paul should both turn to Abraham as the exemplar of faith and should both quote Genesis 15:6 needs no explanation in the light of the Jewish background discussed in our previous section. Nor is it very surprising that both should employ the term ‘to justify’ (**δικαιῶν**) in the context of discussing Genesis 15:6 (cf. 1 Kgs. 15:4; Ps. 143:2 LXX; LAB 3:10; 49:4; 4 Ezra 12:7; Matt. 12:37; Luke 18:14). The terms ‘faith’ and ‘works’ were in Jewish use (4 Ezra 5:1; 6:5; 7:76, 34, 114; 8:33; 9:7), even with reference to Abraham (1 Macc. 2:51–52, and cf. 59), though the meaning of the two terms is assimilated rather than distinguished in such use. What perhaps requires more explanation is the use by both James and Paul of the precise phrases ‘justified by works’ (**ἐξ ἔργων**) and ‘justified by faith’ (**ἐκ πίστεως**).

The best explanation is that both are dependent on a Jewish tradition of discussion of Abraham. With knowledge of the kind of exegetical discussion current in Second Temple Judaism, it is not difficult to imagine this. Genesis 15:6 appears to say that Abraham was ‘justified’ (declared righteous by God) on account of his belief in the promise of God that he will have innumerable descendants (15:5). But in Genesis 22, when the promise is repeated after the Aqedah, it is said to be ‘because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son’ (22:15), while in 26:5, when God repeats the promise to Isaac, it is said to have been made ‘because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws’. These texts raise the exegetical question: was it by his faith or by his works that Abraham was justified? The way in which James links Genesis 15:6 to the Aqedah, Abraham’s faith to his works, is the exegetical solution which James has no doubt derived from Jewish exegetical tradition. It plays a standard Jewish exegetical move: the reconciliation of apparently discrepant texts. Another, even more pervasive practice in Jewish exegesis is the interpretative association of texts which contain close verbal parallels. Besides Genesis 15:6, there is one other Old Testament text which associates faith and righteousness: Habakkuk 2:4 (‘The one who is righteous through his faith shall live’).<sup>4</sup> Jewish exegetical method was such that it is very unlikely that Paul (Gal. 3:11; Rom. 1:17) was the first person to relate these two texts. Habakkuk 2:4 (LXX) has **ἐκ πίστεως**, the only occurrence of this phrase in the Septuagint. (**ἐξ ἔργων** appears only in Judg. 19:16, where the meaning is quite different.) The association of Habakkuk 2:4 with Genesis 15:6 would bring **ἐκ πίστεως** into the exegetical discussion of

Abraham's righteousness and suggest  $\xi\xi \epsilon\rho\gamma\omega\nu$  as the corresponding phrase appropriate to Genesis 22:15; 26:5. In this case, James' account of Abraham's faith and works would closely follow established Jewish interpretation, adopting key terminology already used in that discussion, which James needs only to apply to the particular issue he addresses. Paul would be dependent on the same Jewish exegetical tradition with reference to Abraham, but more creatively adopts the terminology to make a different point: that Abraham was already justified by faith in the promise before he obeyed the commandment of circumcision and became the fore-runner of specifically Jewish works. This hypothesis, that James and Paul are both continuing, in their different ways, a Jewish exegetical discussion of Abraham's faith, accounts for the parallels and differences between them more satisfactorily than postulating a direct relationship between them.

#### **1.4 Does Paul contradict James?**

I put the question in this form because it is usually put the other way around (does James contradict Paul?), on the assumption that Paul is in some way, historical or canonical, primary and James secondary. The assumption is unjustified. In a canonical context, within which we are now asking the question, either form of the question must surely be equally valid.

Whether or not James was, as a historical fact, writing against Paul or Paulinism, the question remains: Are the letters of Paul and the letter of James, as they stand within the New Testament, compatible or contradictory? Even if they are addressing different issues, can their answers stand side by side as compatible with each other, or must we in the end prefer one and by comparison relativize the other, even while learning from it?

The issue can hardly be approached without reference both to Sanders' argument (1977), which has been very widely accepted, to the effect that Second Temple Judaism should not be considered a legalistic religion of earning salvation by works, and to the 'new perspective on Paul' which has resulted, especially in the work of James Dunn, from accepting that Paul cannot be arguing against such a religious position. Briefly, Sanders characterizes Jewish religion as 'covenantal nomism', in which Israel's salvation is based in God's gracious, unmerited election of her. Obedience to the law

was not understood as earning a Jew's standing before God, but as response to God's prior grace. Righteousness refers to the maintenance of a person's status within the covenant people. This may be forfeited by disobedience, though God acts with mercy and forgiveness towards his people. Thus obedience to the law maintains or preserves salvation, but does not cause or earn it. It will be apparent that James' account of justification falls broadly within this pattern. Certainly it will no longer do to classify James' understanding of justification as a typically Jewish notion of self-achieved works-righteousness, by contrast with Paul.

The 'new perspective on Paul' is more controversial. We do not have the space here to enter the debate, but will merely mention key elements in Dunn's reinterpretation of Paul's discussions of justification (relying especially on the synthesis of his work in Dunn 1998). Dunn sees Paul's concern in these discussions (in Romans and Galatians) as strongly focused on the issue of Gentile membership of the people of God. What he opposes is a view of Israel's privileged position as the covenant people which restricts membership to those who adopt full observance of the law, meaning especially the distinctive 'works of the law' which mark out Jews from Gentiles, such as circumcision, Sabbath and food laws. When Paul excludes justification by 'works of the law' he is opposing not a notion of self-achievement of righteousness by obedience to the law, but 'works of the law' as essential marks of Israel's privileged position in the covenant. Justification by faith alone means that God accepts into covenant relationship with himself all those who believe; that is, relate to God, as Abraham did, with wholehearted, unconditional trust. To 'insist on works of the law as a necessary accompaniment of or addition to faith' (Dunn 1998:379) would compromise this total dependence on God in faith through which God both initiates and sustains the believer's covenant relationship with himself.

It may be doubted whether Dunn entirely succeeds in maintaining a clear distinction between 'works of the law' as badges of Israel's privilege and 'works of the law' as means of acquiring righteousness for oneself. The former tends to slide over into the latter, once 'works of the law' are understood as something on which one could rely in addition to that reliance on God in faith which should be total and unqualified. But perhaps more importantly for our purposes, we should notice that Dunn is far from denying that Paul teaches justification by faith in the sense attributed to him in the theology of the Reformation. In other words, both initial and

continuing acceptance by God in covenant relationship with him is by faith alone, and the notion of earning justification by works is explicitly excluded by Paul (Rom. 4:4–5). (Here Dunn merely wishes to assert that the latter point is not aimed polemically by Paul against Jews who thought righteousness could be earned by obedience to the law: Dunn 1998:366–367.) Presumably this is why Paul’s teaching on justification can be generalized as justification by grace and not by works, where the reference is not to the Jewish badges of the canonical but to any good works, in the later or deuter-Pauline writings (Eph. 2:10; Titus 3:5–7). For our question about James in its contextual context, it is no less important to ask whether these later Pauline writings contradict James as to ask whether Paul in Romans and Galatians contradicts James.

Finally, we should notice that, while justification is by faith alone, Paul, of course, expects believers to do good, in the form of ‘good works’ (2 Cor. 9:8; Col. 1:10; 1 Cor. 15:58), which are done in faith or result from faith (Rom. 1:5; 16:26; 1 Thess. 1:3; 2 Thess. 1:11; Gal. 5:6).

Does Paul contradict James? His rejection of justification by ‘works of the law’ does not bear directly on James’ discussion, since, although the works of which James speaks are no doubt done in obedience to the law, James is not in the least concerned with those aspects of Jewish obedience to the law about which it was possible to ‘boast’ (Rom. 2:7) as marks of Israel’s exclusive privilege. The issue of works is focused in James rather in acts of mercy and compassion (2:13, 14), while in any case the relation of Jews and Gentiles is not in view at all.

However, as we have seen, Paul does maintain (whether polemically or not is not significant here) the general principle that justification is by faith alone and not by reliance on works of any kind which would qualify faith’s total reliance on God. Does he not, therefore, contradict James’ principle that ‘a person is justified by works and not by faith alone’ (2:24)? The negative side of this principle—‘not by faith alone’—is unproblematic, since, as we have seen, the kind of faith which James envisages as existing ‘alone’, without works, is mere intellectual assent to truths about God (2:19). Paul, who never speaks of faith in that sense, would certainly agree that no one is justified by that kind of faith alone. The positive side of James’ formulation—‘justified by works’—is more problematic from a Pauline perspective. The key question is whether these works could be understood as achievements on which we can rely in relation to God, thus compromising faith as total and unconditional

trust in God. In order to realize that they are not we must remember that James shifts the meaning of faith in his discussion of faith and works. The faith that can exist without works is mere intellectual assent. But the faith which, like Abraham's, is completed by works must be the kind of faith about which James is explicit in 1:6–7: that wholehearted trust in God to which 'double-mindedness' is opposed. About the nature of Abraham's paradigm faith Paul and James are agreed. No one who does 'works' in the context of that kind of faith can be relying on them for acceptance by God. Such works constitute what Paul calls 'the obedience of faith' (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). When Paul says that justification is not by works he does not have in mind at all these works done in faith. When James says that justification is by works he does not have in mind at all the works of self-reliance which compromise faith. Thus, beneath the surface of disagreement, there is a deeper agreement.

The disagreement on the surface is not insignificant. It concerns the different ways in which James and Paul have appropriated their Jewish heritage in very different contexts of concern and debate. Because James is concerned with the necessity of works he stressed the continuity between faith and works. In this he simply continues the Jewish tradition of interpretation of Abraham's faith, which resolved the exegetical issue of Abraham's faith and works by understanding Abraham's faith as his continuing faithfulness to God taking effect in works of obedience. Paul, on the other hand, because he approaches the matter from the perspective of the inclusion of Gentiles in the eschatological people of God, reworks the Jewish interpretation of Genesis and stresses the discontinuity between Abraham's faith in Genesis 15:6 and his subsequent works (including circumcision, the first subsequent work). While not, of course, denying that Abraham's works were done in faith, what matters in Paul's context of discussion is that Abraham was already justified by faith in God's promise before the acts of obedience in which his faith was tested. This leads Paul to a novel exegesis of the Genesis texts and to the novel formulation: justification by faith apart from works.

The disagreement on the surface and the agreement at a deeper level mean that it would be possible to state what each says without apparent contradiction if we were to use a wider conceptual framework than either uses. But this is not required for them to function adequately alongside each other in the biblical canon. What really counts is not an intellectual formulation which demonstrates their conceptual compatibility, but the existential

discovery of their complementarity in practice. Those who read scripture in order to practise it—doers, not mere hearers of the word (Jas. 1:22–25; Rom. 2:13)—find that the different messages of the Pauline literature on faith and works and James on faith and works address them in different contexts of their lives, correct the misapplications to which each can be subject, and finally cohere in the experience and the practice of relationship with God in Christ.

### 1.5 James and Paul on common ground

The usual concentration on James 2:14–26 gives the impression that either James and Paul are at odds or at least that they appear to be at odds until they are shown not to be. All too readily this leads to general characterizations of their teaching as contrasting. Even when this is for the purpose of showing that they are different but complementary voices within the canon of Scripture, as in Robert Wall's account of their views of poverty (Wall 1997: 242–245), the contrast is easily exaggerated. Wall writes that:

Unlike James, Paul conceives of the poor and powerless in theological and religious rather than in social and economic terms: the Pauline poor are the spiritually impoverished of the world.

(Wall 1997:243)

He claims that

nowhere does Paul renounce wealth or define God's election in terms of the socioeconomically marginal (cf. Col. 3:11–12; 1 Cor. 1:18–31). Nor is there any primary commitment to or identification with the poor as those specially favored by God.

(Wall 1997:245)

The contrast is with James' teaching in 1:9–11; 2:2–7, 15–16; 4:13–5:6 (see chapter 2, section 5 above).

Yet the very passage Wall cites here from 1 Corinthians is evidence to the contrary. As recent study of 1 Corinthians has conclusively shown (especially Pogoloff 1992; Horrell 1996: 131–137; cf. also Chow 1992; Clarke 1993), the first two chapters of that letter are not countering some kind of purely spiritualized, Gnostic teaching, but arguing forcefully against the competitive status-

seeking of the Corinthian Christians, manifested in their praise of rival apostolic patrons and their admiration for status-enhancing rhetoric. The problem is the values of the highly stratified and status-conscious society which the Corinthians have brought into their new life within the Christian community, not noticing how blatantly they conflict with the values of the Gospel. Paul declares these secular values fundamentally at odds with the Christian message about the crucified Messiah, a figure who could be nothing but a shocking affront to the honour and status worldly society values. Both Paul's missionary preaching in Corinth, which lacked the impressive rhetoric associated with social status, and the Corinthian church's own origins, from people mostly of low social status (1:26), therefore correspond to the radically status-rejecting character of the Gospel of the crucified Messiah. This emphasis on the cross is, of course, specifically Pauline, not paralleled in James, but his use of the theme of reversal of status, drawn from the Old Testament tradition, precisely parallels James:

God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God.

(1 Cor. 1:27–29)

The terms 'foolish' and 'wise' have, in this context, strong overtones of education and rhetoric, and so of socio-economic status, while 'weak' and 'strong' refer to the powerless and the powerful in socio-political terms. In the language about God's election of the lowly, about the way things are valued in the world by contrast with God's values, and about shaming and boasting, reversing the socially accepted understanding of shame and honour, Paul is here very remarkably close to James:

Has not God chosen the poor in [the eyes of] the world to be rich in [the eyes of] faith and to be heirs of the kingdom he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonoured the poor (2:5b–6a).

Let the brother who is lowly boast in being exalted, and the rich in being brought low (1:9–10a).

That Paul does not here use the terms 'poor' and 'rich' (but cf. 1 Cor. 4:8) does not reduce the similarity, since wealth, as James recognizes, was inseparable from social status. The wise and the strong are also the wealthy. Paul is concerned primarily with issues of status and honour, as is also James. The point both make is that God's strategy in salvation was to privilege the nobodies in order to deprive the somebodies of privilege. The implication is that all must accept for themselves the same lack of status as the lowest (cf. Jas 4:10).

Paul's treatment of the theme of wisdom in 1 Corinthians 1–2 is also close to James. He contrasts wisdom in the world's eyes, the clever speaking which a rhetorical education enabled and which was a means of competitive status enhancement, with the wisdom of God, foolishness in the world's eyes, given by the Spirit and manifest in the status-renouncing message of the cross. Only in Paul's characteristic focus on the cross does this differ from James' contrast between earthly wisdom, associated with competitive ambition, and the wisdom from above, with its socially despised qualities (Jas. 3:13–17).

Later in 1 Corinthians we find that Paul's ideal of a society in which status, as the world sees it, counts for nothing was also being contradicted in the Corinthian practice of the Lord's Supper. The more affluent were ostentatiously eating their own, rather adequate meal, which they had brought with them, humiliating those who had nothing (1 Cor. 11:20–22). So contradictory was this practice to the very nature of the community constituted by Christ and the Spirit that it meant that it was not the Lord's Supper they were eating at all (11:20). Here Paul shows the same concern about the privileging of the rich and the dishonouring of the poor as James shows in his example of the treatment of the rich man and the poor man who come into the Christian assembly (Jas. 2:2–6). It is not Paul who has spiritualized the poor, but a certain kind of modern reading of Paul which is deaf to the clear references to ordinary, concrete socio-economic realities in his writings.

Again, when Wall points out, correctly, that many of Paul's references to poverty are autobiographical, but claims that they are 'intended to illustrate his commitment to his apostolic calling and invite congregational support for his missionary work' (Wall 1997: 244), he forgets 1 Corinthians. It is clear that Paul's practice of working with his hands to support himself (4:12) was embarrassing to the status-conscious Corinthians, while his high-flown account of

his powerlessness and shame (4:8–13) is a deliberate parody of the rhetoric of status-enhancing self-praise. Paul's poverty and low-status manner of life were no recommendation to the Corinthians but a direct affront to their social values. Perhaps, once again, it is the Lutheran inheritance, with Luther's separation of the two kingdoms and his famous antipathy to the Peasant Revolt, that has blinded us to the socially radical implications of Paul's theology, just as it has marginalized the socially radical teaching of James.<sup>5</sup> What James draws from the Old Testament and the teaching of Jesus, Paul also focuses on the cross, but with no loss of socio-economic reality.

Part of Luther's complaint against James was that it is not one of the books which 'show you Christ', the real function of apostolic Scripture. He meant that the Gospel of the salvation achieved for us by Jesus Christ is not preached in James. The very few references to Jesus Christ make no mention of his death or resurrection. This lack of a Christological Gospel of salvation is another often observed contrast with Paul, whose theology focuses so intensively on the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. That there is such a contrast cannot be denied, but two points of qualification need to be made.

First, Christology, though presumed rather than expounded, is more prominent and considerably higher than is often allowed (see Mussner 1970). Jesus (rather than God) is certainly 'the Lord' in 5:7, 8 (cf. Matt. 24:3; 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 3:13 etc.) and in 5:14, 15 (cf. Acts 3:6, 16; 4:10, 12; 9:34), and 'the judge' in 5:9 (cf. Mark 13:29; Rev. 3:20). It is clear that James uses 'the Lord' indiscriminately of both YHWH (expanded forms: 3:9; 5:4; also 4:10; 5:10–11) and of Jesus (expanded forms: 1:1; 2:1), and can refer to both as 'the judge' (4:12; 5:9). The changing reference of 'the Lord' within the space of a few sentences in 5:7–11 reflects a high Christology in which Jesus shares the divine throne in heaven and is coming to execute the eschatological judgment of God. In 5:7, unnoticed by the commentators, is a significant allusion to Hosea 6:3 (LXX 4), following a widespread (including Pauline) and very early Christian exegetical practice of interpreting prophetic expectations that 'YHWH will come' (or other forms of depiction of an eschatological theophany) as references to the Parousia of the Lord Jesus (see Bauckham 1990:288–295). The Christological implications of the use of 'the Lord' for Christ as for God are much as in Jude (Bauckham 1990: chapter 6) and in Paul, who in this respect follows Palestinian Jewish Christianity. There is no truth in

a suggested contrast between 'Ebionite' adoptionist Christology in James (e.g. Wall and Lemcio 1992:265–266) and much higher, divine Christology in Paul. Both take for granted a Christology of divine identity deriving from the earliest Palestinian Jewish Christianity. A further unnoticed point of special Christological affinity between James and Paul occurs in the admittedly difficult phrase 'our Lord Jesus Christ of glory' (τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῆς δόξης) in 2:1. This is best understood as a combination of 'Jesus Christ' and 'the Lord of glory,' a Christological title found elsewhere only in 1 Corinthians 2:8 and most probably derived from Christological exegesis of Psalm 24<sup>6</sup> (for evidence of such exegesis, see Bauckham 1998: chapter 8, section IV.3; and note that Jas 4:8 alludes to Ps. 24:3–4).

Though the use of the name Jesus (1:1; 2:1) leaves no question that James thinks of the human figure of Jesus of Nazareth, his references are always to Jesus as the exalted Lord, now existing in heavenly glory, and coming in the future as Judge of the world. The resurrection, though not mentioned, is inevitably presupposed. The Lord Jesus the Messiah is the one in whom Christians believe (2:1), the living Lord of whom James himself is a servant, just as he is of God (1:1). Usually neglected here is 5:14–15, which speaks of anointing the sick in the name of the Lord, and says that the Lord will raise them up. This surely reflects the same kind of Christology as Acts 3–4, where Peter heals the lame man in the name of Jesus, and treats this as evidence that Jesus, risen from the dead, is living and powerful. This sense of the living exalted Christ active in the present in healing miracles, just as he had been during his earthly ministry, was probably widespread amongst the earliest Christians. In the phrase 'the Lord will raise him up' (5:15) there may even be implicit reference to the healing activity of the earthly Jesus (cf. Mark 1:31; 5:41).

This discussion has shown that James' Christology is closer to Paul's than first impressions might suggest. It remains the case that anything like the Pauline soteriological interpretation of and focus on the cross and the resurrection of Jesus is completely absent. But a second consideration should be borne in mind at this point. James writes paraenesis. An appropriate comparison is not with Pauline letters as such, but with the paraenetic sections of such letters. These may well be among the most traditional parts of Paul's letters, drawing on common traditions and patterns of Christian ethical instruction. Romans 12–13 are an extensive example, and are no less lacking in Christology than James is. In the 35 verses of these

chapters, Paul refers to Jesus Christ only three times (12:5, 11; 13:14). The frequency is only a little greater than in James (7 references in 107 verses). Two of the references (Rom. 12:5; 13:14) have characteristically Pauline Christological features. Like James, Paul in these chapters probably reflects the teaching of Jesus, but only implicitly (12:14, 17; 13:9), and, again like James, he refers to the law and all of its commandments (13:8–10). Surprising as it may be, it seems that early Christian paraenesis, even in Paul, generally lacked much Christological reference. So James is as Christological as we should expect the kind of Christian literature he writes to be. We have no way of telling whether he would have been more Christological had he written a different kind of literature.

Finally, it is particularly remarkable that even on the subject of the law James (2:8–12) and Paul (Rom. 8:4a; 13:8–10; Gal. 5:14) can sound alike. But we defer further discussion of the law in James to the next section.

That there are very considerable differences between James and Paul is not in doubt. But they should not be exaggerated at the expense of notable similarities, either in a historical reconstruction that has an eye only for diversity in early Christianity, often with the implicit aim of making biblical theology impossible, or by a canonical reading that highlights the distinctiveness of each canonical voice in order to demonstrate their complementarity. In a canonical conversation (cf. Wall 1997:286) between James and Paul there would be much nodding of heads and smiling agreement, as well as some knitting of brows and some exclamations of surprise.

