

ACT IV Part 2
GOD RESPONDS
JOB 38:1 – 42:6

Introduction

Here is God's response to Job's final plea: 'Let the Almighty answer me'(31:35). Job's companions have had three attempts each to provide a satisfactory response to Job's challenge. Each time they have failed. Elihu stepped in, but in spite of his own self-assurance, he too leaves Job (and the thoughtful listener) unsatisfied. If God remains silent, Job's challenge stands.

Job's companions expect a theophany, in which God will punish Job and silence him for ever. Job will have no hope of emerging from the darkness, having been given up to the sword (see 15:22); fire will destroy his tent (see 15:34); God will send forth the fire of his anger (see 20:23); he will be plunged into total darkness (see 20:26); heaven and earth will turn against him and witness to his guilt (see 20:27); his life will be cut short prematurely (see 22:16); day and night he will experience terror (see 27:20).

Job is wanting a straightforward debate which will demonstrate that God is unjust and issue in a judgment declaring Job's innocence. Job will feel vindicated, even though he has lost everything.

The audience is probably divided between those who sympathise with Job and those who are locked into a traditional understanding. Both groups expect a clarification from a just and compassionate God. The former are wondering how Job's innocence and his sufferings can be reconciled. The latter are hoping that Job will be brought to see how he has sinned, however unwittingly. What are we expecting? Are we willing to let the text upset our expectations? Are we open to the surprise of God? Are we willing to be left in suspense, to be provoked to keep an open mind and to explore further? Perhaps the text lends itself to a number of points of view that are different but not contradictory?

As we will see, though God does accuse Job of ignorance and the sin of presumption, he does not support the central teaching of Job's companions: he does not proclaim the principle of retribution that saw a universal connection between suffering and sin.

Job has wanted to encounter God, and God grants Job his wish. This is of central importance. We are reminded of Psalm 73, the theme of which is close to that of Job. The psalm does not resolve the problem of why the wicked prosper and the psalmist suffers. But the psalmist is profoundly consoled and cries out: 'For me it is good to be near God' (Psalm 73:28). We might think too of the mysterious struggle undergone by Jacob as he attempts to enter the Holy Land. He does not discover the identity of his assailant, and is left wounded by the encounter, but Jacob can still say: 'I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved'(Genesis 32:30). God reveals himself to Job, who is drawn into the mystery of communion with God. It does not solve the intellectual problem, but it does bring profound peace and acceptance. He can live with the mystery because he knows himself to be in communion with God. At the same time, there is more to this final act than an intimate encounter and experience of communion. God does 'speak' to Job. We should expect some insight here, even though we may not be able to satisfactorily unravel the mystery of the innocent who suffer. As in Moses' encounter with God on Mount Sinai, theophany is accompanied by 'words'. Both have their place. The same two elements are expressed in Psalm 50. In that psalm God's words denounce sin. If, with Job's friends we expect the same here, we are in for a significant surprise.

Job's request is expressed in a concentrated form in 13:20-24. It is worth recalling here:

Grant me these two things, if I am to face you openly:
 withdraw your chastising hand from me, and do not let dread of you terrify me.
 Then make your accusation, and I will answer, or let me speak, and you reply to me.
 What are all my iniquities and my sins?
 Make me know my transgression and my sin.
 Why do you hide your face, and treat me as though I were your enemy?

Job is asking God to cease hostilities and to take part in due process in which differences are resolved by reasoned debate. Job finds the arguments of his companions unsatisfactory. It is no small triumph that God does speak. One thing Job asked was that God would show him his sins. The fact that God does nothing of the sort is of profound significance. God concedes in this way that Job is truly innocent (we have known that since the Prologue), and that the argument of his companions is fundamentally wrong. God does this, however, by his silence. He does not put forward arguments that would convince reason. The only thing he reprimands Job for is his criticising God without understanding God's designs.

Job seeks a truce, so that he will enjoy a period of absence of suffering before he dies. This request is abundantly granted.

As we will see, much of God's response focuses on God's wisdom and power – attributes which neither Job nor his companions have denied. When they made these points we were left unsatisfied. Is God's response equally 'off the point'? Job feared and Job's friends desired that God would use his power to destroy. That is a major difference from what we will see in God's response. God's aim is to impress on Job his lack of knowledge and weakness before God. Importantly, God says not a word about suffering. He is aiming to lift Job to a state of wonder, humility and trusting acceptance of the goodness of God. The meaninglessness of his present experience made Job wonder if it would be better not to exist than to be part of a world in which the innocent suffer. God reveals to Job that, though chaos is apparent in the world, it is not in control. God has a design for the world, a design in which good and evil coexist, but God it is who is ultimately in control, not evil. What Job ultimately desires is to experience communion with God – and that he experiences. He (and the reader) are left wondering, but not unsatisfied. God convinces Job to trust. The author wants us to do the same, even though we are not in a position to make sense of everything.

