WISDOM: THE FEMININE IN THE DIVINE

Rogel Anecito L. Abais, SJ

Who is Lady Wisdom (σοφία)? Is she God personified or is she an attribute of God?[1] The Wisdom of Solomon presents an elaborate and rich characterization of the figure of Wisdom which goes unparalleled in other sapiential works. This rich imagery attempts to define who Wisdom is and, in the process, unfolds her relationship with God. The imagery also challenges the reader's perception of characteristics which are traditionally identified with the male gender and lesser with the female. In the end one asks: what role does Wisdom play in a largely androcentric milieu? Does she, in fact, give the figure of woman due acknowledgement in Scripture?

To understand this figure, we are invited to trace first the development of this scriptural figure. Second, revisit the assessment of Rosemary R. Ruether on the notion of a feminine vision in Wisdom literature. Then, we propose to center our attention on one text, Wisdom 7:22b-8:1 and see if we can give a positive view of the woman in Wisdom.

[1]Cf. Rosemary R. Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History* (California: University of California Press, 2005), 90: "The Wisdom Literature—Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiasticus (also known as the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach), and the Wisdom of Solomon—contains a personified female figure, Wisdom, that seems at times to be a secondary manifestation, or hypostasis, of God. Scholars of this literature have debated whether Wisdom is simply a literary device, a metaphor for God's wisdom, or a being that has ontological status "alongside" Yahweh."

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The Hebrew God and the Figure of Wisdom

What gives rise to the representation of Wisdom as a woman in Hebrew literature? We have to understand the cultural setting out of which Wisdom is formulated. When Israel sets itself apart from its Near Eastern neighbors with its monotheistic religion, it struggled to establish itself in the midst of a polytheistic world where a plethora of gods and goddesses catered to the people's various needs. These deities had their set of functions—a god of rain, a goddess of fertility, a goddess of war, a god of the dead, et al. The movement towards one God and the elimination of other gods was by nature a difficult and a long process of appropriation. The Hebrew Scriptures, when examined carefully, will show the telltale signs of this rough journey of getting rid of "the other gods." The process would gradually shift from the polytheism the people used to practice to a monotheistic form of religion. The psalmist would sing, "There is none like you among the gods, O Lord" (Ps 86:8). This conflation of the gods into one single deity forced the people to subsume the functions of the various deities to whom they brought their concerns to Yahweh.

Some extra-Biblical texts will suggest that Yahweh had a consort or wife in the form of the Hebrew goddess Asherah. This conception would later evolve so that Yahweh would simply adopt the function of Asherah into himself as his hypostasis. An important element in this monotheistic religion of the Israelites is their choice of a male God. As Yahweh assumes or takes over the function of various deities, he had to absorb those of the goddesses. In Genesis we see him assuming the role of the Sumerian mother Goddess Ninhursag. The war language of Yahweh is most similar to those of the war goddesses like Inanna, Ishtar, and Anat.

The elimination of the female deity saw the shift of many relational characteristics. The motherly qualities of the divinity were necessarily taken over by a divine father figure. The spousal relationship shifted from God and king to God and people. How can the king marry a male God? Thus, the feminine role was given to the collective, the people of Israel became the bride and God the bridegroom. The discrepancy in this whole relationship was that the collective was represented by a predominantly male elite. Women were far from power and communication with God.

It is then quite surprising that in the midst of this predominantly androcentric religion, Wisdom is personified as a female figure. This seeming secondary manifestation or hypostasis of God shows a lot of characteristics which are reminiscent of the Near Eastern goddesses. The academic arguments have been inconclusive but much of the studies show how much of Wisdom in Proverbs, Qoheleth, and Ben Sirach have been influenced by the Egyptian goddess Ma'at or the Goddess Isis. We have already mentioned the Hebrew Asherah, consort of Yahwe, but not least would be the Canaanite Astarte or the Mesopotamian Inanna. Many have concluded that Lady Wisdom is the female expression of God, a mediator between God and man which was a reconceptualization when Yahweh absorbed the function of Asherah.