## **2 JAMES FOR MESSIANIC JEWS AND GENTILE CHRISTIANS**

The relationships with other parts of the canon of Scripture in which the letter of James itself invites us to place it are primarily with the Old Testament, especially Torah and wisdom. Addressing Jewish Christians (see chapter 1 above) James reads the Scriptures of Israel in the way that they address the Messianically renewed Israel. As we have seen (chapter 2, especially sections 5 – 6) the teaching of Jesus, such as we find it in the Synoptic Gospels, is the authority and model which gives a particular shape to James' continuation of the Jewish wisdom

tradition and to his interpretation of Torah. A question that must arise, however, for those who read James in the context of the New Testament, a canonical collection intended for both Gentile and Jewish members of the eschatological people of God, is whether Gentile, as well as Jewish, Christians can read James as addressed to themselves. Is this work one which continues, in its canonical context, to address only Jewish Christians, just as other parts of the New Testament can scarcely be read by Messianic Jews as addressed to themselves (e.g. Galatians, Ephesians)? Or is it like the Synoptic teaching of Jesus, placed by the evangelists in the narrative context in which it addressed Jesus' Jewish hearers with a view to the Messianic renewal of Israel, but as placed in this Gospel context now addressed also to Gentile Christian readers?

## 2.1 Prophecy

Among the New Testament writings James is unusual in that relatively little of its reference to the Old Testament takes the form of finding Messianic and eschatological prophecy fulfilled or being fulfilled in Jesus Christ and his people. Exceptions are 5:7, where the allusion to Hosea 6:3(LXX 4) understands that text with reference to the Parousia, and 2:1, if there is allusion to Psalm 24, as suggested above (section 1.5). We could also add 5:5 (Jer. 12:3; cf. 7:32; 19:6; Ezek. 39:17; see Bauckham 1995b:101–103) with reference to the eschatological judgment in which Jesus is to be the judge (5:9), and 1:10–11 (Isa. 40:6–8) with similar reference to the eschatological judgment on the wealthy. We shall suggest below that 'the implanted word' (1:21) and 'the law of freedom' (1:25; 2:12) refer to role of the law in the new covenant of Jeremiah 31(LXX 38):31–34, but this is less a case of allusion than of an exegesis presupposed by James. This relative absence of references to Christological fulfilment of the Old Testament does not mean the author was ignorant or antipathetic to such readings of the Old Testament, only that it is not the kind of reading normally appropriate to paraenesis. If anything, it is surprising that there is as much as there is. The allusion to Hosea 6:3(LXX 4) in 5:7 belongs to a whole class of such applications of Old Testament prophecy to the Parousia which can be found in the New Testament. Moreover, the verse itself is in a context (Hos. 6:1–6) important for early Christian exegesis (Hos. 6:1, cf. Luke 13:32–33; 1

Cor. 15:4: see Lindars 1961:59–66; Hos. 6:6, cf. Matt. 9:13; 12:7). The same is, of course, true of Isaiah 40:6–8, to which James 1:10–11 alludes. Isaiah 40:3–11 was one of the most important passages for the early Christian understanding of the fulfilment in Christ of the salvation promised in the prophets. It is within the broader setting of early Christian interpretation of this passage (e.g. Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:2–3; Luke 3:4–6; John 1:23; 1 Pet. 1:24–25; Rev. 22:12) that we should understand James' unique application of verses 7–8a to the eschatological abasement of the rich. As so often, this application becomes intelligible when we see how James was reading these verses in context. He has found the theme of the eschatological exaltation of the lowly and abasement of the exalted in Isaiah 40:4 (cf. 2:14), and so read verses 7–8a also in this sense. Then, when we observe how close James 1:18 is to 1 Peter 1:23–24, with its citation of Isaiah 40:6–8, we realize that we have come upon the sort of web of intertextual reference to Old Testament prophecy that so often underlies New Testament writings. In James 1:10–11 and 5:7 we are in touch with the kind of detailed and extensive Messianic exegesis of Scripture which informed early Christian theology from the very beginning.

## 2.2 Law

More prominent in James than such allusions to prophecy are his paraenetic exposition of the law and his paraenetic continuation of the wisdom tradition. The two, as we shall see, are not separable. In James 2:8–12 James can hardly be speaking of anything other than the whole law of Moses, i.e. every commandment in the Torah. But 2:8 refers to it as 'the royal law' and quotes Leviticus 19:18b. Since the singular 'law' (**νόμος**) in the Septuagint and the New Testament only very rarely refers to an individual commandment, normally to the whole law, it is unlikely that 2:8 refers to the love commandment as one commandment among others. Rather, it is the commandment which summarizes the whole law, 'royal' because it summarizes the law *as* the law of the kingdom of God (cf. 2:5). Although an understanding of Leviticus 19:18b as a summary of the whole law can be found in later Jewish tradition (Sifra Lev. 19:18), as one of the answers given in the rabbinic quest for a summarizing principle of the law, we are surely justified in seeing James' interpretation as reflecting the teaching of Jesus (Matt. 22:40). In other words, the law

as James reads it for the Messianically renewed Israel is the law interpreted by Jesus in his preaching of the kingdom, the law as expressing God's will for his people in the dawning of his eschatological rule. This is the same law as is written in the books of Moses. James here emphasizes that it is a whole. One cannot pick and choose which commandments to obey (2:10–11), as though one could disregard the prohibition of partiality (Lev. 19:5) while obeying the commandment to love one's neighbour (2:8–9). But it is *as summarized in the love commandment* that the law is a whole. Partiality, like adultery and murder (2:9, 11), is one form of refusing to love one's neighbour.

As Luke Johnson has shown (1982), James does more with Leviticus 19 than citing verse 18b as the summary of the whole law. He works rather extensively and systematically with the whole passage that concludes with that commandment (Lev. 19:11–18), taking the particular commandments in the passage as instancing particular aspects of loving the neighbour. In other words, he takes the commandment to love the neighbour as the climaxing summary of the whole series of commandments in Leviticus 19:11–18a. Thus many of these commandments underlie the text of James at various points in his letter:

|           |        |       |        |
|-----------|--------|-------|--------|
| Leviticus | 19:12  | James | 5:12   |
|           | 19:13  |       | 5:4    |
|           | 19:15  |       | 2:1, 9 |
|           | 19:16  |       | 4:11   |
|           | 19:17b |       | 5:20   |
|           | 19:18a |       | 5:9.   |

Some of these instances are more obvious than others, but the pattern of such allusions enables us to be fairly confident that the less obvious ones should be understood as allusions to Leviticus 19. The importance of this set of allusions to Leviticus 19 for James is indicated in part by the fact that they begin at the very beginning of the main, expository section of James (2:1) and end at the very end (5:20).

James' use of this passage of Leviticus as a kind of exposition of the love commandment is not arbitrary. The formula 'I am YHWH' punctuates the text of Leviticus 19, concluding each of fourteen short sections, and its use after the love commandment in 19:18b is its seventh occurrence. This is probably not accidental, especially as the following section begins, uniquely, with an introductory

formula: 'You shall keep my statutes' (19:19a). This, forming an *inclusio* with 19:37, marks out verses 19–37 as a second major part of the chapter, leaving verses 2–18 as the first major part. Since seven is the number of completeness, the love commandment, concluding the seventh section of the chapter, climaxes a representative set of commandments which illustrate the way it summarizes the whole law. At least in the case of verses 9–18 it is in fact very easy to read the love commandment as the summary of these various commandments, or, conversely, to read, as James did, these commandments as a kind of representative exposition of the implications of the love commandment. It is also easy to read the 19th chapter of Leviticus as a kind of epitome of the whole of Leviticus, or of the whole of the law, its contents standing representatively for the kinds of material covered in the rest of the law. It has often been observed that most of the commandments of the Decalogue have an equivalent within Leviticus 19 (Patrick 1985:162), which coheres perhaps significantly with the fact that commandments of the Decalogue are the only specific commandments outside Leviticus 19 to which James ever alludes (2:11; cf. 4:27). If Leviticus 19 is an epitome of the whole law, and Leviticus 19:18b a summary of the whole law, then those commandments most closely connected to verse 18b within its context in Leviticus 19 can be taken as, in a special sense, representative of what the whole law, as summarized in the love commandment, requires.

Moreover, it should not be neglected that James' allusions to commandments in Leviticus 19, including the quotation of 19:18b in James 2:8, comprise a set of seven (see the list on p. 143). Like the seven sections of Leviticus 19 which conclude with and climax in the love commandment, James' seven allusions form a representative set of commandments, standing for the whole law as summarized in the love commandment. (Compare the fact that 'wisdom from above' is characterized by a list of seven qualities in 3:18, standing representatively for wisdom in its completeness.)

That James' use of Leviticus is not wholly novel in Jewish tradition can be seen from the Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides, which begin with a section summarizing the Decalogue (3–8) and continue with a paraenetic passage based especially, though not exclusively, on Leviticus 19 (9–21). Unlike James, the whole chapter of Leviticus is drawn on (14–15, cf. Lev. 19:35–36). There is no reference to the love commandment, but this may well mean

that Pseudo-Phocylides, like James, sees it as a summary rather than one commandment among the others. What emerges as distinctively Christian in James' use of Leviticus 19 is that he reads some specific commandments in the light of the teaching of Jesus:

|       |      |                          |
|-------|------|--------------------------|
| James | 4:11 | Matthew 7:1; Luke 6:37   |
|       | 5:9  | Matthew 7:1–2; Luke 6:37 |
|       | 5:12 | Matthew 5:33–37.         |

We have already observed the special significance of James 5:12, marked out for special attention and the nearest James comes to actually quoting a saying of Jesus (chapter 2, section 4.7). So just as the first allusion to a commandment in Leviticus 19 connects it with Jesus (2:1), so this one (not the last, but an emphatically important one) is a radical reformulation of Leviticus 19:12 in the words of Jesus. In this way James shows that for him and his readers Jesus' teaching is the authoritative interpretation of the law.

In treating the commandment to love the neighbour as the summary of the whole law, has James neglected the commandment to love God, which Jesus placed first, before the commandment to love the neighbour (Matt. 22:37–38; Mark 12:29–30; cf. Luke 10:28)? The commandment to love God with all one's heart, soul and strength (Deut. 6:5; 11:13) is part of the *Shema*, to which James twice refers (2:19; 4:12). He also twice refers to eschatological reward as promised by God to 'those who love him' (1:12; 2:5; cf. 1 Cor. 2:9; Sir. 2:15–16). Moreover, the commandment's requirement of devotion 'with all your heart and with all your soul' is the implicit opposite of the attitude James calls 'double-minded' (1:8; 4:8, representing the Hebrew expression 'with a heart and a heart', i.e. 'with a double heart': Ps. 12:3; 1 Chr. 12:33; 1QH 12:14; 4QTQahat 1:9; 4Q525 4:6). The double-minded have divided loyalties, wanting to be friends with the world as well as with God (4:8). In relation to God they are at best half-hearted, whereas the *Shema* requires wholehearted love of God alone. We must conclude that the *Shema* is so axiomatic for James that he can take its command to love God for granted, as read, implying perhaps that it is in failure to love the neighbour that the double-minded people's failure to love God wholeheartedly is evident (cf. 1 John 4:20–21). This would also accord with the fact that the word translated 'religion' in 1:26–27 (**θρησκεία**) normally refers to the cultic service of God. James evidently sees such service of God consisting not in cultic

observances, but in bridling the tongue, caring for the poor, and not being influenced by the values of the dominant society.

It is difficult to be sure what James means by the unparalleled term 'law of freedom' (1:25; 2:12), but in a context of Jewish thought the reference is presumably to the freedom to serve God, freedom from sin, freedom from the evil inclination which otherwise succumbs to temptation and produces sin and death (1:14–15). In that case, it should probably be related to 'birth by the word of truth' (1:18; cf. Ezek. 11:19; 36:26; Ps. 51[50]:10?) and 'the implanted word' (1:21; cf. Jer. 31:27?), which give the ability to overcome the evil inclination and set one free to serve God in obedience to his law. Behind these ideas would seem to lie Jeremiah's prophecy of the new covenant (31[LXX 38]:31–34; cf. Ezek. 11:19–20; 36:26–27).<sup>8</sup> The prophecy is not of a new law, but of *the* law, God's law, put within one and written on one's heart (Jer. 31:33).

Just as James applies language of cultic worship to ethical praxis (1:26–27), so he applies language of cultic purity to moral purity (1:27; 3:17; 4:8). 4:8 refers to the cultic purity required for coming into God's presence in the Temple cult, but this language is not applied literally to the requirements of the law with regard to ritual purity, on which much of late Second Temple Judaism laid great emphasis, but is rather applied metaphorically to the moral purification required to approach God in spirit (cf. Ps. 24:3–4). This is not at all unprecedented in Judaism, partly because the Hebrew Bible's use of the roots טָהַר and טָמֵא to refer both to ritual and to moral purity and impurity encouraged it. It is common in the Qumran texts, and widespread in early Christianity (e.g. Matt. 15:10–11, 17–20; Mark 7:15, 18–23; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 4:7; 1 Tim. 5:22; Jude 23–24; Rev. 14:4; for Qumran and Paul, see Newton 1985), as is the use of language of cultic worship for ethical praxis (e.g. Rom. 12:2; Heb. 13:15–16; 1 Pet. 2:5). We should also note that James' overarching paraenetic aim of 'perfection' (1:4) also has cultic resonances, since the Hebrew תָּמִים, to which James' use of the τέλειος word-group (perfection, wholeness) corresponds, can mean both moral integrity and the unblemished wholeness of a sacrifice offered in the Temple. This complex of uses of cultic language with reference to purity of heart and the ethical practice of life in relation to God is common to James and most early Christian literature. It must go back to the earliest Palestinian Jewish Christianity. As the example of Qumran clearly shows, it by

no means necessarily suggests that such usage substitutes for literal observance of the Mosaic laws of purity and cult. (Perhaps only in Hebrews is it clear that it does.) As far as we can tell, the vast majority of Jewish Christians in the New Testament period continued to observe the whole law, taking for granted that they were still obligated to do so. There is no reason to suppose that James or his readers do otherwise. (Since he writes to the Diaspora, no significance can be attached to his failure to mention sacrifice in connection with forgiveness in 5:16, or elsewhere.) What we do see in James is a continuation of that ethical concentration of the law which is found in Jesus' teaching and encapsulated in the understanding of the commandment of neighbourly love as summary of the whole law. This ethical concentration gives overwhelming priority to the purity of the heart and the practice of love, thereby downplaying and marginalizing ritual purity and cultic practice but not abolishing them (cf. Matt. 5:23–24; 15:10–11, 17–20; 23:23–28). James' failure to refer to the literal observance of ritual and cultic commandments does not mean that he did not expect his readers to observe them, but it does mean that they are not of central concern to him.

In summary, then, the law of which James speaks is the law given to Israel through Moses, but it is also this law understood as the law of the rule of God over his Messianically renewed people. This has three consequences: internalization, ethical concentration, and intensification. First, in fulfilment of Jeremiah's promise of the new covenant and Ezekiel's of new hearts and spirits, God's inward renewal of those who form the first fruits of his new creation of all things (1:18) has freed them from the dominance of the evil inclination within them and freed them to fulfil the law with the wholehearted devotion to God that the *Shema*' requires. This entails an internalization of the law in the sense of a transformation of the heart from which true obedience to the law comes. Secondly, following Jesus, the content of the law is understood from the perspective of the commandment to love the neighbour as the summary of the whole law. This entails an ethical concentration of the law. Thirdly, the interpretation of the law is guided by the teaching of Jesus, not only in his privileging of the two love commandments, but also in his teaching relative to specific commandments (especially in 5:12). This entails an intensification of the law.

### 2.3 Law for Gentile Christians?

It is James' references to the law, and in particular his insistence on the observance of the whole law (2:8–12), which raise the question whether this teaching addressed to Jewish Christians can also be read by Gentile Christians as addressed to themselves. It is important to begin by clarifying the debate about the law which took place in the early church and is reflected especially in Galatians and Acts. Most Jewish Christians in the New Testament period observed the whole law, though they no doubt observed it as interpreted by Jesus rather than according to Pharisaic, Sadducean or Essene halakhah. That they should observe the whole law seems hardly to have been discussed, except in the context in which Hebrews was written. Paul seems to have had reservations about Jewish Christian observance of the law only in marginal instances in which it impeded fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians and implied that the latter needed to observe the whole law (Gal. 2). Even in this case the issue is really one of interpretation of Jewish Christian obligation to the law, not abolition of it. (In Acts 21:21–22 the reports that Paul encouraged Diaspora Jews to give up observing the law are clearly intended to be understood as misrepresentations of Paul.) Although Paul is clear that Jewish as well as Gentile Christians can be justified only 'by faith in Christ, not by doing works of the law' (Gal. 2:16), there is no reason why Jewish Christians should therefore give up observing the law.

The debate was not for the most part about Jewish Christian observance of the law, but about the terms of Gentile membership of the eschatological people of God. Must Gentile converts become Jews, accepting circumcision and the obligation to observe all the Mosaic commandments, including those which marked out Israel as distinct and distinctive among the nations? The evidence strongly suggests that in this debate James consistently agreed with Paul that they did not (Gal. 2:1–10; Acts 15:1–29). It also suggests that, following the resolution of the debates at the apostolic council (Acts 15), few Jewish Christians continued to press for the circumcision of Gentile converts (Bauckham 1995a). It is essential to grasp that the relationship of Gentile Christians to the law was a quite different issue from that of Jewish Christians. It was a perfectly coherent and intelligible position to expect full and strict observance of the law by Jewish Christians without requiring the same of Gentile Christians. This simply meant understanding the eschatological people of God

as consisting both of Jews *as Jews* and of Gentiles *as Gentiles*. The Jewish distinctives of the law need neither be abandoned by Messianic Jews nor observed by Gentile Christians.

This then resolves the issue into the question: How should Gentile Christians *as Gentiles* relate to the law? It is that question which the apostolic decree (Acts 15:19–20, 28–29; 21:25) was designed to answer, by understanding a few Levitical rules about food and sexual unions (Lev. 17–18) as binding on Gentiles *as Gentile members of the people of God*. It is not clear that Paul fully accepted this ruling, and patristic evidence shows that the issue of Gentile Christian obligation to any commandments of the law other than moral ones was not easily resolved (Bauckham 1995a). However, for our purposes, it is much more important to notice that the discussion in Acts 15 takes entirely for granted that Gentile Christians will observe the moral requirements of the law (see Acts 15:28), as does Paul. There seems to be an implicit assumption of a distinction between the law as an expression of God's will for human life as such and the aspects of the law which mark out Israel as his elect people. Once it is agreed that Gentile Christians did not have to become Jews, the question of Gentile Christian relationship to the law focuses on commandments on the borderline between these two aspects of the law.

We cannot here enter the complex debate about Paul's understanding of the law. What concerns us here is primarily those indications in Paul of a positive role of the law for Gentile Christians or at least of the correspondence between the 'good works' God expects of them and God's requirements in the law. Whether or not Paul expects the written Torah itself to function as a guide and standard for Gentile Christians' obedience to God, it is clear that he does think that their life in the Spirit in fact fulfils God's requirement of righteousness expressed in the law. For our purposes what is especially important is that in his thought about this aspect of the law—the law as in some sense a permanent standard of the righteousness God requires of human life—Paul has largely taken over the Jewish Christian interpretation of the law which we find in James and which derives in part from the teaching of Jesus. We shall illustrate this with reference to each of the three aspects of James' understanding of the law which we summarized at the end of the last section.

First, Paul also understood Jeremiah's new covenant to be fulfilled in Christ (2 Cor. 3:3–4, 9). Unlike James, it is in terms of the

indwelling of the Spirit that he explicates it. What the law could only command, the Spirit enables. This is in effect the transformation of the heart and the internalization of the law of which James also speaks, though without using the language of Spirit. Nor does Paul usually use the language of law, but in one key instance he does:

The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do...so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

(Rom. 8:2–4)

The two expressions ‘the law of sin and death’ and ‘the law of the Spirit of life’ most probably refer to the same law, *the* law of God — the former to the law as misused by sin to bring about death (cf. 7:7–13), the latter to the law as obeyed by those liberated by the Spirit to do so (see Dunn 1998:642–649). Here at least Paul’s positive talk of the law is close to James’ ‘law of freedom’, even though it remains unclear and debatable whether the law as written on the tablets of stone (2 Cor. 3:3) still has a function for those who have the law written on their hearts (cf. also Rom. 2:14–15, 25–29; 7:6).

Secondly, Paul’s understanding of the commandment to love the neighbour as summarizing the whole law is parallel with James’. (As in James, we must presume that the commandment to love God is taken for granted as presupposition of the commandment to love the neighbour.) The way in which ‘the just requirement of the law’ (note the singular, suggesting, as in Jas. 2:8, a single principle which underlies and encompasses all the specific commandments of the law) is ‘fulfilled in us’ (Rom. 8:4) is by love (Rom. 13:10). Paul is clear that ‘the whole law’ is fulfilled in loving others (Gal. 5:14; Rom. 13:8), because the love commandment (Lev. 19:18b) sums up every commandment there is (Rom. 13:9: Paul, like James, instances commandments in the Decalogue). (It may be significant that neither Paul nor James actually calls the love commandment a ‘commandment’: as the summarizing principle of the law it is not one commandment among others.) When Paul speaks of ‘the law of Christ’ (Gal. 6:2) it seems likely he means the love commandment interpreted by Jesus as the summary of the whole law (Dunn 1998:654–656),

though we can also note that Paul, unlike James, appeals to the example of Christ in loving the neighbour (Rom. 15:2–3). It is notable that, like James, Paul in these contexts makes no attempt to classify parts of the law as not applicable to Gentile Christians. The whole law, every commandment of the law, is summed up in the command to love. It is this ethical concentration of the law that enables Paul both to maintain that his Gentile converts should not observe the Jewish distinctives of the law, thus becoming Jews, and also to maintain that the Spirit enables them to fulfil the whole law. He and James say precisely the same about the love commandment as summary of the whole law. The difference is that James, addressing Jewish Christians, presumably assumes they observe the ritual and cultic aspects of the law, while Paul, addressing Gentile Christians, assumes they do not. The fact that this difference is entirely unstated in both cases shows how easily the ethical concentration of the law in the love commandment, according to Jesus and James, could come in Paul's teaching to define Gentile Christians' relationship to the law. Since the aspects of the law which maintained Jewish distinctiveness were already in Jesus and James downplayed in favour of 'the weightier matters of the law' (Matt. 23:24), it was possible to claim that in loving the neighbour Gentile Christians could fulfil the whole law without observing its ritual and cultic aspects literally. (Rom. 14:13 [cf. Mark 7:15, 18–19] suggests that Paul was well aware of the element of continuity here between Jesus' teaching to Jews and his own to Gentile Christians.)