In 38:1-38, the author offers powerful images of cosmic phenomena.

In 38:39 - 39:30, he offers a feast of powerful images of the interaction of wild animals with humans.

In a third section (40:15 - 41:26), we are in the world of the hippopotamus (Behemoth) and the crocodile (Leviathan), imagined in mythical terms. We are being called to delight with God in his creation (see Psalm 104:31). In the process we experience the limits of logic and argument, and find peace in being in communion with the Creator of such a marvellous, if puzzling, world.

Nature witnesses to God's designs

¹Then YHWH answered Job out of the whirlwind:

Finally God speaks. Job has been asking for this from the beginning (9:32; 13:3, 5). The movement of the drama demands it. Others have been only too happy to share their understanding of what God's response should be. At last God breaks the silence. The whirlwind denotes power, and might lead us to think that God is going to punish Job. If so, we are in for a surprise.

**²Who is this that denigrates my designs
with senseless words?**

Job does not doubt that God has a design (see 12:13), but he is concerned that in his regard God's design is not simply mysterious; it is unjust (see 10:13-17).

**³Gird up your loins like a man,
I will question you, and you will respond.**

God speaks first of the creation of the earth.

**⁴Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?
Tell me, if you know so much.**

**⁵Who determined its measurements – if you know –
Or who stretched the line upon it?**

**⁶On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone**

**⁷when the morning stars sang together
and all the heavenly beings ('gods') shouted for joy?**

And now, the origins of the sea. The imagery is quite different from the creation account in Genesis. The sea is imagined as gushing forth from the hidden recesses of the earth.

**⁸Or who shut the sea in with barriers
when it burst out from the womb,**

**⁹when I made the clouds its garment,
and thick darkness its swaddling band,**

**¹⁰and prescribed bounds for it,
and set bars and doors,**

**¹¹and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther,
and here shall your proud waves be stopped'?**

Job's attention is now drawn to the origins of light. The dawning of light has a cosmic function, but also an ethical one (compare Romans 13:13). The victory of light is an assurance of the victory of justice over injustice (compare Psalm 101:8).

**¹²Have you commanded the morning since your days began,
and caused the dawn to know its place,**

**¹³so that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth,
and shake out the wicked from it?**

**¹⁴It is changed like clay under the seal,
and it is dyed like a garment.**

**¹⁵Light is withheld from the wicked,
and their uplifted arm is broken.**

Job was not there at creation. Neither can he go on a tour of inspection in order to find out how nature works.

**¹⁶Have you ever reached the sources of the sea,
or walked on the bottom of the ocean?**

**¹⁷Have the gates of Death been revealed to you,
or have you seen the gates of the Dark Land?**

**¹⁸Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth?
Tell me, if you know all this.**

**¹⁹Where is the way to the dwelling of light,
and where is the place of darkness?**

**²⁰Are you able to take them back to their territory
or show them the way home?**

**²¹Surely you know, since you were already born then,
and have completed so many years!**

38:22-38 Various natural phenomena

We recall the statement in Deuteronomy 11:11-12

The land that you are crossing over to occupy is a land of hills and valleys, watered by rain from the sky, a land that YHWH your God looks after. The eyes of YHWH your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

Also Psalm 107:35-38

He turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water.

And there he lets the hungry live, and they establish a town to live in;
they sow fields, and plant vineyards, and get a fruitful yield.

By his blessing they multiply greatly, and he does not let their cattle decrease.

Job is not able to comprehend the complex function of these natural phenomena, and he is not able to control them. How can he be so confident in criticising God's designs?

**²²Have you entered the place where the snow is stored,
or have you seen the storehouses of the hail,**

**²³which I have reserved for the time of trouble,
for the day of battle and war?**

**²⁴What is the way to the place from which heat spreads out,
causing the east wind to blow again over the land?**

**²⁵Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain,
and a path for the lightning and thunder,**

**²⁶to bring rain on a land where no one lives,
on the desert, which is empty of human life,**

**²⁷to satisfy the waste and desolate land,
to cause vegetation to blossom in the parched land?**

How little Job knows!

Against the background of Near Eastern mythology, the author is asserting that God is the father and mother (the origin) of these natural phenomena.

- ²⁸Has the rain a father?
Who has begotten the drops of dew?**
- ²⁹From whose womb did the ice come forth?
Who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven,**
- ³⁰so that the waters become hard like stone,
and the surface of the lake is frozen over.**

We might compare Sirach 43:20

The cold north wind blows, and ice freezes on the water;
it settles on every pool of water, and the water puts it on like a breastplate.

The author goes on to speak of the constellations. It was commonly thought that the constellations affected the kinds of phenomena of which he has been speaking. Job has not the power to control the powers of the heavens. he can only gaze at them in awe (see Psalm 8).

- ³¹Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,
or loose the cords of Orion?**
- ³²Can you lead forth the constellations in their season,
or guide the Bear with its children?**
- ³³Do you know the laws governing the heavens?
Can you determine their role on the earth?**
- ³⁴Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,
so that a flood of waters may cover you?**
- ³⁵Can you send forth flashes of lightnings, and they will come
and say to you, 'Here we are'?**

Verse 36 appears to be out of place, unless the author sees the ibis as having a special relationship with the weather. The cock announces the dawn before anyone else knows it is coming.

- ³⁶Who has given wisdom to the ibis,
or know-how to the cock?**
- ³⁷Who has the wisdom to number the clouds?
Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens,**
- ³⁸when the dust accumulates
and the clods stick fast together?**

The author now turns from his focus on natural phenomena to contemplate the animal world, beginning with animals of the land, then of the sky and finally of the sea. Of the ten creatures listed, all but the horse, are creatures of the wild, associated with hunting. The horse is associated with war. If the providence of God is seen in these animals, why does Job doubt God's power over human beings who act unjustly?

1. The lion (38:39-40)

The lion is no friend of man, but God provides for them. See Psalm 104:21,26-27.

The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God ...
 These all look to you to give them their food in due season;
 when you give to them, they gather it up;
 when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

**³⁹Can you hunt the prey for the lion,
 or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,
⁴⁰when they crouch in their dens,
 or lie in wait in their covert?**

2. The raven (38:41)

This creature of the wild is also cared for by God.

**⁴¹Who provides for the raven its prey,
 when its young ones cry to God,
 and wander about in a daze for lack of food?**

3-4. The mountain goat and the deer (39:1-4)

**^{39:1}Do you know when the mountain goats give birth?
 Have you observed the calving of the deer?
²Do you know how long they are in the womb,
 and the time when they give birth?
³They crouch to give birth to their offspring,
 and are delivered of their young,
⁴their young ones grow and become strong,
 they go forth, and do not return.**

5. The wild ass (39:5-8)

God has ordained that the wild ass is free to roam the wild.

**⁵Who has let the wild ass loose,
 free from the constraints of a bridle?
⁶I have given it the steppe for its home,
 the salt land for its dwelling place.
⁷It scorns the hubub of the city;
 it pays no heed to the shouts of the driver.
⁸It explores the mountains in search of pasture,
 and it searches after anything green.**

6. The wild ox (39:9-12)

- ⁹Is the wild ox willing to serve you?
Will it spend the night in your stall?
¹⁰Can you get it to submit to the yoke and work the furrows,
that it may go after you and plough the countryside?
¹¹Will you depend on it because its strength is great,
and will you entrust your labour to it?
¹²Do you have faith in it that it will return,
and bring your grain to your threshing floor?

7. The ostrich (39:13-18)

- ¹³The ostrich proudly stretches out its wings,
its feathers are like the livery of a stork.
¹⁴It abandons its eggs on the ground,
leaving them to incubate on the sand,
¹⁵forgetting that a foot may crush them,
and that a wild animal may trample on them.
¹⁶It deals cruelly with its young, as if they were not its own;
it has no interest in caring for them.
¹⁷It is God who has deprived it of wisdom,
and given it no share in understanding.
¹⁸When it strides forward beating its wings against its side,
it laughs at the horse and its rider.

8. The horse (39:19-25)

It is hard to find in any language a more striking description.