Finally, Paul also relied on the teaching of Jesus to explicate the meaning of the love commandment in terms which intensify the explicit requirements of the law (Rom. 12:14–21; 14:10, 13; 1 Cor. 7:10–11).

Thus it seems that the way James interprets the law for his Jewish Christian audience—as internalized in transformed hearts, concentrated in the summary principle of love for the neighbour, and intensified in line with Jesus' teaching—is also the way Paul understands it in relation to Gentile Christians. In what James says positively about the law there is very striking continuity between James and Paul. It is only in what James does not say that there is discontinuity. Therefore, even within a Pauline interpretation of the law, Gentile Christians should have no difficulty in reading James' teaching on the law as addressed not only to Jewish Christians but also to themselves.

## 2.4 Wisdom

James' exposition of Torah is not in the style of halakhic discussion which we can now find in a work as early as 4QMMT and which later became, as we see in the Mishnah and other rabbinic literature, the standard form of rabbinic halakhah. In that tradition the aim is to specify exactly what each specific commandment requires. Its tendency is towards the elaboration of rules. James, by contrast, expounds Torah in the manner of wisdom instruction, very much as Ben Sira had done (Skehan and Di Lella 1987:40–43) and as is found in the Matthean Sermon on the Mount. The aim is not to make precise the requirements of the commandments in precise circumstances, but to instil the spirit of the law, to illustrate its demands, to draw on the law as a source of moral formation and advice. This approach is coherent with the interpretation of the law as focused and summed up in the commandment to love the neighbour. Alongside allusions to specific commandments of Leviticus 19 (see section 2.2 above), there is also ethical exhortation which relates to Torah only in the general sense that it explicates the two love commandments (e.g. 3:1–12; 5:7–11). This style of exposition was, of course, quite at home in forms of Judaism which also practised interpretation of the law in the Essene or Pharisaic manner, but there is very little to suggest that early Jewish Christianity developed its own halakhah of the latter kind. As far as we can tell, the way James appropriates Torah in the form of wisdom instruction is the way Torah was received in early Jewish Christianity.

Wisdom and Torah had come to be closely associated, even identified, in the Jewish tradition of wisdom instruction (see chapter 2, section 1). Precisely how James relates the law to what he calls wisdom (1:5; 3:13–17) is difficult to say. (We must here distinguish our use of wisdom as a generic term for the kind of literature James writes—wisdom instruction—where wisdom means the content of practical instruction in living rightly, and the precise sense in which James uses the word 'wisdom'.) But it seems that wisdom is the God-given ability of the transformed heart to discern and to practise God's will. It is the way in which Torah is internalized, so that outward obedience to Torah flows from an inner understanding and embracing of God's will expressed in Torah. It is embodied in qualities of life (3:17) which manifest God's will for human life in a more comprehensive way than obedience to specific commandments can do. There is certainly

some truth in the observation that the function of wisdom in James is parallel to that of the Spirit in Paul.

We have already discussed James' relationship to the Jewish wisdom tradition—especially to Proverbs and Ben Sira—in chapter 2. We observed there what we can now see to be broadly parallel to the interpretation of the law in James: that James appropriates material from the wisdom tradition in a way that is guided and shaped by Jesus' wisdom, and that this results in both an ethical concentration of wisdom teaching and an intensification of the moral demands of wisdom. James' teaching on speech ethics (especially 3:1–12) is an excellent illustration of this.

A further observation is relevant on the way James distinguishes true and false wisdom (3:13–18: see also chapter 2, section 5 above). They are distinguished by a set of contrasting ethical characteristics (in summary, peaceableness and meekness versus envious strife and competitive ambition) and by their sources: 'from above' (i.e. from God; cf. 1:17) and from 'the world' (the terms 'earthly, unspiritual, devilish' [3:15] characterize 'the world' [1:27; 4:4]). False wisdom is the attitudes, aims and values of the dominant society. The contrast of false and true wisdom serves to characterize the Christian community as a counter-cultural society, living by God's values which are seriously at odds with those of the world. True wisdom relates to friendship with God as false wisdom relates to friendship with the world (4:4).

In some ways this dualism of true and false wisdom seems to be a version of the old dualism of wisdom and folly which appears frequently in the Jewish wisdom tradition from Proverbs onwards (cf. also the wise and foolish in Matt. 7:24–27; 25:1–12). The resemblance is closest in those later wisdom texts in which the concepts of wisdom and folly are given exclusively moral and religious content (4Q184; 4Q417 2:1:6–13; cf. 1 Enoch 42 where the counterpart of Wisdom is Wickedness). True and false wisdom in James are also close to the two kinds of wisdom in 1 Corinthians 1–2, each of which embodies contrary values and so appears to be foolishness to the other. (Sirach 19:20–25 is rather different in that it speaks of a kind of cleverness that, in its transgression of the law, is worse than mere folly.)

For the way James relates his dualism of two wisdoms to the older wisdom tradition his citation of Proverbs 3:34 in 4:6 seems especially significant. Since this is his only formal quotation of an Old Testament text other than 2:8, 11,<sup>9</sup> it may have a significance for his reading of Old Testament wisdom comparable with the significance

of 2:8–11 for his interpretation of Torah. In Proverbs 3:34, the contrast is not between wise and foolish but between the ‘scorners’ or ‘scoffers’ or ‘arrogant’ (לצים; LXX ὑπερρήφανοι) and the ‘lowly’ (עניים; LXX ταπεινοί). However, this verse in its context (3:33–35) reads (according to the Massoretic Hebrew):

YHWH’s curse is on the house of the wicked,  
 but the abode of the righteous he blesses.  
 Toward the scorners he is scornful,  
 but to the lowly he shows favour.  
 The wise will inherit honour,  
 but fools exalt disgrace (perhaps: fools he holds up to shame).

Or in the Septuagint:

God’s curse is in the houses of the ungodly,  
 but the abodes of the righteous are blessed.  
 The Lord resists the arrogant,  
 but to the lowly he shows grace.  
 The wise will inherit glory,  
 but the ungodly have exalted disgrace.

So if the preceding and following verses are aligned with 3:34, two sets of three terms result: ‘wicked’, ‘scorners/arrogant’ and ‘fools’ (כסילים, the commonest term for ‘fool’ in Prov; LXX here translates ἄσεβεις, as it does most often), contrasted with ‘righteous’, ‘lowly’ and ‘wise’. Moreover, 3:35 promises honour to the wise, but dishonour to fools. (The awkward paradox in the difficult text of the second line of this verse [cf. 14:29] James surely relished: cf. Jas. 1:9–10.)

Thus the wise and righteous are also the lowly who will be honoured, while the foolish and wicked are also the arrogant who will be dishonoured. This thought is expressed in James 4:10 (cf. 1:9–10; 2:5). It becomes clear that Proverbs 3:34, read in relationship with 3:33, 35, is for James a hermeneutical key to the wisdom literature. It allows him to read that literature’s contrast between righteous and wicked, wise and foolish, as also related to low and high status, and to the theme of reversal of status, according to which God exalts the lowly and the poor and brings low the arrogant and the rich (see chapter 2, sections 2.1.7c and 5). This enables a much more socially radical reading of the wisdom

literature than would otherwise be possible. It provides a hermeneutical perspective for reading Proverbs and Ben Sira in alignment with Jesus' radical privileging of the people who are of lowest status in the eyes of the world, a privileging which James so faithfully reflects especially in 2:5 (see again chapter 2, section 5).

Thus Leviticus 19:18b serves as James' hermeneutical key to the Torah and Proverbs 3:34 serves as James' hermeneutical key to the wisdom literature. In the case of Leviticus 19:18b James follows Jesus in understanding this verse as the summary of the whole law. In the case of Proverbs 3:34, there is no comparable reference to this text in the Synoptic teaching of Jesus. But it is probably the verse of Proverbs which most nearly expresses the theme of reversal of status that is so prominent in Jesus' teaching (Matt. 5:3–6; 19:30; 20:16; Mark 9:35; 10:23, 25, 31, 43–44; Luke 6:20–26; 13:30; 14:11; 16:19–31; cf. also Prov. 11:2; 15:33; 16:19; 29:23). So it is very much in keeping with Jesus' teaching that James should select it as a hermeneutical key to the wisdom literature.

James' canonical relationship with the law and the wisdom of the Old Testament is a relationship shaped both by the teaching of Jesus and also by two hermeneutical key-texts (Lev. 19:18b; Prov. 3:34) which provide an orientation to the Old Testament in line with Jesus' teaching. The result is an ethical concentration of both law and wisdom and an intensified or radicalized interpretation of them in the light of God's coming kingdom. The aim is 'perfection' (1:4), which the Christian community approaches as it lives a radically counter-cultural lifestyle informed by the values of God's eschatological rule.

## 2.5 James and I Peter

Among the significant canonical relationships which the relationship of James and Paul has very much overshadowed in the history of interpretation of James, the relationship of James and 1 Peter deserves more attention than it has received.

The following striking parallels have often been observed:

|         |                    |       |         |
|---------|--------------------|-------|---------|
| 1 Peter | 1:6–7              | James | 1:2–4   |
|         | 1:23 (cf. 3)       |       | 1:18    |
|         | 1:24 (Isa. 40:6–8) |       | 1:10–11 |
|         | 4:8 (Prov. 10:12)  |       | 5:20b   |

|                   |         |
|-------------------|---------|
| 5:5a              | 4:8, 10 |
| 5:5b (Prov. 3:34) | 4:6     |
| 5:6               | 4:10    |

It is doubtful whether these parallels can be explained by literary dependence, but nor is an appeal to general early Christian paraenesis very satisfactory. We should probably think, as in the case of resemblances between James on the one hand and 1 Clement and Hermas on the other, of the close links there seem to have been between the Christian leadership in Jerusalem and the Christian leadership in Rome. However, the explanation of the parallels is not decisive for our present concern with canonical relationship.

There are, of course, also major differences between the two letters, such as the strong Christological emphasis in 1 Peter. There is also a significant difference in that James is addressed only to Jewish Christians, whereas 1 Peter reads as though it were addressed only to Gentile Christians (1:4, 18, 21; 2:10; 4:2–4), presumably because they were in a considerable majority in the churches addressed. Moreover, James' readers and hearers are addressed as the twelve tribes of Israel in the prescript, but there is no further explicit reference to their identity as Israel. In 1 Peter on the other hand, the eschatological people of God to which the readers belong is elaborately identified by analogy with the Israel of the Scriptures (1:18–19; 2:5, 9–10; 4:17) and even distinguished from outsiders called 'Gentiles' (2:12). There is no trace in 1 Peter, any more than in James, of the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians or between Jews and Christians as problematic. Jews are not within the letter's horizon and the application of Old Testament descriptions of Israel to Gentile Christians is not anti-Jewish. Rather it is in the interests of forming the readers' sense of identity by identification with God's people Israel. Part of this process of giving these former pagans a new identity is 1 Peter's use of the language of exile (1.1, 17; 2.11–12; 5.13). In the prescript they are addressed as 'the exiles of the diaspora...' (1:1), taking up the same word (**διασπορά**) by which James identifies his Jewish readers (Jas. 1:1) and which is nowhere else used of non-Jewish Christians.

If we read the catholic epistles in the order which at an early date came to be the accepted canonical order, with James in first place and 1 Peter immediately following, then we read first a letter addressed only to Jewish Christians as the twelve tribes in the Diaspora and then a letter apparently addressed only to Gentile

Christians as 'exiles of the diaspora', to whom defining descriptions of Israel as God's people are applied. One effect is to portray the inclusion of Gentiles in the eschatological people of God, which retains through its Jewish Christian members its continuity with Israel and yet is also open to the inclusion of those who had not hitherto been God's people (1 Pet. 2:10). The inclusion of Gentiles in the eschatological people of God is thus portrayed in the catholic letters in their own way just as clearly as in the Pauline corpus, reminding us that this was not confined to the Pauline mission but also happened, for example, in the church of Rome quite independently of Paul but in relationship with the mother church in Jerusalem.

The sequence and relationship of James and 1 Peter portrays the priority of Israel (Rom. 1:16: 'to the Jew first and also to the Greek'), Gentile Christians' indebtedness to Jewish believers (cf. Rom. 15:27), and also the full inclusion of Gentiles in the people of God. Comparing the obvious Jewishness of James with 1 Peter, which is no less Jewish on account of the much greater prominence of explicitly Christian reference, we recognize that the inclusion of Gentiles does not—or should not—diminish the Jewishness of the Christian Gospel and its theological and ethical implications. As Robert Wall (Wall and Lemcio 1992:265) puts it: 'the church must become more Jewish to become more Christian' (and cf. especially McDade 1993). Gentile Christians, finding themselves addressed as 'exiles of the diaspora,' are encouraged to find James' letter to the twelve tribes in the Diaspora also addressed to them by virtue of their grafting into the root of Israel (Rom. 11:17). It is theirs too, not as a Gentile appropriation of the Jewish inheritance but as the root into which they have been engrafted. Above all, perhaps, James evinces no indication of the discontinuity between Israel and the church which inevitably appears along with continuity in other New Testament witnesses. Inspired and guided by his master, the Jewish sage Jesus, James reads the scriptures of Israel and develops the traditions of Israel in a way that entertains no doubt as to their continuing relevance. The teaching of Jesus does not replace them, but shapes the way they are read, and inspires the creative re-expression that is James' way of being faithful to Torah, wisdom and Jesus.

## James in modern and contemporary contexts

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Most people really believe that the Christian commandments (for example, to love one's neighbour as oneself) are intentionally a little too severe—like putting the clock on half an hour to make sure of not being late in the morning.

(Kierkegaard 1955b:23; cf. 1995:479)

[The words of James 1:17] are not spoken incidentally but with special emphasis, not in passing but accompanied by an urgent admonition: Do not go astray, my beloved brethren (v. 16). We dare, then, to have the confidence that they have not only the power to lift up the soul but also the strength to carry it, these words that carried an apostle through a turbulent life. They are not spoken without any bearing on other words; it is to warn against the terribly mistaken belief that God would tempt a person, to warn against the heart's delusion that wants to tempt God, that the apostle says: Do not go astray, my beloved brethren. We dare then to be assured that the words are also mighty to expose delusion and mighty to halt errant thinking.

(Kierkegaard 1990b:32–33)

[James] warns against the error of observing the mirror instead of seeing oneself in the mirror. I merely make use of the remark and ask you, my listener: Does it not seem to be coined for our times and our situation and in general for the later ages of Christendom?

(Kierkegaard 1990a:25)

In previous chapters, historical and literary study of James in its historical and literary contexts has led us to important conclusions as

to appropriate ways in which James should be read. We presuppose those conclusions in this chapter. But we have not yet explicitly addressed the task of appropriating the text of James in our contemporary context. For those who wish, with Kierkegaard, to avoid 'the error of observing the mirror instead of seeing oneself in the mirror', this is an essential task. We cannot truly see ourselves in the mirror unless what we see is ourselves in the contemporary context that shapes our lives and within which we must live our appropriation of James. We return now to that part of this book's agenda which the Prologue adumbrated by examining Kierkegaard's critique of biblical scholarship and his demand for an engaged hermeneutic, one which enables subjective engagement with the text by readers who approach it with 'impassioned interestedness', as moral and religious people whose deepest concerns are at stake in the text. It will be instructive, as a first stage, to study Kierkegaard's own reading of James, his own practice of an engaged hermeneutic. Kierkegaard was deeply concerned to appropriate James for Christian faith and praxis in his own life and in his own particular context ('our times and our situation and in general the later ages of Christendom'). Readers of this book, if they live in contemporary western societies, live in a post-Christendom age unknown to Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard cannot do for us what we must do for ourselves in our own time. But he can do much for us. Innocent as he was of most of the kind of study of James with which our previous chapters have been concerned, Kierkegaard's appropriation of James offers an existential depth of alignment with the text that, while by no means contradicting what we have learned in our previous chapters, takes us beyond where such study can reach. In the second main part of the chapter we shall attempt to initiate a hermeneutical process (no more than to initiate it, because appropriation cannot be done merely by one author for many readers) in which reflective understanding of the text, informed by historical and literary study, can lead to that appropriation and practice of the text which the text itself so clearly expects, in ways that respond and relate to our contemporary context.

## **I READING JAMES IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY COPENHAGEN**

As we already noticed in the Prologue, the first chapter of James, especially verses 17–21, was Søren Kierkegaard's favourite passage

of Scripture: 'my first, my favorite text', he called it (Kierkegaard 1978:416), 'my first love', even 'my only love—to which one returns again and again and again and “always”' (Kierkegaard 1978: 569; cf. also 1991:352). The frequency of his allusions to biblical books may not very obviously bear this out. In his published writings James is only ninth in a scale of the most frequently cited books, after the four Gospels, 1 Corinthians, Genesis, Romans, and Ecclesiastes (McKinnon 1980:136).<sup>1</sup> But this position is more impressive when one considers the relative length of the books, as well as the fact that a majority of the allusions to James are to the first chapter. Certainly the figures suggest that James was more important to Kierkegaard than to most Christian writers. Moreover, of the 'discourses' which Kierkegaard wrote as reflections on specific biblical texts, five are on texts from James. Four of these are on James 1:17–21 (Kierkegaard 1990b:31–48, 125–139, 141–158; 1941:228–240): three on the theme 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above' (Jas. 1:17a), and the fourth an address on the unchangeableness of God (Jas. 1:17b) which he delivered in 1851 and which was also the last work published before his death in 1855. James 4:8 is the text from which *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*, one of Kierkegaard's finest religious works, is developed (Kierkegaard 1956). In addition, we noticed in the Prologue that the first section of *For Self-Examination* is a reflection on James 1:22–25 (Kierkegaard 1990a:25–46). Something of the way he valued his favourite verse of all, James 1:17, can be seen in the second of the quotations at the head of the present chapter, and also in his description of it as 'a commemorative coin more magnificent than all the world's treasures, but also a small coin that is usable in the daily affairs of life' (Kierkegaard 1990b:39).

There are various ways in which Kierkegaard's relationship to James could be explored. One could create a Kierkegaardian commentary on the first chapter of James: little more would be required than to extract Kierkegaard's own comments and compile them in the order of the biblical text. It would also be possible to take the themes which Kierkegaard identifies in James and follow each of them through its full development in Kierkegaard's own thinking about the Christian life. Or, following Hans Urs von Balthasar's remark that often a saint's whole life can be understood as the living out of just one verse of Scripture, one could read Kierkegaard's life in terms of his appropriation of James 1:17 or, more generally, of the first chapter of James. Certainly, few

theologians have lived more intensively their own religious thought. In any such approach it would be very difficult, probably impossible, to determine the extent to which James really influenced Kierkegaard's thinking and the extent to which Kierkegaard in any case thought along lines which made James particularly congenial to him. Clearly the influence was at a deeper level than can be seen merely on the surface of his writings. James was one of the biblical texts which was literally on his mind throughout his adult life and with which a remarkable range of the key themes in his religious (as distinct from his philosophical and pseudepigraphal) works closely coheres.

Kierkegaard is not an exegete, at least in the modern sense. He makes his contribution at a stage of interpretation and appropriation of the biblical texts which lies beyond the historical exegesis practised by modern commentators. It makes no sense to ask where his reading of James ends and his own creative thinking begins. But this is the way biblical texts have always had their creative effects both in the thought of the great Christian theologians and also in the lives of the exemplary followers of Christ, known and unknown, who have lived creatively the texts they loved. An example like Kierkegaard's should make biblical scholars a little more modest than they often are about the importance and the limits of what they do, especially when they are tempted to speak as though they have the meaning and the effect of the texts in their professional control. By contrast with commentaries that seem to tie the text up safely in a protective package of learning, Kierkegaard's biblical interpretation, whatever else may be said for it, evidently lets the power of the biblical texts loose in his own life and in the lives of his sympathetic readers. It is as the performative and transformative word of God that Kierkegaard reads Scripture.

Kierkegaard's biblical interpretation, inseparably a part of his own highly creative thinking as it is, has inevitably a kind of individuality which readers in other contexts will not necessarily wish to reproduce. This does not detract from his value as a stimulus and inspiration to others. In what follows we take up four major themes which are prominent in Kierkegaard's interpretation of James, though they do not exhaust it, with the intention of pointing readers in directions in which Kierkegaard can prove a stimulating discussion partner in the hermeneutical task of appropriating the message of James today.

## 1.1 Faith and works

Kierkegaard's context in nineteenth-century Danish Lutheranism meant that he had to confront, not merely Luther's disparagement of James (see the quotations at the head of chapter 3 above), but, more importantly, the fact that this disparagement was so closely linked with the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith alone, the doctrine by which above all Lutheran Christianity defined itself. In Kierkegaard's view Luther's extreme insistence on this doctrine was justified and necessary as a corrective to medieval Catholic ideas of merit, but it was also dangerous, in the sense that it could provide justification for neglecting the works in which faith should issue. The danger had been realized in the Danish Lutheranism of Kierkegaard's day, which

had sloganized the doctrine of 'justification by faith' into a device not just for avoiding the idolatrous meritoriousness of works, but for avoiding works per se—that is, sloganized it into a device for divorcing faith from practice, the practice being increasingly one of making capital.