- ¹⁹Do you give the horse its might,
or clothe its neck with a mane?
²⁰Do you make it leap like the locust,
its neighing majestic and terrible?
²¹It pounds the earth in the valley, and exulting in its strength,
it gallops forward against the foe.
²²It laughs at fear, and is not dismayed;
it does not turn back from the sword.
²³Upon it rattle the quiver,
the flashing spear, and the javelin.
²⁴With ferocity and rage it swallows up the ground,
and does not stop at the sound of the trumpet.
²⁵When the trumpet sounds, it says 'Aha!'
smelling the battle from afar,
the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.

9. The hawk (39:26)

The author admires the instinct for direction displayed by the hawk. This is more than Job can claim!

**²⁶Is it by your wisdom that the hawk soars,
and spreads its wings toward the south?**

10. The vulture (39:27-30)

**²⁷Is it at your command that the vulture soars
and makes its nest in the heights?**

**²⁸It lives on the rock and makes its home
in the fastness of the rocky crag.**

**²⁹From there it spies the prey;
its eyes see it from far away.**

**³⁰Its young ones suck up blood;
and where the carcass lies, there it is."**

In the literature of the Older Testament each of the above creatures is an object of special awe as well as of menace, attractive and at the same time dangerous. They share in the goodness of the whole of God's creation (see Genesis 1). Though (with the exception of the horse) they are not useful to man, their value should not be overlooked. They come within the ambit of divine providence. Could this not be the case also for human beings? Are our concepts of good and evil too simplistic?

The God revealed by Jesus 'makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous'(Matthew 4:45).

Job, who has been focusing too narrowly on his innocence, and so on questioning God's justice, has been overpowered by the marvel of God's providence in the world. Wonder and awe have taken him beyond the limits within which he has been complaining.

God's second speech

¹And YHWH said to Job:

**²"Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty?
Anyone who argues with God must respond."**

³Then Job answered YHWH:

**⁴"See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you?
I lay my hand on my mouth.**

**⁵I have spoken once, and I will not answer;
more than once, but will proceed no further."**

From the beginning Job has been challenging God to answer. Now that God has broken his silence, Job is reduced to silence, and decides not to proceed. Wonder, awe, and humility have replaced his self-focused determination to assert his innocence and to accuse God of injustice. However, God has more to say. Now that Job is really ready to hear, God can give his key response. He does so in the following speech.

It is important to note that God does not deny Job's innocence. Where Job is wrong – and the same goes for his companions – is that he has not been able to think outside the trial paradigm in which in a dispute if one is right (innocent), the other is necessarily wrong (guilty). Yes, Job is innocent, but that does not make God unjust. We have seen that God cares for the wild animals, even those that human beings might consider as enemies. Does God have to destroy evil people to prove his care for the good? Does God have to intervene and stop the suffering of the innocent to prove his justice and to demonstrate his providential care for them?

God's second speech (40:6-14)

⁶Then YHWH answered Job out of the whirlwind:

**⁷"Gird up your loins like a man;
I will question you, and you declare to me.**

**⁸Do you dare to put me in the wrong
or to condemn me so that you may be seen to be innocent?**

**⁹If you have an arm like God,
then thunder with a voice like his,**

**¹⁰deck yourself with majesty and dignity,
clothe yourself with glory and splendour,**

**¹¹let your anger burst forth,
and look on all who are proud, and bring them down,**

**¹²humiliate the proud with a glance,
and trample on the wicked;**

**¹³bury them together in the dust,
blindfold their faces in the tomb.**

**¹⁴Then I, too, will pronounce your praise:
"Your right arm has given you victory!"**

God's irony reaches its limit here. He is telling Job to play God, while he, God, will chant Job's praises (as in Psalm 98:1).

God's second discourse features two animals that are gigantic, beyond any human control and hostile to man. Both are seen as monsters of the chaotic waters, and so find themselves the subject of myth.

Behemoth (the hippopotamus?) (40:15-24)

¹⁵Look at Behemoth, which I created just as I created you;

Neither Job nor the hippopotamus are outside God's providence.

it eats grass like an ox.

**¹⁶Look at the strength in its loins,
the power in its muscular belly,**

**¹⁷when it stiffens its tail (a euphemism?) like a cedar,
the sinews of its thighs knitted together,**

**¹⁸its bones tubes of bronze,
its skeleton bars of iron.**

**¹⁹It is God's masterpiece
only its Maker can approach it with the sword.**

Only God has the power to terminate its life. He therefore holds sway over the life of other lesser creatures.

**²⁰The mountains yield their tribute of food to it,
the wild animals play with it.**

**²¹It sprawls under the lotus plants,
hidden among the marsh reeds,**

**²²the lotus trees covering it with their shade,
surrounded by the willows of the stream.**

**²³Even if the river is turbulent, it is not frightened,
it is confident though the Jordan rushes against its mouth.**

**²⁴Can one take it with hooks
or pierce its nose with a snare?**

Leviathan (dragon? crocodile?) (40:25 – 41:26)

**²⁵Can you fish for Leviathan with a hook
or shut its mouth with a cord?**

**²⁶Can you put a rope through its nose,
or pierce its jaw with a hook?**

**²⁷Will it come to you submissively
and speak soft words to you?**

**²⁸Will it come to an agreement with you
so that you will not make it your slave forever?**

**²⁹Will you play with it as with a bird,
or will you put it on leash like one of your sparrows?**

**³⁰Will fishermen offer it for sale
or cut it up in pieces for trade?**

**³¹Can you puncture its hide with darts
or its head with fishing spears?**

The crocodile

^{40:32}Lay hands on it
and you won't forget the battle; you won't try it again!

Chapter 41 verses 1-3 seem better placed as a conclusion (after 41:26)

^{41:4}I will not keep silence concerning its limbs,
or its incomparable strength.
⁵Who can strip off its outer garment
and penetrate its double coat of mail?
⁶Who can prize open the doors of its jaws,
surrounded by its terrifying teeth.
⁷Its back is made of rows of shields,
bound together without break as with a seal,
⁸each one bound tightly to the other
that no air can come between them;
⁹joined one to another,
they are tightly locked and cannot be separated.

The author goes on to describe the crocodile, a creature of the chaotic element, in language associated with the master of chaos, the devil.

¹⁰Its sneezes flash forth light,
and its eyes are like the eyelids of the dawn.
¹¹From its jaws go flaming torches,
and sparks of fire leap out.
¹²Out of its nostrils comes smoke,
as from a heated pot boiling over.
¹³Its breath kindles coals,
and a flame comes out of its jaws.
¹⁴In its neck abides strength,
and terror dances before it.
¹⁵The folds of its flesh cling together;
it is firmly cast and immovable.
¹⁶Its heart is as hard as stone,
as hard as a millstone.

¹⁷When it raises itself up heroes are afraid,
and surrender in consternation.
¹⁸Though the sword reaches it, it does not avail,
nor does the spear, the dart, or the javelin.
¹⁹It counts iron as straw,
and bronze as rotten wood.
²⁰The arrow cannot make it flee;
slingstones, for it, are turned to chaff.
²¹Clubs are counted as chaff;
it laughs at the rattle of pikes.

- ²²Its underparts are like sharp potsherds;
it spreads itself out like a threshing sledge on the mire.**
- ²³It makes the deep boil like a pot
and thrashes the water as in a distillery.**
- ²⁴It leaves a shining wake behind it,
the water like a whitened beard.**
- ²⁵On earth it has no equal,
a creature without fear.**
- ²⁶It stands up to everything that is lofty,
it is king over all the wild beasts.**

There are creatures in this world that are hostile to man, and God does not destroy them. We can learn important lessons from them, especially about our own limitations. In the following verses we find the conclusion. Human beings cannot control these monstrous creatures that belong to the world of chaos, but God is above all. Everything is under his domination and providence.

- ^{41:1}Well then, is there no hope of dominating it?
Do you think God would be overwhelmed at the sight of it?**
- ²When God provokes it is God being cruel?
Who can resist me?**
- ³Who can stand up to me and depart unscathed?
Everything under the heavens is mine!**

Neither Job nor the audience have received a totally intellectually satisfying answer to Job's dilemma. What is clear is that God (and this sets God aside from Job's companions) has not denied Job's innocence. Job has not deserved the suffering that he has experienced. What God has done is invite Job to look beyond guilt and innocence, evil and good, and acknowledge that the world is far more complex and mysterious. Furthermore God (not Job, and not Job's companions) is supervising everything. God is asking Job to trust him. Whatever happens will be for his good. All will be well. Job is a human being with all the necessary limits that being a man necessarily includes. He is to wonder and to trust, even with his doubts unresolved. Most important of all, he has encountered God!

Job has learned

^{42:1}**Then Job answered YHWH:**

**²"I acknowledge that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.**

See the reflection on God's 'control' in the Introduction, pages 95-96.