(Polk 1997:31–32)

Justification by faith had become a justification for the comfortable bourgeois ethic, protecting it from any disturbance by the stringent demands of true Christianity. As Kierkegaard put it:

Contemporary Christendom really lives as if the situation were like this: Christ is the great hero and benefactor who once and for all has guaranteed us salvation, and now all we have to do is be happy and satisfied with the innocent goods of earthly life and leave the rest to him.

(Kierkegaard: 1995:471)

This so-called Christianity of which Kierkegaard could be so scornful was a kind of worldliness which wanted the name Christian at the cheapest possible price and gladly professed a purely inward and ineffective faith as this price. Kierkegaard asks his reader to imagine Luther returning. What would he say to the present generation of Lutheran Christians?

do you not think he would say as he says in a sermon, 'The world is like a drunken peasant; if you help him up on one

side of the horse, he falls off on the other side.’ Do you not think he would say: The Apostle James must be drawn forward a little, not for works *against* faith—no, no, that was not the apostle’s meaning either—but for faith, in order, if possible, to prevent [*sic—read: present*] *grace*, faith and grace as the only redemption and salvation, from being taken totally in vain, from becoming a camouflage even for a refined worldliness.

(Kierkegaard: 1990a:24)

For Kierkegaard, Luther—himself very much a dialectical thinker in his own way—was not dialectical enough on this issue. An emphasis on either faith or works was always a corrective, and the truth was to be found only in the dynamic of these mutually correcting emphases, just as the drunken peasant would only be able to stay on the horse if he were constantly being helped up from each side in turn. Surprisingly, perhaps, Kierkegaard does not explicitly develop this thought as a canonical hermeneutical principle for reading Paul and James as mutually corrective on the issues of faith and works, as others since him have done. Nor does he explicitly find in his contemporaries’ misuse of the doctrine of justification by faith a parallel to the reliance on mere intellectual belief alone to which James reacts in the second half of his second chapter, though it is impossible not to believe that he saw such a parallel. He makes rather little explicit reference to James’ discussion of faith and works in 2:14–26.<sup>2</sup> But there can be no doubt that one reason he valued James was because of its much needed emphasis on the practical and very demanding ethic of love from which no appeal to faith can excuse.

Perhaps because it could be understood to exclude the need for works, Kierkegaard was less inclined to speak of salvation by faith alone (though he can do so) than to speak of salvation by grace alone. On the latter he insists, but in a way that incorporates the necessity for moral effort:

Christianity requires everything of you, but when you have accomplished everything it requires, all the same, that you realize you have been saved by grace alone and nothing else.

(quoted in Koenker 1968:242)

Or in one of the delightful similitudes for which Kierkegaard shares a propensity with James:

it is like a child's giving his parents a present, purchased, however, with what the child has received from his parents; all the pretentiousness that otherwise is associated with giving a present disappears since the child received from the parents the gift that he gives to the parents.

(Kierkegaard 1995:411)

Thus there is no question, for Kierkegaard, of seeking merit in doing good. But, unlike Luther, he never tired of stressing the stringent demands of the moral law on the Christian, requiring intense moral effort. In effect, he produces a dialectic between Luther's view of the role of the law and James': Attempting to fulfil the law drives one to reliance on God's grace through faith (Luther's negative role for the law as the antithesis of grace which brings one to see the need for the Gospel of faith alone), but grace itself drives one to renewed moral striving (James' positive role for the law as fulfilled in works of love which faith produces), and so on. It is this dialectic, incorporating a 'strenuous' ethic, which gives Kierkegaard's understanding of Christianity such a different feel from Luther's.

When Kierkegaard wrote his long and magnificent *Works of Love*, he was again much less concerned with the relation of faith and works than we might expect, and therefore makes very little reference to James, beyond identifying the commandment to love the neighbour as 'the royal law' (Kierkegaard 1995:24, 62), following James 2:8. Instead, he is much more preoccupied with the relation between love and its works, since the danger he detects here is no longer that of Luther's doctrine but of a more specifically nineteenth-century view: the understanding of love as a purely inward emotion or inclination, rather than as a duty which must be exercised in works of love for the neighbour if it is to be Christian love at all. Though not expressed, the parallel with James' thought is interesting: as James rejects a kind of faith which need not be expressed in love for the neighbour, so Kierkegaard rejects a kind of love which need not be expressed in love for the neighbour. Kierkegaard applies, as it were, the same Jacobean remedy to a new way of evading the stringent moral demands of Christianity. Moreover, in this example a broader similarity between Kierkegaard and James is observable: the emphasis on both the inward and the external. For all Kierkegaard's characteristic insistence on the inwardness of faith and love, he is equally insistent that love is action and must take form in works of love for the neighbour. A parallel

way of thinking can be seen in James' concern with the heart (1:14, 21, 26; 3:14; 4:1, 5, 8; 5:5, 8) as the pure or the polluted source of words and deeds. It is in the deepest inwardness that a person must be loyal to God and God's will, and it is also in the words of the tongue and the deeds of the hands that a person must be loyal to God and God's will. Inconsistency of heart and deed is double-mindedness (see above, chapter 3, section 5).

Kierkegaard thus shows a deep affinity with James' insistence that hearing is of no value without doing (1:22), saying is of no value without doing (2:15–16), and believing of no value without doing (2:14–26). However, it is noteworthy that explicit reference to this aspect of James tends to occur when Kierkegaard is discussing Luther's doctrine. Because of the Lutheran legacy, Kierkegaard addresses here what we might call the Pauline and Lutheran agenda for discussing James (see above, chapter 3, section 1.1). But this does not seem to have been his own agenda. His first and only love was the first chapter of James, especially verse 17. He shows himself a true and rather rare disciple of James in that he evidently does not locate the theological centre of James in chapter 2, where the preoccupation with James merely as a foil to Paul has so often placed it. For Kierkegaard it would seem that the theological centre of James lies in the doctrine of God expressed in 1:17.

## 1.2 Purity of heart

The overarching theme of James is 'perfection' or 'wholeness' (1:4). Wholeness requires wholehearted and single-minded devotion to God, and its opposite is that half-heartedness in devotion to God and that divided loyalty, vacillating between God and the world, which James calls double-mindedness (1:8; 4:8). Also part of this complex of thought in James is the cultic language of purity and defilement (1:27; 4:8). The unblemished wholeness of the sacrifice suggests the image of the pure heart as the state of integrity before God or entire devotedness to God that is, again, the opposite of double-mindedness (4:8).

Kierkegaard not only borrowed this vocabulary from James, especially when he wrote his religious discourse *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*, with James 4:8 ('Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify

your hearts, you double-minded!') as its text, and a major part of its purpose 'to track down double-mindedness into its hidden ways, and to ferret out its secret' (Kierkegaard 1956:178). Kierkegaard entered deeply into this theme from James and translated it into his own conceptuality to enable him to treat it at length in his own way. Hence having quoted the text, he gives a preliminary summary explanation of it in two forms, first in biblical terms—

For only the pure in heart can see God, and therefore, draw nigh to Him; and only by God's drawing nigh to them can they maintain this purity—

then in the terms, reliant more on the philosophical tradition, which he himself largely uses in this discourse:

And he who in truth wills only one thing can will only the Good, and he who only wills one thing when he wills the Good can only will the Good in truth.

(Kierkegaard 1956:53)

Purity of heart is 'to will only one thing in truth'. Kierkegaard labours to show that this willing one thing in truth is only possible if it is the Good that one wills. What might easily appear to be a form of willing one thing—such as willing the Good for the sake of reward or out of fear of punishment—turns out to be a form of double-mindedness, not the wholehearted devotion to God and God's will for God's own sake that Kierkegaard takes purity of heart to be.

In his exploration of purity of heart through its contrast with various forms of double-mindedness Kierkegaard offers an illuminating insight into the Jacobean notion of wholeness. It is only, he shows, through wholehearted devotion to God, through willing only one thing, that the human person is integrated and made whole. No other object of devotion, however single-mindedly one might adhere to it, can truly draw faith and life into a unity. Two further points can clarify this. The apparent single-mindedness which turns out to be double-mindedness is unloving:

there was a man on earth who seemed to will only one thing ...[T]here were witnesses enough against him who testified how inhumanly he steeled his mind, how nothing touched him, neither tenderness, nor innocence, nor misery; how his

blinded soul had eyes for nothing, and how the senses in him had only eyes for the one thing that he willed.

(Kierkegaard 1956:56)

A single object which must be pursued so hard-heartedly cannot bestow wholeness because it is not an inclusive good, but a narrowly exclusive one. The Good that the pure heart wills is the Good that includes the true good of all people. True single-mindedness is the loving will that wills this inclusive good. In this way Kierkegaard shows how the Jacobean emphasis on the love of neighbour as the fulfilment of the whole law coheres with Jacobean wholeness as that wholehearted devotion to God alone that the *Shema* requires. Single-minded devotion to God alone entails love for all people.

Elsewhere Kierkegaard contrasts the 'busyness' of worldliness in which it is impossible to be other than distracted and divided (Kierkegaard 1956:108) with the wholeness of fulfilling the law of love:

To be busy is to occupy oneself, divided and scattered (which follows from the object that occupies one), with all the multiplicity in which it is simply impossible for a person to be whole ... To be busy is, divided and scattered, to occupy oneself with what makes a person divided and scattered. But Christian love, which is the fulfilling of the Law, is, whole and collected, present in its every expression, and yet it is sheer action; consequently it is as far from inaction as it is from busyness.

(Kierkegaard 1995:98)

Here it is clear that purity of heart is not inactive inwardness. It is the inwardness that is consistently expressed in every action. As in James, consistency—of heart with word and deed, of speech with action, of this with that deed or word—is an essential part of what it means to be integrated in wholehearted devotion to God alone.

The second point which clarifies Kierkegaard's argument that only the Good can truly be the object of willing only one thing is this:

Shall a man in truth will one thing, then this one thing that he wills must be such that it remains unaltered in all changes, so that by willing it he can win immutability. If it changes continually, then he himself becomes changeable, doubleminded, and unstable. (Kierkegaard 1956:60: the end of this quotation echoes Jas. 1:8)

Since such things as wealth or status are not permanent, they cannot be the true object of single-minded devotion (Kierkegaard 1956: 56–57), for the latter must have an object which in its own unchangeableness keeps the will and the mind steadily and undeviatingly focused on it. Like James (see Verseput 1997a), Kierkegaard is here less concerned with an immutability of metaphysical nature than with steadfastness of moral and spiritual purpose. In other words, it is once again a question of wholeness as consistency, in this case over the course of time. (Elsewhere Kierkegaard talks of continuance or perseverance of love over time as part of what the love commandment requires: Kierkegaard 1995:132–133.) The unchangeableness of God's good will thus confers unchangeableness on the will that is devoted to it. For reading Kierkegaard as an interpreter of James, what is especially interesting here is to observe that behind what he says undoubtedly lies a connection he has made between the Jacobean themes of wholeness and purity of heart and Kierkegaard's favourite Jacobean verse 1:17, from which he elsewhere expounds the unchangeability of God (see p. 169 below). He has thought these themes together, explored the intertextual logic of various parts of James in such a way that he can then re-think the same connections—not exegetically but in his own terms. A superficial reading of *Purity of Heart* might suggest that Kierkegaard merely uses texts from James as pegs on which to hang his own thought. Close reading suggests that the influence of James is at a deep level.

Kierkegaard, as we know, resembles James in his liking for similitudes. His comparison of the pure heart with the sea when it is deep and transparent, contrasted with the dark opacity of the sea disturbed by storm and wind, is clearly inspired by James' image of the double-minded and doubting person as 'a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind' (1:6). It shows how Kierkegaard can be influenced imaginatively, as well as conceptually, by his favourite biblical chapter:

Since the sea is pure only when it is deep, and is transparent only when it is pure, as soon as it is impure it is no longer deep but only surface water, and as soon as it is only surface water it is not transparent. When, on the contrary, it is deeply and transparently pure, then it is all of one consistency, no matter how long one looks at it; then its purity is this constancy in depth and transparency. On this account we compare the heart with the sea, because the purity of the sea lies in its constancy in

depth and transparency. No storm may perturb it; no sudden gust of wind may stir its surface, no drowsy fog may sprawl out over it; no doubtful movement may stir within it; no swift-moving cloud may darken it: rather it must lie calm, transparent to its depths. And today if you should see it so, you would be drawn upwards by contemplating the purity of the sea. If you saw it every day, then you would declare that it is forever pure—like the heart of that man who wills but one thing. As the sea, when it lies calm and deeply transparent, yearns for heaven, so may the pure heart, when it is calm and deeply transparent, yearn for the Good. As the sea is made pure by yearning for heaven alone; so may the heart become pure by yearning only for the Good. As the sea mirrors this elevation of heaven in its pure depths, so may the heart when it is calm and deeply transparent mirror the divine elevation of the Good in its pure depths. If the least thing comes in between, between the heavens and the sea, between the heart and the Good, then it should be sheer impatience to covet the reflection. For if the sea is impure it cannot give a pure reflection of the heavens.

(Kierkegaard 1956:176–177)

The passage draws together what Kierkegaard has said about purity of heart and double-mindedness, and a good deal of what James says about them too.

### **1.3 God the unchangeable giver of good**

Kierkegaard was not the first to find in James 1:17 a centrally important and theologically rich statement about God. Many of the Fathers also did so (see Johnson 1995a:138–139, 204). Kierkegaard rightly takes the basic sense of the verse to be that God, being unchangeable in his goodness, gives only perfectly good gifts, and he rightly connects it with Jesus' comparison of God with a father who will give only good gifts to his children (Matt. 7:9–11). His four discourses on the verse cover a surprisingly wide range of related topics, but probably his most important thoughts on the implications of this understanding of God are two. In the first place, he understands the verse to mean not merely that every good gift comes from God, but that, since God is continuously and consistently good, the whole of life, all that happens to one, comes

from God as God's good and perfect gift, and should be received with thanksgiving. More precisely God makes everything good for those who receive it with trust and thanksgiving:

[God] at every moment makes everything good, makes everything a good and perfect gift for everyone who has enough heart to be humble, enough heart to be trustful.

(Kierkegaard 1990b:40–41)

[E]very gift is a good and perfect gift when it is received with thankfulness.

(Kierkegaard 1990b:42)

This exegesis depends partly on the intertextual connections Kierkegaard makes between James 1:17 and 1 Timothy 4:4 and Romans 8:28 (see Kierkegaard 1990b:42). The result is to find in this verse a call to unconditional trust or self-surrender to God's will, such that it is possible to receive whatever happens as a good and perfect gift of God. The second key thought is that the unchangeableness of God, meaning the absolute steadfastness of his will, is a matter of great consolation and joy for one who wills unconditionally what God wills. Otherwise, the thought of God's immutable will, looming like a huge and impassable mountain, could only be terrifying (Kierkegaard 1941:232–240). Thus these two interpretative thoughts converge in requiring absolute alignment of one's will with God's—having 'enough heart to be humble, enough heart to be trustful' (Kierkegaard 1990b:41). Reflection on this verse's key statement about God leads to the necessity for the most fundamental aspect of right relationship with God.

#### **1.4 Equality in neighbourly love**

In a fine passage at the beginning of his third discourse on James 1:17 (Kierkegaard 1990b:141–143), Kierkegaard insightfully brings together the royal law of neighbourly love (Jas. 2:8), which James employs against showing partiality (2:1–4, 9), and the theme of reversal of status (1:9–11; 2:5), a theme which Kierkegaard recognizes to be 'frequently stressed' in the Bible. Because the commandment to love one's neighbour requires one to love everyone, whatever their social status, 'as oneself', its effect is to make all equal. Neighbourly

love is ‘the bond of perfection that knits [the congregation’s] members together in equality before God’. In treating all alike as equal in status before God, love reflects God’s own attitude of impartiality (not respecting persons). Its effect is to elevate the lowly and to humble the exalted. Kierkegaard weaves echoes of the Gospels and Paul into his treatment of this theme of equalizing by reversing status, showing that he has taken considerable notice of the recurrence of this theme in various forms throughout Scripture.

Two further points are notable about the way Kierkegaard develops this theme. One is his sense of this equalizing effect of neighbourly love as strongly counter-cultural. It is directly opposed to ‘the law that rules the world’, which is the law of partiality, respecting persons, treating the wealthy as more important than the poor:

In the world, the differences [of social status] work frantically to embellish and to embitter life, as beckoning goals, as rewards of victory, as oppressive burdens, as attendants of loss; in the world, external life takes arrogant pride in differences—or cravenly and worriedly sighs under them.

(Kierkegaard 1990b:141)

Kierkegaard’s own social location (his own wealth disappeared largely through his expensive lifestyle) is evident in his care, here and elsewhere, to make it clear that the poor as much as the rich have the responsibility to disregard status and love all as equals. Nevertheless the contrast he draws between the divine law of equality in neighbourly love and the ‘thralldom of the world’, a law of regard for status which exercises a powerful hold over people, could not be sharper.

Secondly, Kierkegaard sees equality preserved and nurtured within congregational worship, but to be practised also in life outside of the church building. Of an individual who treats people equally within the church, he says:

[E]ven if he sometimes forgets about equality again and loses himself, distracted by life’s confusing distinctions, nevertheless his mind, every time he goes to the hallowed place, will be preserved in equality before God during that time and will be educated to preserve increasingly this equality in the clamor of the world and with it to penetrate the confusion.

(Kierkegaard 1990b:141–142)

Equality in neighbourly love is a principle for the ethical behaviour of the individual in the world. Kierkegaard was politically conservative and opposed to programmes of radical social reform. This was in part because he thought that true equality could come only from the practice of God's law of neighbourly love, in which God is always the middle term between one person and another (Kierkegaard 1995:106–107), a practice expressing the transformed heart of the individual whose will is surrendered to and aligned with God's. Equality is the divine law

only when the single individual fights for himself with himself within himself and does not unseasonably presume to help the whole world to obtain external equality, which is of very little benefit.

(Kierkegaard 1990b:143)

Kierkegaard's stress on the inwardness of the individual before God would not allow him to translate equality directly into political or socio-economic programmes, but on the other hand he does not simply spiritualize the equality of neighbourly love. It requires socially radical practice by each individual in everyday social relationships, an outward practice which in Kierkegaard's thinking is impossible in the distractedness and social conformity of purely worldly life, and can only derive from the deepened inwardness that enables the individual to live counter-culturally.

### **1.5 Limitations in Kierkegaard's appropriation of James**

Kierkegaard's penetration and appropriation of James' thought are in many ways, as we have seen, profound and instructive. He provides many insights and examples which can be followed and developed appropriately in a contemporary context. He leads us into the theological and existential dimensions of the text in a way that purely historical exegesis fails to do, so that, whether or not we agree with the detail of his interpretation in any particular case, he helps to engage us with the text at a level appropriate to its content. There are respects in which his appropriation of James is deficient. That it should seem so from the quite different context from which we can now view both it and James is hardly

surprising, and Kierkegaard's deficiencies in interpreting James are understandable in view of the way his own thinking related—of course, highly critically—to his own social and ecclesiastic context. Nevertheless, they too are instructive for us.

That Kierkegaard neglects some parts of James completely cannot be held against him, since he never attempted a systematic exposition of James. More important are two aspects of the general orientation of James' thought which contrast with that of Kierkegaard. The two are closely connected. The first is the strong eschatological orientation of James' thought, which is not simply absent from Kierkegaard but is transmuted into the relationship between the finitude of the temporal and the transcendence of eternity. The second aspect is the orientation of James' work towards the Christian community as a counter-cultural community practising the values of the kingdom of God already within this world. The two aspects are connected in that church as counter-cultural community is the first fruits of the new creation (1:18) and the vanguard of the coming rule of God (2:5). Just as James' futurist eschatology goes with his emphasis on the Christian community, so Kierkegaard's transcendent eschatology goes with his emphasis on the individual.

We should not make the mistake of simply contrasting the individual in Kierkegaard with the community in James. Many of James' aphorisms are in fact formulated in individual form (e.g. 1:5–15, 19b, 23–26), as aphorisms of this kind normally were, although James frames them in plural address (e.g. 1:2–4, 16, 19a, 21–22). Of course, James' instructions must be practised by individuals, even though in community. Nevertheless, it is symptomatic of a real difference that in 2:1–4 James addresses his readers in the plural, while Kierkegaard's paraphrase of this passage not only puts it into individual form but attributes to James his own habit of deliberately addressing the single individual: 'this idea the apostle wants to bring to life in the single individual for application in his life' (Kierkegaard 1990b:141). It is not Kierkegaard's stress on inwardness which is the problem here, for it parallels James' concern with the heart, as we have noticed. The problem is that Kierkegaard envisages only the two alternatives of the person who is absorbed in the unreflective mass, subject to the social conformity of a society that has diluted Christianity beyond recognition, and the person who in inwardness before God becomes an individual aligned with God's will and practising love in the world precisely by not being of the world. Faced with a

society which still largely paid lip-service to Christianity but systematically avoided the demands of true Christianity, Kierkegaard's concern was to awaken individuals to these demands. He did not envisage what James takes for granted: a community formed as *a community* by the radical practice of neighbourly love and wholehearted devotion to God, and thereby distinguished as a community from the values and practice of the dominant culture. In what Kierkegaard calls 'the later ages of Christendom', the approach he exemplifies—deepening the commitment of the individual in a nominally Christian context—has been not at all uncommon. In the post-Christendom age of the contemporary West, it has become both a more obvious and a more urgent (but still not especially well practised) task to nurture Christian faith and practice in a community which lives in its own life as a community the way that it recommends to the world.