**³You said: 'Who is this that speaks ill of my designs
with senseless words?'
Truly I spoke without comprehension,
about matters too wonderful for me, beyond my intelligence.**

Job can now see that he was wrong to expect religious tradition to answer man's search for meaning. We must live with the question by embracing the mystery, not by attempting to contain the transcendent God within the limited categories of our theology.

**⁴You said: 'Listen to me, hear what I will say,
I will question you, and you will answer me.'
⁵I knew you, but only on hearsay,
but now my eyes have seen you;
⁶therefore I withdraw and repent,
in dust and ashes."**

Throughout, and against the relentless tide of traditional 'wisdom', Job has remained faithful to his experience. However, he has come to see that he was too self-centred. His focus was too limited. Now he has learned humility. Compare:

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.
It is better to be of a lowly spirit among the poor
than to divide the spoil with the proud.

– Proverbs 16:18-19

There are those—how lofty are their eyes, how high their eyelids lift!

– Proverbs 30:13

YHWH, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.

– Psalm 131:1

Job's most profound longing has been graced. He has been invited to encounter God in the beauty, wisdom, diversity and fruitfulness of creation.

In her 'Israel's Wisdom Literature: a liberation-critical reading' (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1997, pages 37-38), Dianne Bergant writes:

The book lends itself to two very different rhetorical interpretations. It can be directed to people who are prosperous or at least content. They will watch as their concept of justice is challenged and found wanting. From the outset, they will find themselves siding with the dissenter and, with him, will come to several new insights: success is ephemeral; it is not the sure sign of moral integrity; disaster can come to anyone at any time; and setbacks are not necessarily indications of moral frailty. At the end of the book, they will be brought with Job to the feet of God, there humbly to acknowledge their own limitations and their utter dependence on God.

Bergant continues:

The book can also be directed to those who live lives of desperation. Its dilemma will confirm their conviction that virtuous people can indeed be the victims of misfortune; that the frustration and anger of the poor can be justified; that the tradition often supports the status quo; that those who do not know tragedy can be quite self-righteous in their comfort. In the face of all this, the book calls them to be steadfast in their own righteousness, persistent in their protest, and tenacious in their trust in God. Regardless of the socioeconomic status of the readers, all will recognise the significance given to honest human experience. Job did indeed endure suffering that was in no way a consequence of his behaviour.

Although the visitors were ignorant of the wager in heaven, they know of Job's reputation for wisdom and righteousness. Despite this, his claims did not conform to their framework of thought and so they refused to believe him. This obduracy on their part shows that empirical wisdom, which is actually a dynamic reflection of the genuine experience of life, can turn into rigid dogmatism, closed to whatever does not fit the theory. When this happens, the religious teaching, which both rests on and legitimates the sapiential tradition, ceases to be real wisdom. It did not appeal to Job's heart, and it will not appeal to the hearts of the readers.

Both Job and his visitors clung fast to what they believed was right, but Job was grounded in reality while they were caught in convention. Although true virtue will always be guided by sound convention, sometimes convention must give way to uncommon experience. God's defence of Job and rebuke of the others shows the preference for genuine experience over unyielding dogma, whether that dogma is founded in a cultural or in a religious sapiential tradition. This divine preference probably made the standard-bearers of orthodoxy, whoever they might have been, feel very uneasy.

Job is portrayed as a model of personal integrity. He is an inspiration to those who, in the throes of distress with no support whatever, are tempted to compromise themselves. His response to his reversal of fortune, to God's silence, and to the denunciation by his visitors was not capitulation but fierce protest. Job would not tolerate meekly what he considered to be injustice on God's part and unsympathetic accusation on the part of others. From his point of view, he was a man of resolute virtue, his visitors were purveyors of empty platitudes, and God was an unreliable overlord. In his mouth, protest was nothing more than abused innocence demanding redress or human frailty crying out for release. This in comparable situations will notice quickly that God does not fault Job for his outbursts. They will rightly conclude that, as harsh as they may have been, they were not inappropriate.

One final quote from Bergant on the limitation of theology and the need to assess and revise it constantly (page 47):

New experiences and new insight must not only be evaluated in the light of traditional teaching, they must also critique the claims of that teaching. Since truth is less an absolute that is discovered and applied to new situations than a judgment reached through assiduous investigation and astute evaluation, new data will always call for new interpretation. If this ongoing development is in any way thwarted, theology will become stagnant instead of dynamic, obsolete rather than relevant, illusory and not revelatory. Even the most conscientious theological articulations are limited, for they are finite expressions of infinite reality.