## **2 READING JAMES AT THE TURN OF THE MILLENNIUM**

For Kierkegaard in nineteenth-century Copenhagen, 'the world' to which he necessarily related was still an overtly Christian society, whose Christianity, as he perceived it, was diluted to the point of unrecognizability. The counter-cultural force of the teaching of James therefore focused on the individual who must become a responsible subject, able to strive to live truly Christianly in an only nominally Christian society. For those of us who live in the contemporary, post-Christian West, 'the world' to which we necessarily relate is a secular—or, in some ways better: pluralist—society in which Christians have become a culturally marginalized minority, facing the contrasting dangers of sectarian withdrawal from or assimilation to the dominant culture. In this context, Christian individualism would especially run the risk of cultural assimilation. To the extent that Christian churches ignore their relationship to the dominant culture and leave their members without guidance or reflection on being Christian in relation to it, Christians will be torn between the two poles of sectarian withdrawal and assimilation. What is needed is for the Christian community to develop as a counter-cultural alternative to the dominant culture, in its own life together both distinctive and outgoing, shaping its members' lives, both within and without the community's own life, in ways that

witness to Jesus Christ, in critical solidarity with all that is good in the dominant society and in prophetic critique of all that is corrupting and destructive. James can inform the life of such a counter-cultural community because its aim is precisely the formation and nurturing of the Christian community as counter-cultural embodiment of God's values and commandments. One of the aims in the rest of this chapter is to contextualize James in the context of contemporary western society, but such contextualization should not be understood as a kind of cultural assimilation in which the distinctive voice of the text is smothered by contemporary cultural assumptions and imperatives. We cannot avoid and should not ignore the latter. Indeed, if our reading of James is not to be unreflectively influenced by them, they need to be articulated and considered. But their place is as part of the context to which the text itself speaks. The aim must be to hear within our own context the distinctive voice of the text with a view to the distinctive community it aims to construct.

It may be helpful here briefly to suggest two possible models (not incompatible) for biblical interpretation as contemporary appropriation of Scripture. The first is recognition that the text creates a textual world into which readers may enter along with all that they know and experience of their own contemporary context. In this sense the world that James constructs for us is a portrait (what Carroll R. 1992:279 calls an 'identity document') of what the Christian community should be like, emerging in critical distinction from what it may be and very often is like. This portrait of the community has essential relation to a vision of who God is and what God has done for his people, and it also projects the eschatological goal of the community as the fulfilment God has promised his people. In other words, the portrait locates the community within the story of God's history with his people and the world on the way to the new creation at the end of history. What the community should be like is a matter of its being on the way to the wholeness and perfection of itself and all things, and of its being in relation to the God who has formed and directs the community. Those who read James within contemporary Christian communities and in relation to them can find themselves and their communities drawn into the text, reading, as Kierkegaard insisted, with the persistent reminders: 'It is I/we to whom it is speaking'; 'It is I/we about whom it is speaking.' In responsible interaction with the text and its world, contemporary Christian communities can in this way align themselves, both

faithfully and creatively, with the direction in which the text points towards God-given wholeness.

It is worth noticing that, while the historical and literary study of the context can most certainly inform such a reading of James, detailed reconstruction of the text's original context is of limited usefulness. The text's own relative vagueness in this respect, the generality of its address to Jewish Christians throughout the Diaspora, its use of typical rather than specific instances, and the nature of aphorisms, which have their force not in contextual specificity but in conceptual concentration, linguistic aptness and imaginative impact, are all advantageous for a reading in contemporary context. They assist the contemporary Christian community's identification of itself within the world of the text.

Another model for interpretation which has had several major advocates in recent hermeneutical writing (Barton [forthcoming] brings together insights from the previous advocates and adds his own) is that of 'performance'. The idea is that the biblical writings, as the Scriptures of the Christian church, are most like writings, such as a Beethoven score or a Shakespeare play, which are adequately interpreted only in performance and can be validly interpreted in a number of relatively different performances:

[A]lthough the texts of the New Testament may be read, and read with profit, by anyone interested in Western culture and concerned for the human predicament, the fundamental form of the *Christian* interpretation of scripture is the life, activity and organization of the believing community. [Moreover,] Christian practice, as interpretative action, consists in the *performance* of texts which are construed as 'rendering', bearing witness to, one whose words and deeds, discourse and suffering, 'rendered' the truth of God in human history. The performance of the New Testament enacts the conviction that these texts are most appropriately read as the story of Jesus, the story of everyone else, and the story of God.

(Lash 1986:42; italics in original)

We cannot sufficiently know what the biblical writings mean until they are appropriated and lived in the way they expect to be; that is, until we are involved in their performance and in the transformation they enable when appropriated in performance. Interpretation

*cannot* be primarily an ‘archaeological’ task if the kind of text the Bible delivers its meaning only as it is *‘played out’* in patterns of human action in Church and society. Rather, on the performance analogy, biblical interpretation is something practical, personal, communal and ‘political’: to do with changing and being changed.

(Barton forthcoming; italics in original)

The analogy of performance thus says a lot which Kierkegaard said in other ways without the analogy. It requires both that we observe ourselves in the mirror, not the mirror itself, and that we do not forget but put into practical effect what we learn. In performance we cannot keep a safely detached distance from the text, but in attempting its enactment incur the risk and struggle of being the people and the communities of whom the text speaks.

What follows is an attempt to open up directions of appropriation and enactment of James within the contemporary context. It does no more than initiate. Readers must continue it in a process of contextual reflection before God which can reach only one of many provisional conclusions as it leads back into the immediacy of lived life in which appropriation and enactment take place.

## 2.1 Wholeness and integrity

The importance of the notion of ‘wholeness’, ‘completeness’ or ‘perfection’ in James has been widely recognized, and there are good exegetical studies of it and exploration of its background in Jewish literature and its parallels in other early Christian literature (Hoppe 1977; Zmijewski 1980; Martin 1988: lxxix–lxxxii; Tamez 1992: 56–70; Elliott 1993; Tsuji 1997: 53–54, 100–104; cf. Peterson 1982).<sup>3</sup> Careful study shows that it is not just one important theme, but the overarching theme of the whole letter, encompassing all the other major concerns. The aphorism with which the whole work begins (1:2–4) introduces the theme of wholeness with a strong emphasis on this notion in verse 4. Of the two synonyms used here, ‘complete’ (**τέλειος**) and ‘whole’ (**ὁλόκληρος**), paired for emphasis, the first, with its cognate verb (**τελειοῦν**),<sup>4</sup> forms a word-group which is a favourite of James and is one (but only one) of the ways in which the theme of completeness or integrity recurs through the letter (1:4 [*bis*] 17, 25; 2.8, 22; 3.2). The two words **τέλειος** and **τελειοῦν** occur

a significant seven times (seven being the symbolic number of completeness), just as the wisdom from above is characterized by seven qualities (3:17). The words **τέλειος** and **τελειοῦν** are used with several of James' key words ('endurance': 1:4; 'work': 1:4; 2:22; 'faith': 2:22; 'wisdom': 1:4–5; 'law': 1:25; 2:8, 10). But the use of these words is no more than a preliminary indication that the theme of wholeness pervades the letter and is expressed in many other ways also. What we shall attempt here is not an exegetical study of the theme, but an account of the way the thought of the whole letter is structured as explication and application of the notion of wholeness, before offering some preliminary reflections on how this relates to ideas of wholeness in contemporary western culture.

In order to analyse the notion of wholeness in a schematic way, we shall consider it in five aspects: integration, exclusion, completion, consistency, and divine perfection. In each case the positive concept is conceived in opposition to a negative, which characterizes 'double-mindedness'.

1 *Integration* (or inclusion) is concerned with the harmonious wholeness of the individual person and of the community. The individual's devotion and obedience to God should be wholehearted, whereas the 'double-minded' (1:8; 4:8) are half-hearted in their relationship to God. Whereas the half-hearted doubt, vacillate, are unstable and restless (1:6–8; 3:8), the wholehearted are stable and free from doubt because they are wholly devoted to God. This wholehearted devotion to God involves the whole person, since the heart is the inner source of words and deeds, which, conversely, reveal the state of the heart (1:26; 3:12, 14). The whole person in James consists of heart (thoughts, feelings, will), the tongue and the mouth (words), and the hands or the whole body (deeds). Thus repentance involves the cleansing of both hearts and hands (4:8). One who can control the tongue can also control the whole body (3:2), thus unifying will, words and actions in obedience to God. Salvation is restoring health to both body (5:15) and soul (or life: 1:21; 5:20), while physical healing may be accompanied by forgiveness of sins (5:16). Thus the whole life of an individual is integrated or included in the total dedication of the person to the service of God.

Wholeness as integration or inclusion also applies to the Christian community. Loyalty to God and to each other should unite individuals in a community characterized by peaceable, gentle, considerate, caring and forgiving relationships (2:13; 3:13, 17; 4:11–12; 5:16, 19).

James connects the conflict within an individual, which impairs integrity of the person (4.1) and stems from double-mindedness (4:8), and the conflict which tears the community apart (4.1) and against which he especially warns (3.16; 4.1–2, 11; 5.9). Competitive ambition (3–14) threatens the wholeness of the community, just as peacemaking (3.18) promotes it. Wholeness in its communal dimension is entailed by the commandment to love one's neighbour as oneself without distinction (2:8–9; 3:17), whereas partiality to the rich, involving discrimination against the poor (2:1–4), is a form of division. The poor above all must be encompassed in the wholeness of the community (1:27), just as the person who errs should be restored by love (5:19–20).

Finally, there is one indication that the eschatological goal of the process of integration and inclusion does not stop at the individual and the community but extends to the inclusion of the whole creation in the renewal of life (1:18).

2 *Exclusion* is that aspect of wholeness which creates and maintains the whole by excluding what is incompatible. In its aspect as integration, wholeness aims to unite (both...and), in its aspect as exclusion, it requires a certain kind of distinction (either...or). Thus the wholehearted are also those whose devotion to God and his law is single-minded, excluding anything that would qualify or detract from that devotion, but the double-minded have divided loyalties, attempting to please both God and the world. They are attempting a 'both...and' which cannot be true unity, but only an impossible compromise. People can either be friends with God (4.4), like Abraham (2.23), or they can be friends with 'the world' (4.4), but the choice must be made. The distinction cannot be fudged.

This is how James' dualism fits into the overarching theme of wholeness. This dualism is fundamentally one of value-systems. One lives either by God's values or by that dominant value-system which James calls 'the world' (1.27; 2.5; 4.4). 'Friendship' (4.4) has connotations of loyalty and sharing of values. Hence friendship with both God and the world, indicating opposed systems of values to live by, is impossible. In the same context (4.4) James uses the image of marriage and adultery in the manner of the Old Testament prophets: God's people who compromise with worldly values are adulterous women, attempting the impossible task of combining marriage to God their husband, who requires exclusive loyalty, and liaison with another partner, the world. This dualism between God and the world appears also in 1.27, where religion that is undefiled

in the eyes of God involves keeping oneself unstained by the world. The latter phrase does not imply avoiding contact with outsiders, but refusing to comply with that approach to life which is inconsistent with God's values. That the issue is primarily one of values is very clear in another manifestation of James' dualism: the contrast between two kinds of wisdom, one of which is 'earthly' (i.e. of earthly origin rather than coming from heaven), 'natural' (i.e. purely human rather inspired by the divine spirit) and 'demonic' (i.e. associated with the evil spirits who inhabit this earthly realm), while the other is 'from above' (i.e. from God; cf. 1.17). The former is characterized by competitive self-seeking (3.14), the latter by the love which respects and seeks the good of others (3.17). The dualism entailed by wholeness as exclusion thus requires a counter-cultural community, one whose values and therefore also lifestyle are at odds with the dominant society.

In the last paragraph we have already referred to the notion of purity and its opposite, defilement (1:27). This cultic language (see also 3:6, 17; 4:8) is closely connected, from its Old Testament and Jewish background, with wholeness. Its use belongs to this aspect of wholeness as exclusion: purity must be preserved by removing and keeping untainted by anything that would defile. But it is important to notice that the notion does not seem to be used to draw a sociological boundary around the community, distinguishing insiders from outsiders in order to reinforce the community's sense of self-identity. Self-identity, as we shall see, is secured with reference to God as the focus and integrating point of the community's wholeness, rather than by a negative delineating of themselves over against others. As a counter-cultural community, the church is distinctive, but is not at pains to secure this distinctiveness in social separateness.

Wholeness as exclusion also means resisting the evil inclination (1:14) and removing all wickedness from the heart (1:21). Truth, with its opposite deceit (1:16, 22, 26; 3:13), an important contrast for James, can also be understood as a wholeness which excludes any admixture of untruth (5:12). Blessing is incompatible with cursing: if the former is genuine it must exclude the latter (3:9–11). All these are ways of saying that integration and completion of the good entails the exclusion of the evil.

Eschatologically, this must mean that the good completion of all things entails the condemnation and exclusion of evil (2:13a; 5:1–6, 9, 12).

3 *Completion* (like integration, a valid form of ‘both...and’) is the attainment of wholeness by the adding of one thing to another as its necessary completion (‘not only this, but also that’). Thus, what is required is not only hearing but also doing (1:22–25), not only knowing but also doing (4:17), not only saying but also doing (2:12), not only believing but also doing (2:14–26, especially 22: ‘faith is completed by works’). And when it comes to doing, one may not pick and choose which commandments to obey, since the law is a whole and must be fulfilled (completed) as a whole (2:8, 10–11). Endurance in testing and patience in suffering, important themes in James (1:2–4, 12; 5:7–11), belong to wholeness in that they are what must be undergone on the way to (and even as contributing to) the completion of wholeness as the eschatological goal (1:3–4).

4 *Consistency* is not so much another aspect, as another way of considering the first three aspects. Integration requires the coherence and consistency of what is integrated, and therefore also the exclusion of what is not consistent. Completion requires that one’s doing be consistent with one’s hearing, knowing, saying and believing. In other words, wholeness is about the consistent devotion of the whole person, the whole of life, the whole community, and ultimately the whole cosmos to God.

5 *Divine perfection*. Wholeness as we have expounded it in the first four aspects requires a focus of integration and a standard of consistency: this is God and God’s law. This can be so only if God himself is characterized by wholeness and consistency, and James is at pains to make it clear that he is. God is wholly good: he tempts no one to evil and cannot himself be tempted to evil (1:13). He is consistently good, never wavering from his steadfast purpose of giving good gifts to his creation (1:17). Moreover, his giving is single-minded and wholehearted (1:5: *ἁπλῶς*), just as people’s response should be. What God gives are ‘perfect gifts’ (1:17), especially the perfect or complete law (1:25) and complete wisdom (3:17; cf. 1:5), the two gifts which make possible the wholeness of human life lived according to God’s complete law and informed by the complete wisdom from above.

Two Old Testament texts which link God with the wholeness required of his people are very probably implicit in James’ paraenesis. One is Leviticus 19:2: ‘You shall be holy, for I YHWH your God am holy’, paraphrased in Matthew 5:48 as: ‘Be perfect (*τέλειος*), therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.’ (James’ frequent and systematic allusions to Leviticus 19 increase the probability that the implicit

presence of this verse of Leviticus 19 should be inferred.) Holiness in God is his perfection, in his people it is their complete dedication to God. This dedication is described in the *Shema*; several times echoed in James (1:12; 2:5, 19; 4:12): 'Hear, O Israel: YHWH our God, YHWH is one. You shall love YHWH your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might' (Deut. 4:4–6). The one God provides the single object of wholehearted love. Devotion to any other object is idolatry. This is why James refers to 'the world' as though it were an idol or another god, and the double-minded as attempting, like faithless Israel in Old Testament times, to worship other gods alongside God (4:4). The dualism which we have observed is connected with James' notion of wholeness at this point is the necessary implication of the exclusiveness of the total devotion to the one and only God which the *Shema* requires. Wholeness derived from and directed to God requires the exclusion of anything which claims allegiance in competition with God.

Wholeness occurs when the whole of human life is focused and integrated in God. It receives from God the complete law and complete wisdom, adequate to encompass the whole of life. It responds to God in wholehearted faith (1:5–8), in wholehearted love (1:12; 2:5) and in fulfilling the complete law (1:22–25; 2:8–11). The last is summed up in the commandment to love one's neighbour as oneself (2:8), an all-inclusive and non-discriminating love of one's fellows. This is not, in the end, an addition to love of God, as though it provided an alternative point of focus and integration of life. Rather, love of God entails love of neighbour. One cannot love God without loving the neighbour (cf. also 3:9–10). Thus the wholeness of community and of non-discriminating neighbourly love is included in the wholeness that is given by and rendered back to God in faith and love.

One further point needs to be made about the connection between wholeness and the divine perfection. In a certain sense, as we have seen with reference to Leviticus 19:2, human wholeness is imitation of God's completeness. But it is so only in a way that is consistent with creaturely distinction and difference from God. Thus James can insist, with reference to the *Shema*, that judgment is the peculiar prerogative of God which humans may not arrogate to themselves (4:11–12). Similarly, God opposes the arrogant (4:6), who behave without reference to God as though they were their own gods (4:13–16). He brings down these people who aspire to divinity themselves, and instead exalts those who in

submission and humility acknowledge their complete dependence on him (1:9–10; 4:7, 10). The difference between God's perfection and his people's is that God is the complete giver, consistently lavishing perfect gifts on his people, while they rely completely on his gifts, receiving them in wholehearted faith. His wholehearted love for them is expressed wholly in giving, while their wholehearted love for him is expressed always first in receiving and subsequently in giving back.

This structure of thought about wholeness provides a broad framework for relating James' teaching to the cultural context in which contemporary Christians in western societies live. It can be contrasted with two broad cultural trends in this context. One of these is in search of wholeness (the word itself provides a point of connection here), but seeks it in integration and inclusion that seem to permit no exclusion at all. All that western culture has viewed negatively must be integrated rather than rejected. Dualistic thinking of every kind is classified as the root of all evil. Jungian psychology, New Age thinking, and important strands of feminist thought converge in this approach. In response it is important to distinguish different forms of dualism. We have seen that James, like the whole biblical tradition, maintains the distinction between the Creator and the creation, but it is misleading to classify this as dualism in the same sense as the dualism of good and evil. James' thinking, as we have seen, is holistic in integrating all aspects of human being in the whole person and in community. What are excluded are values, attitudes and behaviour which are inconsistent with the wholeness of human life integrated by devotion to God. At stake is the belief that the wholeness of human life is possible only in relation to a specific centre outside of the self: God. Wholeness cannot be found simply by accepting whatever one is in all one's disordered and distracted existence. Wholeness is a goal towards which one can move only in relation to a centre which is already whole and from which one can gain wholeness. This means moving in one direction rather than others. It means rejecting values and behaviour which are inconsistent with the goal. It means refusing all the idolatries which dominate and diminish human life in favour of the one love which can truly liberate and include all that is good. The fact that James' understanding of wholeness actually entails a certain sort of dualism — fundamentally that between God and the value-system James

labels ‘the world’—should help to inform and to clarify the Christian understanding in dialogue with other kinds of holism and other contemporary searches for wholeness in human life.

The quest for wholeness is important today because it responds to another cultural trend, which accepts and even celebrates the fragmentation of life in the name of openness and diversity. Probably the typical form of human life in contemporary secular society is one which has no overall goal, no point of integration, no focus to which all its manifold and contradictory desires, all the diverse claims on it, all the fragments of belief and principle can be turned. As David Ford remarks, this secular fragmentation of life could well be interpreted as a contemporary form of polytheism:

[I]n practice the religion of many in our society could be described as a form of polytheism: there are many shifting objects of esteem and desire, many beliefs, many ‘gods’ demanding ‘worship’ in explicit or implicit forms, and time and energy are divided among these ‘cults’. People in this position sometimes feel at an advantage over those committed to more single-minded faiths, seeing themselves as more open, flexible and pragmatic.

(Ford 1997:xxvi)

It is an important question whether this fragmentation can be lived without either making the self its own focus of wholeness, the divinization of self which is the extreme of selfishness, or else dissolving self-identity into a thousand scattered fragments of make-believe identities, leaving meaningless even the question, ‘Who am I?’ For many postmodern thinkers, wholeness is always an illusion, an oppressive delusion because it suppresses and excludes diversity, reducing pluralism to enforced uniformity. The fragmentation of the self is welcomed as liberating, permitting the endless play of ever newly constructed identities. Technologies such as the Internet are friendly to such an attitude. Perhaps there will soon be only virtual selves in virtual reality. Perhaps the dissolution of the self is now the death from which souls need to be saved (cf. Jas. 5:20; 1:21).

In the following three sections we shall explore in contemporary context three further major themes in James. These are the three most prominent specific ways in which James develops the concrete meaning of wholeness in the lived reality of life: solidarity with the poor, speech ethics, and prayer. Almost certainly they are

not the trio which any contemporary writer, Christian or not, would have come up with. One of them, plausibly, two of them, possibly, but not precisely these three. Therein lies their interest, as a set of priorities bound, in some way or other, to challenge our own.

## 2.2 Solidarity with the poor

Since James 2:5 is one of the most explicit biblical statements of God's 'option for the poor', it is surprising that Latin American liberation theology (or other liberation theologies of the Two-Thirds World) has not paid more attention to James. Elsa Tamez's small but insightful book (1992) seems to be almost unique in this respect (see Tamez 1992:90 n. 7 for a few other examples). (Perhaps liberation theologians have felt James to be too open to a reading which encourages the poor to accept their poverty: cf. Tamez 1992:7, 55–56.) No contemporary reading of James can afford to ignore the insights of liberation theology, not least its hermeneutic of suspicion applied to exegesis of biblical treatments of wealth and poverty. In such matters, it is vital to ask ourselves, not only, 'Is it I/we about whom the text is speaking?', but also, 'In whose interests is my/our reading of this text?' Those of us who enjoy even very moderate affluence in a western context must forget neither how considerable is our wealth by the standards of the world's poorest nor how grossly inequitable is the global economic system to which we owe that wealth. Especially for those of us who write books like this from such a context—but to some degree also for those who read them—there is a particularly seductive temptation. It is that of aligning oneself with liberation theology—or even, purportedly, with the poor—in a merely rhetorical way, as though mere talk of the poor as a theological locus (cf., e.g., Araya 1987:20) or of theology from the underside of history (cf., e.g., Gutierrez 1983:169) could be a means of adopting their perspective. Nowhere does interpretation of James more easily rebound, as it were, upon itself, falling foul of James' own strictures against saying or hearing without doing (2:15–16; 1:22–25). This is why James himself warns that 'we who teach will be judged with greater strictness' (3:1). All the same, there can be no praxis without the kind of transformation of attitude that serious engagement with the text of James can enable.

Especially on this topic of poverty and wealth it is important not to be unduly distracted by attempts to reconstruct the original

social and economic context of James (on which see Maynard-Reid 1987; Martin 1988:lxii-lxix; Edgar 1995). Some knowledge of the first-century context, such as the economic identity of those James calls 'poor' (see p. 188 below), is virtually essential, and some such knowledge, for example of the widespread phenomenon of the growth of large estates in this period, can be very illuminating. But we should recall that James writes an encyclical to the whole Jewish Diaspora (see chapter 1, section 2 above). Influenced as no doubt he was by his own Palestinian context, nevertheless he writes in general, typical and illustrative terms with a view to relevance wherever his letter should be read. More important than any very specific reconstruction of the context are the theological approach and the kind of ethical evaluation that James, drawing on the rich resources of the biblical, Jewish and Jesus traditions, applies to matters of economic and social status. For these to be relevant to our contemporary world, we do not need to argue that James' original context parallels ours. It is doubtful whether it does in any but the most general terms. What we need is a critical view of our own context from the perspective James adopts. (Compare the approach to interpreting Amos for a Latin American context argued by Carroll R. 1992.)

This context includes the increasing globalization of the unrestrained market economy, the dominance of the transnational corporations, the crippling burden of Two-Thirds World debt, the culture of consumerism in the West spreading to the East and to the Two-Thirds World, advertising and the manufacture of needs and desires, the growing disparities of wealth and poverty both globally and within both richer and poorer nations, the ecological destruction wrought and threatened by the over-consumption of the West and the ever-increasing productivity of the world economy. We cannot begin to analyse this context adequately here. Instead, the following quotations may stimulate thought. John Kavanaugh, in a wide-ranging theological assessment of the contemporary American culture of consumerism, depicts it thus:

The present situation in the United States is one in which the producing, purchasing and consuming of objects provides the ultimate horizon of meaning for persons. Its 'lived' Gospel, its 'real world' is the Commodity Form. The pre-eminent values of

the Commodity Form are producing, marketing, and consuming. These values are the ethical lenses through which we are conditioned to perceive our worth and importance. They have profoundly affected not only our self-understanding but also our modelling of human behavior (into manipulation and aggression), human knowledge (into quantification, observation and measurement), and human affectivity (into noncommittalness and mechanized sexuality).

(Kavanaugh 1991:32)

More recently, Peter Selby offers an important theological discussion of the phenomenon of debt and its victims, both the problem of international debt and the recent escalation of debt in the United Kingdom. He observes the evolution of the market economy into a market in money, in which money takes on a life of its own and becomes a self-generating commodity:

The world that has been unleashed around us is one in which the making of money out of money has become the most exciting world of adventure and the greatest source of wealth for the richest people in the world. Increasingly the balance shifts so that the activity of lending and borrowing...is not what is carried on to support human beings in their personal lives and their productive activity, but is that for which life is engaged in. So it is not surprising to find that in the two decades to 1990, whereas income from wages [in the UK] has on average doubled, that from lending money has multiplied sevenfold.

(Selby 1997a:55)

The market in money facilitates even more what the free market in any case promotes: that those who have are those who get, while many of those who have little lose even what they have. The general effect of economic globalization and growth has been that, whereas in 1960 the richest 20 per cent of people in the world enjoyed 70 per cent of global income and the poorest 20 per cent received 2.3 per cent (a ratio of 30:1), in 1993 the richest 20 per cent enjoyed 85 per cent of the world's income, while the poorest 20 per cent received only 1.4 per cent (a ratio of 61:1). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the lot of the world's poorest people has grown steadily worse (Athanasiou 1997:53).

### 2.2.1 *Who are the poor?*

It is important to grasp that James, like other biblical writers, does not perceive society as divided into 'the rich' and 'the poor'. The rich in ancient societies were a very small élite, often extremely wealthy, usually large landowners. The poor (*πτωχοί*) were not the mass of the ordinary people, peasants and artisans, people who had a reasonably secure means of supporting themselves in the basic necessities of life (or rather more). By modern western standards these would certainly be considered poor, but in Antiquity their standard of living was considered the norm. The poor were those who lacked economic security, destitute or living dangerously close to destitution, unable to survive except by begging or crime or selling themselves into slavery. People not quite destitute but economically very vulnerable, who could easily find themselves among the truly poor through bad harvests or increased rents and taxes, were often classed with the poor. The large majority in society, neither rich nor poor, did not aspire to wealth, but nor did they consider poverty anything other than a highly undesirable and unfortunate fate (cf. Prov. 30:7–9). Thus, when James addresses his readers/hearers in general, he speaks of both the poor and the rich as other people (2:2–7, 14–16; in 4:13–5:6 he employs rhetorically direct address to two different groups of the rich in turn). This certainly does not mean that he expected no poor people to belong to the communities he addresses (1:9; 2:15), but that he expected the majority not to be poor. The rich person and the poor person in 2:2–3 represent not the social spectrum, but its two extremes, as do the rich man and Lazarus in Jesus' parable (Luke 16:19–31).

In Jewish tradition there were four classic categories of the poor and vulnerable: widows, orphans, sojourners (resident aliens) and day labourers (e.g. Exod. 22:21–22; Lev. 19:10; Deut. 24:14–22; Job 24:3–4; 31:16–31; Ps. 84:3; Zech. 7:9–10; Mal. 3:5; Matt. 20:1–15; Mark 12:41–44; Luke 18:2–5). Such either could not work or did not own land or even if they did own land were very vulnerable to abuse of power by the powerful. The day labourer was the most vulnerable of peasant workers, employed only a day at a time on the estates of others, paid his minimal wages at the end of each day's work, living from hand to mouth. Withholding his wages even until the next morning, the offence of which James holds the landowners guilty (5:4), was a serious matter, condemned in the law (Lev. 19:13; Deut. 24:14–15) and often in Jewish literature (Mal.

3:5; Sir. 34:27; Tobit 4:14; Testament of Job 12:4; Ps.-Phoc. 19: see Bauckham 1995b:103–104). In referring to widows and orphans (1:27) and to the oppression of day labourers (5:4) James stands in the Jewish tradition of concern for the poor, instancing these categories as typical and representative. The remaining classic category, the sojourners, would scarcely be relevant in the Diaspora to which he writes.

The poor lack social status and power, and so can also be called the 'lowly' (1:9; 4:6: **ταπεινός**). The word refers both to social status and to the attitude appropriate to that status, just as the English word 'humble' used to do when it was in common use with reference to social rank or condition. The lowly are those whose self-estimate is in accordance with their unimportance in the social hierarchy. In the ancient world in general the 'humble' in this sense were generally despised, and their subservient attitude was considered inappropriate to those of higher status. The more positive attitude to the poor in Jewish tradition meant that, as we shall see below, their attitudinal humility could be taken as exemplary. Sometimes, therefore, the attitude can be recommended even for the rich (Sir. 3:17–18), but predominantly the attitude retained its strong association with lowly social status and poverty (Wengst 1988). It is clear from James 1:9–10 that it does so in James: God's reversal of status exalts the lowly and brings low the rich.

Since material goods and social status were connected with honour (e.g. Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.5.7), the poor were generally treated with contempt in the ancient world (cf. Sir. 13:22–23; but Balch 1995 shows that this generalization should not be pushed too far). While Jewish tradition resisted this (Prov. 14:21; 17:5; Sir. 10:19–11:6), injunctions against it were evidently needed. Conversely, while the wealthy were routinely regarded as greedy and oppressive, they would also be honoured as patrons. Patronage (of inferiors by superiors in the social scale) was a pervasive part of the social system, a relationship which forged links of mutual benefit up and down the social hierarchy, benefiting most people except the really poor. Thus the special attention shown to the rich man, as a potential patron of the community, and the contemptuous attitude shown to the poor person, in James' hypothetical example (2:2–4), are the attitudes to rich and poor which could be expected of ordinary people in the normal social mores of the time. James' accusation that they are dishonouring or shaming the poor (2:6) reverses the evaluations of the dominant social values.

Poverty thus goes with a place in the social hierarchy of the strongly hierarchical society of the New Testament period—or rather it defines the poor as the bottom of that social hierarchy. All the same, poverty was not understood in the relative sense that has become common today. The poor were not poor merely by comparison with others, but because they lacked security of basic subsistence. Only this understanding of poverty as desperate need makes intelligible the religious value attached in the Bible, not to the economic condition of poverty as such but to the religious attitudes of the poor. Poverty, in a sense, exposes the truth of the human situation in its need of God. It dispels the illusion that wealth so often encourages: the illusion of being self-sufficient and secure, with no need of God. The poor are those whose material condition enables them to see more clearly than most the human need to be wholly reliant on God. (At this point economic destitution joins other forms of human extremity, such as chronic illness, as one of those plights in which faith proves itself.) It is in this sense that the biblical poor are understood as paradigmatic in their faith. The propensity of the rich to ignore the poor is not only an ethical but also a religious matter. To truly confront the plight of the poor would disturb the rich in their comfortable cocooning of themselves against the realities of life. It would challenge the superficial and easy atheism (whether practical ignoring of God, as in biblical societies, or practical ignoring of God supported by a thoughtless theoretical atheism, as often today) which rarely exists apart from affluence, and which should be distinguished from the much rarer, serious atheism to which those who really know suffering sometimes resort.

The illusions of affluence are virtually the religion of contemporary western society. Its spiritual malaise cannot be cured without profound and practical attention to the destitute. And if we adopt the biblical definition of poverty in absolute rather than relative terms, there is certainly no lack of such poor people in the world today. By 1990

770 million had insufficient food for an active working life, and over a billion lacked even the most rudimentary necessities. Today, as then, an estimated 13–18 million people, mostly children, die from hunger and poverty each year. That is about 40,000 people per day, or 1,700 people an hour.

(Athanasίου 1997:53)

If such figures defy imagination, then we should think concretely of some of these poorest of people—such as the street children of Rio de Janeiro or those who live on the rubbish tips of Manila: these are the orphans and widows of today's global village. These are the destitute. These most wretched of the earth are the people we must bear in mind if we are to read James appropriately to our contemporary world. This does not mean that an approach to poverty and wealth inspired by James' teaching will have nothing to say to issues of relative poverty and disparities of wealth among those who are not, in this literal sense, destitute. It does mean that such an approach will be radical enough to *start* with consideration of the truly destitute and never to forget them. It is these whom God has chosen to inherit the kingdom (2:5).

### 2.2.2 God's choice of the poor

God's choice of the destitute 'to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him' (2:5) is the way James expresses Jesus' beatitude of the poor (Matt. 5:3; Luke 6:20) and is paralleled by Paul's statement of God's choice of the nobodies of society (1 Cor. 1:27–28; for these vv. as referring to social status, see Pogoloff 1992:197–212; Horrell 1996:132–135). In order to understand this 'preferential option for the poor', as liberation theologians have called it, it is essential to notice its context in James 2, where it is part of an argument against 'partiality' (2:1, 4, 9; 3:17; Lev. 19:15), which is said to be transgression of the commandment to love's one neighbour as oneself (2:8; Lev. 19:18). By favouring the rich (in hope of receiving benefits from them) and treating the poor with contempt, James' readers are not acting in accordance with that equal valuation of all human persons which loving all as oneself implies. To love each person as one loves oneself requires equal treatment of all. It requires the 'impartiality' which Leviticus 19:15 (cf. Deut. 1:17; 16:19; Sir. 7:6–7) prescribes as the principle of equality before the law in court judgments, and which James here extends to the community's treatment of its members and others. Were we to have to justify this extension, we could say that it is required by the love commandment itself, but also that it reflects the impartiality for which the biblical God himself is known in all his just dealings with humanity (Deut. 10:17; 2 Chr. 19:7; Sir. 35:15–16; Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; 1 Pet. 1:17). God has no favourites.

But does not God's choice of the poor imply precisely that he does have favourites? We should note first that in the Torah's own statement of God's impartiality in judgment, his concern especially for the poor is treated as entailed by this impartiality. God is the one

who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing.

(Deut. 10:17–18)

Throughout the Old Testament God's fatherly care for the poor (Ps. 68:5–6) is related to justice. He secures justice for those who are denied it by the powerful, those of whom the rich take advantage (Ps. 146:7–9; Job 5:15–16). In other words, precisely God's impartiality requires his specific action on behalf of the poor. We should note that in James the poor are not regarded (any more than they are anywhere in the Bible) as simply unfortunate, but as those whom the rich have treated unjustly (2:6; 5:4). The point of the questions in 2:6 ('Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court?') is to enable the majority of the readers/hearers, who are not themselves poor, to see that, by the unjust practices of the dominant society and its values, they are aligned with the poor as victims of injustice. This makes it all the more shocking that they should themselves practise those values in honouring the rich and despising the poor.

God 'chooses' the poor in order to remedy the injustice done to them by the rich. But there is more to be said. The Old Testament tradition does not actually speak of God's 'choosing' the poor. But the background to this term lies in the Old Testament's theology of election. Israel herself was poor, resident aliens and slaves in the land of Egypt, when God chose her to be his people. The Torah frequently points this out when urging just and compassionate treatment of the poor within Israel or resident aliens in her midst (e.g. Lev. 19:24; Deut. 5:15). Now, in the Messianic renewal of God's people through the Messiah Jesus, God has again chosen the poor to be the paradigmatic members of this renewed Israel. They are not the only members, for the kingdom they will inherit God has promised, like the crown of life (1:12), to 'those who love him' (2:5; for this phrase with reference to eschatological reward, cf. also 1 Cor. 2:9). But they are the paradigmatic members, in some

sense the model to which all other members must conform. Thus, just as Old Testament Israel's election was not for herself alone, but for the sake of the nations, so God's choice of the poor is not for the sake of the poor themselves only but also for others.

God's choice of the poor fulfils the divine strategy of exalting the lowly and bringing low the exalted (cf., e.g. 1 Sam. 2:7–8; Job 5:11a, 16; Ps. 113:7–8; Prov. 29:23; Isa. 2:11; Ezek. 17:24; Sir. 11:1, 5–6; Matt. 23:12; Luke 1:52–53; 14:12; 18:14; 1 Pet. 5:6) in order to abolish all status, privilege and exploitation. Believers who are 'lowly' can 'boast' of their exaltation by God (Jas. 1:9), i.e. they find their self-worth not in the world's evaluation of them according to their material goods and place in the social hierarchy, but in God's valuation of them. 'Boasting' is the behaviour ascribed to those of high social status, who thus assert their superior position in the social hierarchy (1 Sam. 2:3 LXX; Jer. 9:23; Sir. 11:4; Rom. 11:18; 1 Cor. 1:29–31; 4:7; Pogoloff 1992:212–213, 223–231; and cf. Jas. 4:16). The lowly may 'boast' of the status accorded them by God, but this constitutes no claim to superiority over others, since God's evaluation of them is his gracious gift to them and expresses his equal evaluation of all people. Of the rich, James 1:10a says that they may 'boast' of their being brought low, their humiliation. This may be, as most commentators think, a reference to their enforced humiliation in God's judgment, of which verses 10b–11 goes on to speak (and cf. 5:1–6). In that case the idea of the rich 'boasting' of their humiliation is ironic. But it may be that verse 10a also leaves open the possibility of the voluntary humiliation of the rich; that is, their renouncing of status and privilege, putting themselves on the same level as the poor. The divine strategy is to abolish all status and privilege by 'choosing' those of lowest status, the poor, and requiring others, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, to renounce all superiority to the poor. All should seek their self-worth, not in the world's evaluation, which ascribes honour and privilege to some above others, but in God's evaluation of all as equal in his sight. This 'levelling' of all can be expressed either as the exaltation of the poor or as the humiliation of the rich. (For this strategy in the teaching of Jesus, see chapter 2, section 5 above, and Bauckham 1996b.)

This is why the language of social status, the attitudes that go with it, and God's eschatological reversal of status, reappear in 4:6–10, a passage not directly concerned with the poor or the rich. In the preceding verses of the chapter James has accused his readers/hearers of competitive ambition for status within the community

and of craving for material gain (4:1–3; cf. 3:14, 16), and understood this as friendship with the world, that is, living by the world's values and standards instead of God's (4:4). Though not rich, these people participate in the status-seeking values of the world, just as those who pander to the rich in 2:2–3 do. They are therefore in the position of the arrogant rich whom God brings low. They must renounce the self-satisfied and self-indulgent laughter of the privileged (4:9; cf. 5:1; Luke 6:25b) and place themselves in the lowly position of the poor whom God will exalt (Jas. 4:10; cf. also Matt. 23:12; Luke 14:12; 18:14b; 1 Pet. 5:6; b. 'Eruv. 13b). The correspondence between 1:9–10 and 4:6–10 is between the actually poor and those who must identify with the poor. It is intelligible only in the light of the nexus of wealth, status, social power, privilege and arrogance, which James, with the whole biblical tradition, presupposes.

This identification with the poor does not mean that James expects the majority of his readers/hearers, ordinary people with little enough to live on, to become destitute like the poor, though he does expect generous sharing with those in need (2:15–16). The economic plight of the poor is undesirable and should be relieved whenever and as far as possible, but their place in the social hierarchy and the attitude that goes with it are paradigmatic for God's people, just as the status of the rich and the attitude that goes with it are exemplary of all that comes under God's judgment. In both cases there are corresponding attitudes to both God and other people. The poor, having nothing on which to rely except God, model the wholehearted trust in God and submission to his will that are the authentic relationship of humanity to God (cf. 4:7, 10). They are 'humble' in relation to God in that they know their utter dependence on him. But they are also humble in relation to others, in the sense that they do not think themselves better than others and claim no privileges over others. The rich, on the other hand, are arrogant and boastful before God, feeling in complete control of their lives, self-sufficient (cf. 4:13–16), while in relation to others also they are arrogant, considering themselves, by virtue of their social position, entitled to privileges, and using their social power to exploit and oppress the poor and others (2:6; 5:4–6).

Right and wrong relationships to God are fundamental here. God's eschatological reversal of status is often said to be so that God alone may be exalted, and so that 'boasting' may be not of what anyone is of themselves, but solely of what they are by God's

grace (Isa. 2:11, 17; Jer. 9:23–24; 1 Cor. 1:27–31). Relationship with God is primary but entails social relationships: knowing themselves equal in the sight of God, none may think themselves superior to others or claim privileges over others. All must adopt the humility of the poor towards God and the humility of the poor (i.e. their not claiming superiority) towards others. (It is important to note that whereas, in the social hierarchy of the dominant society, the humility of the poor is expected as the subservience of the unimportant to the important people, in the context of God's people in which all are enjoined to take the attitude of the poor to each other, humility becomes a matter of mutuality in considering the interests of each other. Being meek and gentle [3:13, 17; cf. Matt. 11:29] are other ways of speaking of humility in mutual relationships.) Humility before God is primary but, just as one cannot love God without loving one's neighbour as oneself, so one cannot be humble before God without solidarity with the poor. God's choice of the poor as heirs of the kingdom ensures that no one else can inherit the kingdom without recognizing the poor as honoured by God and without sharing the humiliation of the poor so as to share also their exaltation.

In this way, God's choice of the destitute is definitive of the nature of the Christian community as a counter-cultural community already living the values of God's kingdom in distinction from those of the world. James' dualism between God and the world (meaning the dominant system with its worldly values) is crucial here. God has chosen those whom the world considers poor but who in the eyes of faith are actually rich (2:5; cf. the very similar use of 'world' in 1 Cor. 1:27–28). This reversal of status must already be practised in the life of God's Messianic people. The community whose life together is characterized by neighbourly love must express this, above all, in honouring the poor (2:6), treating the poor in the way the world treats the rich. Solidarity with the poor is not a matter of the mere individual's spiritual attitude alone. As always in James, spiritual attitudes are inseparable from praxis in social relationships. Solidarity with the poor is expressed in the social and economic relationships of the community. For the community whose life is characterized, not by competitive ambition, status-seeking and greed, but by peaceableness and selfless consideration of others (3:13–17), attitudes to the poor expressed in concrete economic and social relationships are the litmus test, the dividing line between

friendship with God and friendship with the world (4:4). Visiting orphans and widows—implying compassionate practical involvement—is an essential characteristic of the true worship of God untainted by the values of the world (1:27).

Klaus Wengst, concluding his study of ‘humility’ in Jewish and early Christian traditions, writes: ‘It is important for those who are not numbered among the humiliated to learn and practise humility as solidarity with the humiliated’ (1988:60). The radicality of an ethical approach to wealth and poverty which begins with and never forgets the poorest, the destitute, requires also the radicality of a religious self-understanding which makes the paradigmatic faith of the poor its own. It requires of those who are not poor an understanding of their true status before God which deprives them of status in relation to other people. It requires that they realize a God-given identity in which superiority or privilege in relation to others plays no part. This alone enables true solidarity with the poor, which is not condescending charity but brother-and-sisterliness, recognizing and treating the poor as one’s equals and doing what can be done to acknowledge that equality in material terms. Only the ‘humble’ heart can truly love the neighbour, including the poorest, as oneself.

### **2.2.3 Issues in contemporary relevance**

We shall explore the potential of James’ teaching on poverty and wealth for contemporary relevance by posing three questions.

First, in what sense are poverty and wealth ‘spiritualized’ in James? Tamez is typical of liberation theologians in protesting against a spiritualizing interpretation of James and other New Testament texts which deprive them of their reference to the economically poor and the economically rich, in favour of reference to spiritual attitudes only:

if we make the poor and the pious synonymous then real economic oppression and God’s concern for this very class of people are lost. The rich become the pious poor and the poor rich in piety, and the economic order and the unjust power stay as they are. Thus the rich always come out ahead: they are rich in real life and piously poor before God and heirs of God’s reign.

(Tamez 1992:45)

She is quite correct in insisting that James is clearly speaking of economic poverty and wealth (2:2–3, 15–16; 5:1–6). All the same, he writes in the Jewish tradition in which different spiritual attitudes were standardly correlated with wealth and poverty and with the status or lack of it that these entailed. Briefly, as we have noticed, the rich are arrogant and feel in control of their lives, ignoring God, while the poor are humble and trust in God. In modern scholarship it has quite often been held that, in consequence, ‘the poor’ became a term which could refer purely to people’s piety, with no reference to their economic and social status. It is doubtful whether this is really the case. When Matthew’s first beatitude refers to ‘the poor in spirit’ (Matt. 5:3), where Luke has simply ‘the poor’ (Luke 6:20), the effect is not to spiritualize the material aspect away but to clarify the economic and spiritual correlation: these are the people who rely wholly on God because they are destitute of worldly goods. The poor in James are not people who are entirely indifferent to material things, as even Bede suggests (1985:23), but people who turn to God in trust and hope that he alone can supply the basic necessities of life that they need, as Tamez rightly maintains (1992:45).

It is the correlation between material and social position and spiritual attitude that is the key to this line of biblical thought. It is not that, if people have the right spiritual attitude, their wealth or lack of it is of no consequence. Nor is it that all rich people are necessarily arrogant and self-sufficient, while all poor people have exemplary faith in God (cf. Sir. 12:1–7). Rather it is that people’s inner attitudes to God, their social attitudes to others, and their concrete material conditions and their social power or impotence are intimately connected. James sees this in the way the patronage system encouraged those who aspired to the advantages of having a wealthy patron to pander to the rich and to neglect the poor. Writing of the contemporary British context, Peter Selby points out how the majority of voters shifted their allegiance during the 1970s and 1980s. Instead of identifying themselves as workers whose interests were opposed to those of the economically powerful, they came to see their interests as identical with those of the powerful, whose affluence, they supposed, could promote their own. This was a realignment of the desires or aspirations of the majority (Selby 1997b:22–23). It has had a significantly similar effect to that of the patronage system in Antiquity. In other words, in the contemporary western culture of consumerism, hedonism and debt, the majority perceive their interests in a way that leaves

the poor poor. It should be clear that the way to economic justice cannot lead directly to the restructuring of society or the redistribution of income. It must first head straight for the desires of the heart and the values of the culture which are both manufactured and internalized through complex social processes.

This leads directly to our second question: For the sake of the poor, is it people or structures that need to change? James is not explicitly criticizing economic and social structures which favour the rich and deprive the poor of justice, but he is attacking the dominant value-system which he calls 'the world' (1:27; 4:4). He expects his readers to resist this value-system, forming instead a society informed by God's values. These are implanted and nourished in the heart by God (cf. 1:21) and at the same time expressed in social and economic relationships. The values of the heart are embodied in public praxis. James' way is neither merely the transformation of individuals nor change in the structures of the dominant society (which could not have been conceived as practicable in the circumstances), but the formation of a counter-cultural community which lives out alternative social and economic relationships in advance of the coming of the kingdom in which God's values will be universally realized. Such a community is formed of individuals whose hearts embrace its values, but it is much more than the sum of its parts. Its communal life, while vulnerable to the dominant value-system (2:2–3; 4:1–4), is also the power of resistance to the dominant value-system (cf. 5:19–20).

The allegiance of the heart and the social promotion of values are no less fundamental to issues of poverty and economic justice today. The dominant system, which both within states and through world trade is skewed to the further enrichment of the rich and the further impoverishment of the poor, depends on values internalized by individuals and promoted in many social forms. Athanasiou points out that economic expansion is not only 'an *extensive* process, one that takes place "out there" somewhere, in "markets," but also 'an *intensive* process as well, an expansion into life, culture, and the mind' (1997:43). Advertising—which constantly manufactures needs and desires—is one instrument of this intensive process, and its own continual expansion a sign of the dominance of the values of ever-increasing consumption in western society and, increasingly, the rest of the world.

James represents the dominant value-system of competitive ambition and acquisitiveness as an alternative to God as object of

absolute allegiance. It is impossible to be God's faithful marriage partner while committing adultery with 'the world'. In this image James takes up the Old Testament prophets' image of God's people's unfaithfulness to him in worshipping other gods. He adds an equivalent image of his own: It is impossible to give God the loyalty of a friend while also behaving as a friend of the 'world', sharing its values as friends do (4:4; cf. Matt. 6:24; Luke 16:13). In effect, as an alternative system of values demanding allegiance in place of God, the world is an idol. It is therefore worth noticing that Kavanaugh, in his analysis of consumerism, and Selby, in his theological critique of the credit and debt economy, both make use of the notion of idolatry. For example, Kavanaugh writes:

The Commodity Form, which serves as an undertow toward thingification, also channels our self-consciousness, valuing, and interpersonal behavior in the direction of dominance and self-aggrandizement. We are drawn into conflict among ourselves, and are led to believe that we will fulfill our insatiable longing for completion and self-realization on our own.

(We may note, in passing, that the poor in the biblical tradition are exemplary precisely in acknowledging their 'incompletion' and knowing that they can attain completion only from God as the gift of God's grace.) Kavanaugh continues:

If we can just collect enough, produce enough, or win enough, we will be god. We will have gotten rid of our painful incompleteness. The paradox is that, as in every idolatry, we eventually entrap ourselves after the image and likeness of the idol—the thing we have created and trusted—the commodity: replaceable and obsolete, only quantifiably valuable, and bereft of freedom or qualitative growth.

(Kavanaugh 1991:113)

Selby speaks of the divinization of money (e.g. 1997a:106, cf. 70) and speaks of our society as one

in which money not only functions as an *instrument* for valuing commodities in relation to each other but has also obtained a degree of ultimacy for itself in *deciding* the value of human persons in relation to each other... [T]he fundamental

principle that each person counts for one is being replaced by a system that values persons according to their power in the market.

(Unpublished communication)

He calls on the church, among other institutions which exist for values other than money, to resist 'the processes by which money is divinised' (1997b:25). (Money as idolatry is also discussed by Latin American theologians—Araya 1987:91–95; Gutierrez 1991: 48–62—but with less contextual specificity.)

Both Kavanaugh and Selby, in different ways, see the effect of economic idolatry in the way that persons come to be valued, no longer as irreplaceable and invaluable persons, but as commodities or according to their monetary power in the market. Though the economic and social structures and mechanisms are quite different from those of the societies James knew, nevertheless his critique of the latter is directly relevant. To a system of social values which honoured the rich and despised the poor, i.e. valued persons according to their relative place in the social hierarchy, he opposed the royal law, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (2:8), requiring the evaluation of all persons equally with oneself, and the divine reversal of status, which privileged precisely those of lowest status in the world's eyes in order to overturn the discriminatory valuations of persons by the world. It is doubtful whether the criticism of idolatry can ever be adequate except by way of faith in and love of the true God, who has chosen the poor (2:5) and has mercy on those who show mercy (2:15), and love of whom is that single-minded devotion which includes the love of neighbour as oneself.

The third and last question is: Are the biblical, including James', condemnations of wealth based on a presupposition which we cannot share and which renders them irrelevant to us? The presupposition is that known as 'limited good'. Cultural anthropologists point out that in the first-century Mediterranean world, as in most peasant societies, all goods were believed to exist in finite and limited quantities, just as arable land in a densely populated area is. Therefore the rich can be rich only at the expense of the poor. This is 'why the wealthy are believed to be wicked, purely and simply. Their control over more actual wealth than others is due to their own or their ancestors' taking advantage of others' (Malina 1987:362). Whether James' condemnation of the rich does depend on this presupposition could be questioned, since he levels

specific accusations of unjust treatment of the poor against them (5:4, 6). Yet he does also speak of the rich person as such, without qualification, as liable to God's judgment (1:10). It seems likely that he shares the common view of his time, expressed also, for example, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, that rich people can only be rich at the expense of the poor.

This view, presupposed in much of the biblical literature, does not mean that people should be content to be poor. To understand it we have to make the distinction, largely abandoned in our modern world, between sufficiency and excess. To have less than sufficient is to be poor and is not at all desirable, but to have much more than sufficient is greedy and selfish, since this excess is enjoyed at the expense of those who do not have enough. Excess is attributed to greed and is also seen to be bad for those who have it (Prov. 30:9; Matt. 6:21). The modern expectation, normal in contemporary western society and increasingly exported to the rest of the world, of ever-increasing standards of living was completely unknown in the ancient world. The extent to which people regarded sufficiency as normal and even ideal can be seen from the Old Testament's classic picture of utopian existence: 'everyone under his vine and his fig tree' (e.g. 1 Kgs. 4:25; Mic. 4:4). This is simply the life of the ordinary peasant family at its best: owning their own modest smallholding, producing enough to live and with leisure enough to enjoy it, and with no threat from the rapacious rich or foreign invasion. Even when imagining the idyllic future, Israelite peasants wanted no more than this in material terms.

The modern idea that economic desires can increase indefinitely and that the economy can expand indefinitely to meet them is one of the major ideological roots of the modern world. It is taking this modern idea for granted that leads Malina, for example, to state that 'biblical evaluations about rich and poor would not fit our contemporary world' (Malina 1987:361–362). This verdict seems to depend on a kind of cultural determinism, which supposes that people in biblical times were bound to believe in limited economic good and that modern Americans (Malina refers specifically to American culture) are equally bound to believe in the modern cultural assumption of unlimited economic good, with the implication that the wealth of the rich need not be seen as deprivation of the poor. In fact, this modern assumption is highly debatable and has been and is being debated. The notion that those who become rich through 'wealth creation' create wealth for the

benefit of all is far from self-evident, and on a global scale is plainly contradicted by the statistics quoted above (immediately before section 2.2.1). Economic good may not be as limited as ancient people thought, but this does not prevent the rich from enjoying it at the expense of the poor (cf. Selby 1997a:130). However, such discussion has in any case now been overtaken by the evidence of ecological limits to economic growth, limits we are now discovering by colliding with them in a potentially catastrophic way.

This point is still so little understood that it is worth quoting some detailed argument. John Athanasiou summarizes the argument of an article by the economist Paul Ekins, entitled 'A Sustainable Consumer Society: A Contradiction in Terms?':

[Ekins] begins with a back-of-the-envelope estimate that 'sustainability' means cutting the overall ecological weight of human society in half, then goes on to remind us that best projections have the population leveling off in about fifty years at between ten billion and twelve billion people—a doubling from the current level. It follows quite simply that consumption patterns and technology must change enough so that each person fifty years from now makes only a quarter of the ecological impact he or she makes today. This is possible, Ekins notes, but it would not be enough. The poor of the world seek to improve their lot, and the only means they are offered to do so is 'growth.' The Brundtland Commission, the World Bank, and politicians everywhere therefore assume that a 3 percent annual rate of economic expansion, at the very least, will be needed to alleviate poverty.

But even a 3 percent growth rate would double the total size of 'the economy' (in the most abstract, aggregate sense) every twenty-three years. The math (most of which I am skipping here) is inexorable: 'If sustainability is to be achieved by technology alone, in 50 years time technology must have reduced the environmental impact of each unit of consumption to one sixteenth its present level...more than a 93 percent reduction.' If population growth levels off in the mid-twenty-first century and that 3 percent rate of 'green growth' continues to 2100, then 'every unit of consumption would [have to] be making only 1.6 percent of its current environmental impact.'

This would be tough under any circumstances, and it is *not* the direction in which we are heading. Energy efficiency is increasing, but not nearly so fast as overall energy consumption. ...Ekins thus suggests that if room is to be made for the world's poor, rich countries must be allowed 'no growth in consumption per head.'... [H]e notes that the South's economy could expand while ecological damage was held to current levels, but only along a path that promises security rather than affluence, and only if a lid were kept on the rich.

(Athanasίου 1997:83–84)

It is surely evident that the biblical and pre-modern distinction between sufficiency and excess (or, in Ekins' terms, security and affluence) is a distinction it has become vital for us to recover. The world's affluent people must be cured of their addiction to excess for their own sakes as well as the poor's. The hope of the world's poor for the kind of sufficiency most people in western societies take entirely for granted is wholly legitimate, but it is a vain hope so long as the idol of unlimited economic growth holds sway. For the contemporary churches to take seriously, in this context, James' understanding of the church as a counter-cultural community would mean contemplating a vocation to be in the vanguard of the reversal of values which the world so desperately needs. It would mean, in the light of James' insistence on consistency between words and deeds, practice as well as advocacy of a movement back towards sufficiency. (Very relevant here is Kavanaugh's proposal [1991: 131–134] for the formation of Christian cell-communities which will support a counter-cultural lifestyle, confronting 'the patterns of the Commodity Form' as they appear both within the group and in the culture at large, and developing the insight and compassion required for an alternative praxis both in the group's own life and in relation to the wider society.)

### **2.3 Speech ethics**

Probably most readers of the New Testament, asked about the content of James, would remember the material on wealth and poverty. They are less likely to remember the material on speech ethics, which is in fact just as prominent in the text (1:19–20, 26; 3:1–12; 4:11–12; 5:9, 12). At the end of chapter 1, James places side by

side two aphorisms which define true service of God by instancing crucial tests it must pass to be valid: one refers to practical concern for the poor (1:27), the other to control of the tongue (1:26). According to 3:2, anyone who could fully control the tongue would demonstrate thereby their ability to control the whole body and would be 'perfect': they would have attained the moral goal of human life. When William Baker claims that 'James has made control of speech the premier ethical and spiritual task of man' (1995:99), he may be wrong to place control of the tongue before solidarity with the poor, but it is at least equal in importance.

That James is now known much better for his treatment of possessions than for his treatment of the tongue is a fine illustration of the way our contemporary sense of what is important can influence the way we read biblical texts.<sup>5</sup> Speech ethics is a topic rarely discussed today. Yet in the ancient world James' ethical concern with speech was not in itself at all unusual, even though the relative emphasis he gives it is. As Baker (1995) has amply documented, speech ethics was an important topic—not only in the Jewish wisdom tradition, to which James is most indebted in this respect, but also in the ancient Mediterranean world generally: ancient Near Eastern societies and Graeco-Roman culture. This is less surprising than the absence of the topic from modern concerns, since, after all, verbal communication is a significant part of most interpersonal relations. Baker's suggestion that the difference is due to the predominantly oral character of ancient culture as contrasted with the way that the written word has supplanted the oral in many respects today (1995:3) can at most provide only a partial explanation. It is true that modern culture lacks ancient people's strong sense of the power of spoken words, which accounts for the great importance of rhetoric in ancient education and life. But oral communication is still of great importance in many contexts, while telephone, radio, film and television have surely now increased the role of the spoken word (admittedly in the context of visual communication in the latter two cases). The best instance in which a contemporary concern approaches James' moral interest in the tongue is that of the mass media, whose power to distort the truth and to do considerable harm to private (and royal) persons, as well as exerting considerable influence on political events, for good or ill, has become more and more evident, and recurrently a matter of serious public concern, in the recent past. This illustrates how the nature of communications in our society would require fresh thinking about speech ethics, while sharing and being inspired by James' concerns.

That cannot be attempted here. Instead, in order to stimulate reflection on the potential of words to do harm, which is so strongly emphasized in James (3:5–8) but so rarely given serious attention today, we could read alongside James the following passage by the novelist Ben Okri:

It sometimes seems to me that our days are poisoned with too many words. Words said and not meant. Words said *and* meant. Words divorced from feeling. Wounding words. Words that conceal. Words that reduce. Dead words.

If only words were a kind of fluid that collects in the ears, if only they turned into the visible chemical equivalent of their true value, an acid, or something curative—then we might be more careful. Words do collect in us anyway. They collect in the blood, in the soul, and either transform or poison people’s lives. Bitter or thoughtless words poured into the ears of the young have blighted many lives in advance. We all know people whose unhappy lives twist on a set of words uttered to them on a certain unforgotten day at school, in childhood, or at university.

We seem to think that words aren’t things. A bump on the head may pass away, but a cutting remark grows with the mind. But then it is possible that we know all too well the awesome power of words—which is why we use them with such deadly and accurate cruelty.

We are all wounded inside in some way or other. We all carry unhappiness within us for some reason or other. Which is why we need a little gentleness and healing from one another. Healing in words, and healing beyond words. Like gestures. Warm gestures. Like friendship, which will always be a mystery. Like a smile, which someone described as the shortest distance between two people.

(Okri 1996:3–5)

## 2.4 Prayer

Prayer is an important theme in James (1:5–8; 3:9–10; 4:2–3; 5:13–18). With the exception of references to benedictions of God (3:9–10) and to hymns of praise to God (5:13), the prayer in question is petitionary. Two major aspects of James’ treatment of petitionary

prayer are noteworthy. First, petition is based on knowing God as the generous and consistent giver of good (1:5, 17). Second, there is an evident concern to state conditions on which God will give what is asked (1:6–8; 4:3; 5:14, 16).

Like much of James' wisdom, his teaching on prayer is closely continuous with that of Jesus (see chapter 2, section 4.3 above). It is part of the widespread impact made in early Christianity by Jesus' profoundly simple principle of prayer: 'Ask and it shall be given to you' (Matt. 7:7; Luke 11:19; see Minear 1972, chapter 7; Crossan 1988). Moreover, the concern seen in James to qualify this principle by stating conditions is also widely apparent in other traditions. Prayer should be made in faith (Matt. 21:21–22; Mark 11:22–24; Jas. 1:5–8; 5:15); it should be according to God's will (1 John 5:14); it should be made in the name of Jesus (John 14:13–14; 15:16; 16:23–24, 26; Jas. 5:14); and it should be made by a righteous person (1 John 3:22; Jas. 5:15). In some cases such qualifications no doubt respond to the problem of unanswered prayer. But they also protect prayer from magical or mechanical misunderstandings, and they ensure that prayer 'does not remain a monologic expression of a claim, but becomes true dialogue within a relationship between two wills, two freedoms, two othernesses' (Bianchi 1990:56–57). Prayer on such conditions is always itself a response to God (to God's promises, to what is already known of God's will, to God's commandments, to the revelation of God's purpose in Jesus), and must seriously reckon with who God is. In such a dialogical context prayer cannot be the mechanical cause of an effect, but must be part of the believer's relationship with the personal God.

James contrasts prayer in faith (1:6; 5:15) with the doubting prayer of double-minded people (1:6–8; 4:3, cf. 8). The latter cannot be expected to be answered. The double-minded vacillate between trusting God and looking elsewhere. They do not truly, wholeheartedly want what they ask of God. Or they may import the values of the world into their prayer, desiring what they ask for the sake of personal gain and pleasure (4:3). In either case, their divided loyalties, their attempt to be friends both with God and with the world (4:4), mar their relationship with God, so that their faith is half-hearted or misguided. By contrast, asking in faith without doubting (1:6) is wholehearted commitment to what the believer trusts to be God's will. (In the instance James is considering in 1:5–6, no one need doubt that God, the generous giver of good, will give wisdom to those who ask him.) What

Moltmann says of prayer is true of James' teaching: 'Faith means wanting and willing something with all our hearts' (Moltmann 1997:139). But it is also entrusting these wholehearted wishes and desires to God.

Prayer has always been difficult, but the difficulty of prayer in the modern western world has its own specific profile. The fundamental reason why prayer became difficult in the modern period was humanity's modern self-image as those who, especially through technology, have gained control over the world. Rather like affluence, this assumed position of mastery over the world has deluded modern people into trusting their own capacity to achieve all human ends and has promoted a sense of autonomy and self-sufficiency to which prayer is alien. Whereas petitionary prayer is recognition of the limits of human abilities, the modern age has encouraged the sense that all problems have human solutions and that all human desires may in the end be realizable by human means, especially through the unlimited potentialities of technology. While problems and desires with which human resources can deal are constantly being created by advertising, problems which have no solutions and desires which cannot be met are suppressed.

There is also the danger that in some forms of contemporary spirituality prayer itself is redefined, in theory or in practice, as another technique by which people can master their destiny or control things. This is prayer as spiritual technology. It poses a real danger of misreading James' claim that 'the prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective' (5:16) in an instrumental way, as though prayer were a powerful means which qualified people can use to achieve things. That way of thinking ends by making God himself a means to human ends. While it was important in an early Christian context to emphasize the power of prayer, in a typically modern context it will often be more appropriate to remember that petitionary prayer is reliance on God's power. It is acknowledgement that we are not in control, readiness to receive what we cannot achieve of ourselves and to be thankful. In prayer for others, for example, we express responsibility and concern for others, but emphatically do not aspire to control over others. On the contrary, we recognize the limits of what we can do for others, renounce the attempt to master the situation (which is otherwise always liable to spoil what we can do for others), and give way to God. If faith means wanting and willing something with all our hearts, it also requires the very unmodern renunciation of

attempting total control and the wholehearted surrender of what we want and will to God. Though petitionary prayer in this sense is also very far from being a typically postmodern activity, it is possible that the contemporary collapse, not to say catastrophe, of the modern attempt at total human mastery of the world may open the way to a re-learning of trust in God and petitionary prayer. It may be possible to recover the sense, so alien to modernity, that the kind of wholehearted trust in God that petitionary prayer expresses is not infantile or obsequious, but liberating and empowering.

Martin Buber examined the difficulty of prayer in the modern age in a different but closely related way. Describing the modern age as that of ‘the eclipse of God’ (rather than, with Nietzsche, ‘the death of God’), he explains the nature of this eclipse thus:

In our age the I—It relation, gigantically swollen, has usurped, practically uncontested, the mastery and the rule. The I of this relation, the I that possesses all, makes all, succeeds with all, this I that is unable to say Thou...is the lord of the hour. This selfhood that has become omnipotent, with all the It around it, can naturally acknowledge neither God nor any genuine absolute which manifests itself to men as of non-human origin. It steps in between and shuts off from us the light of heaven.

(Buber 1953:166–167)

Petitionary prayer, along with thanksgiving, is the clearest and most effective way we have of refusing the absolute rule of the ‘I—It relation’ and taking our place in a dialogical relationship with the divine Thou. In it we increasingly discover—or rediscover—all things, not as what we possess and make, but as what God gives us. We return to the theological heart of James’ letter: ‘Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows’ (1:17 NIV)—even when eclipsed by the promethean darkness of the modern age.

# Through the looking glass and back

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We shall not necessarily reflect upon, or get to know, anything we did not know before, but we shall meditate. And by God's help we shall have something to meditate upon.

(Kierkegaard 1955a:154)

The man sat, huddled against the cold, in a shop doorway, his upturned cap on the pavement in front of him. So far the only coins were two left from yesterday, displayed in the hope they would attract more. Many passers-by looked through him as though he were himself the shop window. Others, with embarrassment, avoided his eyes as they kept up a purposeful pace along the street. Had they looked, they would have seen neither pleading nor accusation, only patience, sometimes weary but never bitter. Sometimes he felt that time was his own special gift. Few of those who passed had time for him, but he had all the time in the day for them. This gift of time, lavished on him, he in turn lavished on those who never had enough time, hurrying and harassed as so many of them were. Unknown to them, he gave them time as he waited patiently and they had no time to notice.

He never spoke and no one spoke to him. He was glad of this. Words from the past—words of foster parents and school teachers, playmates and lovers—still stabbed his heart and turned like knives in his pain whenever he could not help remembering. Words had been the weapons in his world, and he always their victim. Words, damning and mocking, belittling and humiliating, had driven him, a refugee, from the world of those who passed by, into the silence where he waited, patiently waiting to be noticed, nothing to those who passed by.

Though they never spoke, he felt he knew these passers-by. He knew the driven quality of their lives—driven to make money, to

pursue pleasure, driven by never satisfied desires for more and different and yet more and different again. He felt their hearts harden. He saw their selves lost in distraction. Silently he cursed the demons of the city, their devices of distraction, their enticements to destruction.

Putting his hand in a pocket for warmth, he felt something he had picked out of a litter bin a week ago. It was a small mirror, cracked and dirty. He had pocketed it only to give himself the feeling of having found something in an otherwise fruitless search. Usually he avoided mirrors, even his reflection in a window. No one now looked into his face, and so, obscurely, he felt it would be shameful to do so himself. But now he for once felt curious and held the mirror up before his eyes. He could make nothing out, and so he used his sleeve to clear the dirt and polish the shiny surface. He still could not see his face, but as he peered into the mirror it seemed transparent, as though he were looking through it at the street and the passers-by in front of him. But the familiar scene appeared so different that for a moment he wondered whether the mirror was some new technological device that transmuted his surroundings into a kind of virtual reality.

The street was transfigured. People, he noticed, were no longer hurrying past but stopping to talk to each other. Tables and chairs were set out on the pavement in front of a café. It no longer seemed too cold to be sitting in the street. At one table two elderly men were engrossed in a game of chess, while a young man with shaven head and a ring in his nose, sitting reading at another table, was ordering drinks for them all. A fat woman in garish clothes was coaxing a cat to come and be stroked. Another woman who looked like a bag lady was busy ordering a large meal for a smartly dressed family of five. Small children were running round and under the tables, hooting and laughing, in a game incomprehensible to adults. But one adult, a man in a pin-striped suit, watched as though he understood, tears trickling down his face. Two of the children pulled him into the game.

There were still some people hurrying along the street, but (the beggar could not believe it) they smiled or even waved at him as they passed. Slowly he began to realize the difference that made everything so different. He was part of the scene. As he looked around, he looked into faces—open and friendly faces, such as he had not seen in years. They gave him the courage to listen. There were no words—and still he was glad of that—but there was

music. Music danced in the street, drew smiles on faces, opened hearts and opened hands. It had no source he could see. It seemed at once unearthly and entirely at home among these people, flowing between them and through them as though it were the very life they lived. He knew that the music was what he had for so long waited.

Instinctively he looked upwards to the sky, but as he did so he realized that his eyes had withdrawn from the mirror. Outside the mirror the street was just as it had been. So he thought until he saw that someone had stopped on the pavement in front of him. She was tall, and elegantly and expensively dressed. Her bright face looked directly into his. She opened her handbag, looking for money to give him. Suddenly he knew it was imperative that she should also look in the mirror and see what he had seen. He turned it towards her but she looked puzzled. He realized he must get to his feet to show it to her. He began to struggle up, but he was very stiff and slow. In a moment he saw that she had guessed his intention. To save him getting up, she sat down beside him in the doorway. Together they looked into the mirror. This time they saw themselves.

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# Notes

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## I An encyclical from James to the Diaspora

- 1 Where more positive views of the Diaspora situation are found (Barclay 1996:422–423; Gafni 1997: chapter 1), it seems that the *word* ‘Diaspora’ is not used.
- 2 Van Unnik argues that therefore ‘Diaspora’ in 1 Pet. 1:1 cannot be a reference to the church, but since there are many indications in 1 Peter that it is addressed mainly to Gentile Christians, it is difficult not to conclude that this text is an exception to the rule. The striking parallel with the opening of the Aramaic letter of Gamaliel to the Diaspora in b. Sanh. 11a suggests that in 1 Pet. 1:1 **διασπορά** may be used, untypically (van Unnik 1993:81–84), for *galût*, *gôlâ* (exile), a term more appropriately transferred to Christians as sojourners in this world. The difference between the usage in James and 1 Peter can be seen from the fact that, whereas in James the word is used to identify the addressees but then plays scarcely any further part in the argument of the letter, in 1 Peter the Diaspora belongs to a potent theological metaphorical complex which is developed through the letter as a way of interpreting Christian existence in a pagan society. The attempt by Cargal (1993:45–53) to see a parallelism between Jas 1:1 (‘diaspora’) and 5:19–20 (‘wanders from the truth’) founders on the fact that the term *Diaspora* was not understood as Israel’s voluntary ‘wandering’ into exile but as God’s scattering of Israel among the nations as judgment for Israel’s sins.
- 3 His name confirms this. The prophet Nahum had a special relevance to the exiles of the northern tribes (cf. Tobit 14:4).
- 4 Since the letter refers to sacrificial animals and its point is to warn Diaspora Jews not to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem a month too early, its subject-matter would not be that of later letters from the rabbinic authorities to the Diaspora.
- 5 Neusner (1971:35 8–3 59) suggests this, but doubts there were Pharisees in Babylonia and Media (the named destinations in t. Sanh. 2:6), and concludes the letter must be authentic, ‘but I do not know who would have received it’. He is probably too sceptical about the presence of Pharisees in the eastern Diaspora at this date; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 20:43.

- 6 Strictly speaking, the Letter of Jeremiah is addressed to those about to go into exile in Babylon, probably because of the position of Jer. 10:11 in the book of Jeremiah.
- 7 2 Baruch refers to a similar letter to the exiles of the two and half tribes in Babylon (77:19), but does not include it.
- 8 The dispersal of 'Hellenists' from Jerusalem at the time of the death of Stephen (Acts 8:1, 4; 11:19) certainly did not mean that there were no longer such people in the Jerusalem church thereafter (Acts 21:15).
- 9 Further issues with regard to the historical James and the attitude to the law in the letter of James raise the problem of James and Paul, and the question whether the letter has Pauline teaching in view. These issues are considered in chapter 3.

## 2 The wisdom of James, disciple of Jesus the sage

- 1 The most important texts are conveniently available, in translation and with commentary, in Harrington (1996). See also Harrington (1997a); Collins (1998:112–131).
- 2 But note the brief but insightful contribution of Baasland (1982: 123–127).
- 3 It should be noted that not all of Aune's types are mutually exclusive categories. Thus, e.g., probably all examples of type 2.4 also belong to another type.
- 4 Other beatitudes in wisdom literature: Prov. 3:13; 8:32; 14:21; 16:20; 20:7; 28:14; 29:18; Job 5:17; Eccles. 10:17; Sir. 14:1, 2, 20; 25:8, 9; 28:19; 31:8; 34:15; 48:11; 50:28; Wisd. 3:13, 14; 4Q185 2:6, 13; 4Q525 Frag. 2 2:1–10.
- 5 Pss. 1:2; 2:12; 32:1, 2; 33:12; 34:9; 40:5; 41:2; 65:5; 84:5, 6, 13; 89:16; 94:12; 106:3; 112:1; 119:1, 2; 127:5; 128:1, 2; 137:8, 9; 144:5 (*bis*); 146:5; Psalms of Solomon 4:26; 5:18; 6:1; 10:1; 17:50; 18:7.
- 6 Dan. 12:12; 1 Enoch 58:2; 81:4; 82:4; 99:10; 103:5; 2 Enoch 41:1; 42:6–14; 44:4; 48:9; 52:1–14; 61:3; 62:1; 66:7; cf. Sibylline Oracle 3:371.
- 7 Gammie (1990a:58–61) distinguishes these as two distinct forms: 'exhortations' and 'admonitions'.
- 8 See the full list of such sayings attributed to Jesus in Aune (1991: 232).
- 9 The usual interpretation of this passage understands the second phrase (translated: 'and is set alight by hell') as referring to hell as the source of the evil, destructive power of the tongue. There are two decisive objections to this exegesis: (1) In this period, hell (Gehenna) is the place of divine punishment of sinners, not the home of Satan or the forces of evil. It is not the source of evil but the place where evil persons suffer judgment. (2) The fire of Gehenna is invariably portrayed as the fire of divine judgment. Therefore the statement is best understood as an instance of the eschatological 'measure-for-measure sayings', which frequently use the same verb to refer both to the sin and its punishment. Because the tongue sets fire to the cycle of

- existence here and now, its punishment hereafter will be to burn in the fire of Gehenna. See further Bauckham (1998: chapter 5).
- 10 Crenshaw (1975:48–51) calls these ‘an ancient debate-form’.
  - 11 In addition to the formal similitudes and parables discussed in this section, note also the metaphorical language in 1:15, 18, 21, 26; 3:2, 6b, 8b; 4:4a; 5:5b, 9b; and the simile in 5:3.
  - 12 In other instances of this common image for the transience of life or the fate of the wicked (Ps. 37:20; 68:2; Hos. 13:3; Wisd. 5:14; 1QM 15:10; 4 Ezra 4:14; 7:61; 2 Baruch 82:6) the form used is a simile.
  - 13 Cf. also the rabbinic parables in b. Ber. 11a; ‘Avot R. Nat. A 14, each addressed in the second person to an individual.
  - 14 See the full study of *paradeigmata* in Graeco-Roman literature, especially letters, in Fiore (1986).
  - 15 Note also Luke 11:31–32, where the queen of the South and the people of Nineveh function to highlight by contrast the lack of response among Jesus’ contemporaries; and cf. Luke 10:13–14.
  - 16 Wisd. 3:10–5:23, though functionally similar, is not formally a judgment oracle. Cf. also 4Q418 69:4–9.
  - 17 Stowers (1988:129): ‘Objections seem to arise from the author’s argumentation and attempt to persuade or arise from concern for special emphasis rather than as part of a polemic against an individual or collective opponent.’
  - 18 The point is badly obscured in the NRSV, which has ‘if you [i.e. James’ audience in general] say you have faith’ and ‘can faith save you?’, rather than the accurate: ‘if someone says he has faith’ and ‘can faith save him?’; the attempt at inclusive language (laudable in itself) has produced a misleading translation.
  - 19 Rhetorical questions are found in Jewish wisdom instruction, but are not usually argumentative in the way they are in James: Prov. 31:10; Eccles. 5:6, 11; 6:6, 11–12; 8:1; Sir. 2:10; 10:9; 36:31; 37:3.
  - 20 The argument of Westermann (1995: chapter 7) that the aphorisms of Jesus were not composed by Jesus, but were proverbs popular ‘in circles of common people with whom Jesus associated’ (112) is implausible. With few exceptions, their content is quite different from that of popular proverbs, including those of Prov. 10–31 which Westermann studies in this book. The fact that they are short sayings in proverbial form is no proof of their origin. It is a weakness of Westermann’s book that he takes no account of Ben Sira, who shows that proverbial sayings, indistinguishable in form, were part of the teaching of sages, who no doubt coined and used them orally in teaching, as well as sometimes (such as in Ben Sira’s case) writing them down in a collection. Ben Sira clearly composed many proverbs on the model of those he knew in Proverbs. To what extent they may be distinguishable from popular proverbs in content would require detailed investigation in the light of Westermann’s and Golka’s work on Prov. 10–31. Jesus’ social location differed from Ben Sira’s, but there is no reason why he should not be regarded as comparable to the extent that he was a teacher who coined

- proverbial sayings which his disciples memorized. That his sayings are indebted to an oral tradition of popular preaching by religious teachers in the synagogues is more plausible than that they are indebted to folk wisdom, and is probably required to explain parallels with later rabbinic sayings and parables.
- 21 Cf. also the early Christian wisdom writing, the Teachings of Silvanus, probably attributed to Silvanus the colleague of Paul (1 Thess. 1:1 etc.) and Peter (1 Pet. 5:12).
  - 22 On Ben Sira's self-understanding see Gammie (1990b).
  - 23 For the debt to Theognis, see Sanders (1983:33–34); cf. also Scott (1971:62–63). For another example, see Skehan and Di Lella (1987: 41–43).
  - 24 For some other examples, see Sanders (1983:14–15).
  - 25 Sanders (1983) shows that Ben Sira's debt to Theognis is less extensive than was argued by T.Middendorp, but nevertheless real, and also shows Ben Sira's debt to Phibis.
  - 26 On the prominence of the fear of God in Ben Sira, see Skehan and Di Lella (1987:75–77).
  - 27 Cf. also m. 'Avot 1:15 ('say little and do much': attributed to Shammai); 2:10 ('be not easily provoked': attributed to R.Eliezer b. Hyrcanus); 5:12 ('quick to hear and slow to forget'); 4Q420 1:2:1–3 ('He will not answer before he hears, and he will not speak before he understands, and with patience he will give a reply'); Job 11:2–3 LXX ('The one who speaks much should also hear much... Do not be profuse in speech'), quoted in 1 Clem. 30:4–5.
  - 28 Cf. also John 14:14; 15:7, 16:23–24; 1 John 3:22; 5:14–15.
  - 29 No doubt a similar reflection lies behind the reference to 'the Holy Spirit' in Luke 11:13, where Matthew 7:11 has 'good things'. The parallel is especially interesting in view of the observation, sometimes made, that 'wisdom' in James plays the part the Holy Spirit plays in Paul.
  - 30 Cf. also Gospel of Thomas 45a; Coptic Apocalypse of Peter 76:4–7.
  - 31 Other examples are given in Dibelius and Greeven (1975:204–5).
  - 32 Contra Dibelius and Greeven (1975:204–205). There is no reason why Plutarch's use of it should derive from Stoic use. Similarly, there is no need to postulate a Stoic origin for its use in Epistle of the Apostles 32: 'do the fruitbearing trees give the same fruit? Do they not bring forth fruit according to their nature?'
  - 33 For arguments for differing conclusions, see Dibelius and Greeven (1975:204–205); Davids (1982:148); Deppe (1989:99–102); Hartin (1991:169).
  - 34 No parallels have been found for metaphorical use of the images of water in James 3:11–12. Both 4 Ezra 5:9 and 4 Baruch (Par. Jer.) 9:18 (probably based on Ezek. 47:8–11) are intended as literal references to salt and fresh water.
  - 35 The closest Jewish parallel is Josephus, *BJ* 2.135; cf. also Philo, *Dec.* 84. 2 Enoch 49:1 would be a remarkably close parallel if it could be regarded as belonging to the original Jewish form of 2 Enoch, but it is more likely a later Christian addition. For the dominical authenticity of Matt. 5:33–37, see Ito (1991), refuting Dautzenberg (1981).

- 36 James makes no explicit reference to Jesus' distinctive demand for love of enemies (Matt. 5:43–47; Luke 6:27–35), but nor does he repeat the wisdom tradition's principle that one should do good only to the good, not to the bad (Sir. 12:1–7; Tobit 4:17; Ps.-Phoc. 152).
- 37 Some of the Qumran wisdom texts address a community, as 'my sons' (4Q525 2:2:12; 4Q185 1–2:2:3), 'my people', 'you simple ones' (4Q185 1–2:1:13–14); cf. also 4Q298 1.
- 38 It may be that James interprets Job as an example of reversal of status (5:11): those who endure humiliation are exalted by God in the end.
- 39 Witherington's distinction between two types of sage, defined by their social status and loyalties, needs further investigation, with more attention paid to the Qumran wisdom texts now available and to wisdom elements in apocalypses such as 1 Enoch and 2 Enoch. Witherington's evaluation of James' wisdom as largely conventional and traditional, by contrast with that of Jesus and Q, is strongly influenced by the correct observation of James' indebtedness to traditional wisdom, including Ben Sira, even though Witherington is also prepared to argue that Jesus himself was influenced, directly or indirectly, by Ben Sira (143–145). What he ignores in the case of James is the selectiveness of James' debt to Proverbs and Ben Sira, a selectiveness governed by his faithfulness to the wisdom of Jesus. Whereas Witherington thinks James appropriates elements of the Jesus tradition in Q to serve the ends of conventional and traditional wisdom (cf. 244–246), in my view James draws on the wisdom tradition in order to express and to extend the central emphases of the sayings of Jesus. In the case of both Jesus and James, traditional wisdom is not simply contradicted, but radicalized. There is continuity in the discontinuity.

### 3 James in canonical context

- 1 The late date at which James was generally recognized as canonical is still regularly cited as major evidence against its authenticity as an authentic work of James the Lord's brother. This is hard to understand. By the late second century Christians are unlikely to have had any means of assessing authenticity which are not also available to us.
- 2 This statement in early editions of Luther's preface to the epistles of James and Jude was somewhat softened in the 1530 edition (Luther 1960:397 and n.55).
- 3 To look for a real distinction between faith collaborating (*συνήργει*) with works (Jas. 2:22) and faith working (*ἐνεργουμένη*) through love (Gal. 5:6) would be pedantic.
- 4 This rare combination occurs also in LAB 23:6 ('the just who have believed in me'), where it echoes Gen. 15:6 and applies the terminology of that text about Abraham to all the righteous descendants of Abraham, just as Paul does in Gal. 3:6–7; Rom. 4:16–17, 22–24. This is a significant hint that Paul's novel interpretation of Gen. 15:6 was not developed without reference to existing Jewish interpretation.

- 5 A fuller treatment of this issue would have to contest also Wall's evasion of the implications of 2 Cor. 8–9: Wall (1997:244); contrast Mott (1993:270–271).
- 6 Cf. also 1 Enoch 22:14 (=4QEn<sup>d</sup> 1:11:2); 25:3; 40:3; 63:2. The Aramaic phrase as found in 4QEn<sup>d</sup> 1:11:2 (מַלְכֵּי כְבוֹד [מְרִיבָא]) also appears in 1QapGen. 2:4. The phrase 'king of glory' (Ps. 24:7–10) occurs in 1QM 12:8; 19:1; 4Q427 7:1:13; 4Q510 1:1. In all these cases the reference is to God.
- 7 If 4:2 alludes to the commandment not to covet (Exod. 20:17), then it is an allusion to the only commandment of the Decalogue which has no real equivalent in Leviticus 19.
- 8 In view of Jas. 1:1, it is worth noting that in all three passages there is a connection with the eschatological regathering of the Diaspora (Jer. 31:10; Ezek. 11:16–17; 36:24).
- 9 Verse 4:5 probably quotes a no longer extant apocryphal work, but the problem of this much debated passage is too complex to resolve here.

#### 4 James in modern and contemporary contexts

- 1 The numbers of allusions are: Matthew 621, Luke 515, Mark 256, John 240, 1 Corinthians 139, Genesis 115, Romans 107, Ecclesiastes 82, James 66. McKinnon's article is devoted to a method of measuring the distance of biblical books from the 'centre' in Kierkegaard's use of the Bible. The distance is determined by the co-occurrences of texts from each book with texts from other biblical books. In McKinnon's calculations (1980:139) James is fifteenth in order of distance from the centre. But it is not at all clear that co-occurrences are the right means of measuring the centrality of various books in Kierkegaard's view of the Bible.
- 2 On 2:26 he observes: 'we could rather turn the figure around and say: So works apart from faith are dead, for faith corresponds more to spirit and works more to body than the other way around' (Kierkegaard 1967:426). Curiously, Luther made precisely the same point as evidence of James' incompetence (Luther 1967:425).
- 3 Probably the fullest and most satisfactory study of this theme in James is by my doctoral student Luke L.Cheung and will appear in his dissertation when this is completed.
- 4 Whether James also associates τέλος (5:11) with these words is doubtful.
- 5 It is interesting to note that R.W.Dale, in his sermons on James published posthumously in 1895, does more justice to James' speech ethics than to his treatment of wealth and poverty. The latter is smothered by Victorian respect for social hierarchy and for the benefits society owes to self-made rich industrialists. A reading even more from

the perspective of the wealthy is offered by W.Boyd Carpenter, who thinks the rich man of 1:10 an exemplary Christian who has sadly been deprived of his wealth in persecution for his faith and is encouraged by James to bear such misfortune with Christian fortitude, knowing that his true riches are spiritual (Carpenter 1903:116–118)! The great commentary of J.B.Mayor (first edition 1892), to which both Dale and Carpenter express their grateful indebtedness, moves in this direction in his comment on 1:10, but nowhere near so far as Carpenter (Mayor 1897:43–44).

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Abbreviations used here for journals and series follow SBL style.

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