While all of these conjectures are quite plausible, they are not mutually exclusive and neither are they exhaustive. We must also consider that Lady Wisdom of the Hebrew literature is an original creation. She is a new configuration without an equivalent in the past. Our study of the sapiential literature leads us to conclude that this figure evolves from a rougher earlier version for example in Proverbs that is "goddess-like" in her appearance to the more subtle figure in the Wisdom of Solomon.

Rosemary Ruether's Assessment of Women in Wisdom Literature[2]

In her book, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine* (2005), Ruether makes a very short assessment on how women are treated in the vision of Wisdom Literature. She points out that at first glance, women seem to be given an exalted identity as quasi-divine mediators between God and "men". However, she quickly adds that this vision is quite androcentric. In her own estimation, women are only made to "whisper" as counseling wives and mother figures but they are totally absent as the seekers of knowledge and teachers of wisdom. For her, the whole world of Wisdom is defined by relations between men, relations between men and a male God which are most usually played out in relations between father and son and between male teachers and students. The female figures appear as two contrary liminal symbols on the borders of this male world.

This book is a very excellent survey of the *sitz im Leben* of Lady Wisdom and her appropriation by various traditions leading up to Medieval religious literature and even by Protestant Mystical writers. Her conclusion above is fair given that she looks for active female figures other than Wisdom herself as reference points. Since the cultural milieu when these texts were written was male dominated, much of the female action is downplayed.

Our own suggestion is to revisit the text itself and see how we may be able to reappropriate it. For us, Lady Wisdom cannot be relegated as a liminal figure because she occupies the center stage in this huge corpus within Sacred Scripture. There is a clear development in this female figure from the "little child" that was beside God in his work of creation (cf. Prov 8:30) to the Wisdom that comes forth from the mouth of God (cf. Sir 24:3) to her figure acquiring divine characteristics

[2]Cf. Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine,* 96-97.

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(cf. Wis 7:22b-8:1). Lady Wisdom clearly provides a key in reading and interpreting the divine characteristics that are touched on in this latest addition to Wisdom Literature. One becomes aware that in touching on the mystery of God, the writers of this part of the Sacred Scripture was led to appeal to a feminine mediator.

Wisdom 7:22b-8:13

1. The Nature of Wisdom

One of the affirmations that can be made of the Hebrew wisdom tradition is the close relationship between God and Wisdom. Her own coming to being preceded all of God's creation (Prov 8:22-26) and she witnessed this act of creation (Prov 8:26-30). In Prov 8:30 she is seen as the "delight" of the Lord. In Job 28:20-21, 23, it is told that only God knows Wisdom's origins and her ways again express her intimacy with God. The most revealing of these texts is her own self-proclamation in Sir 24:3 saying she "came forth from the mouth of the Most High". In my opinion this statement expresses divine origin and divine nature. It is supported by her claim to dwell in the highest heavens and to have a throne on a pillar of cloud (Sir 24:4). It is therefore not surprising that the book Wisdom describes her as "the breath of the power of God" (7:25), "living with God and the Lord of all loves her" (8:3), or "she who knows your [God's] works" (9:9).

All twenty-one attributes of Wisdom characterize this intimacy with God with a greater precision and directness thus far unseen in the Hebrew wisdom tradition. The direct application of divine qualities to Sophia is for me another

[3]The whole section on Wisdom 7:21b-8:1 is culled from my unpublished licentiate thesis entitled "The Relationship between God and the Figure of Wisdom: An Exegetical Study of Wisdom 7:22b-8:1" (Unpublished Thesis, Pontifical Gregorian University, 2011).

clear indication to what Sinnott describes as one and same reality in reference to the attribution of the same saving power to God and to Wisdom.[4] There is also an internal coherence in which this list of characteristics constructs the image of Wisdom. Some authors have analyzed the attributes and have seen pairings, word formations (such as the strong presence of alpha privatives) or alliterations as indications of this coherence. What Vílchez Líndez affirms however is not so much the intention of the author towards an individual conceptual sense for each adjective but rather that they come together to form a more collective sense.[5] Following this intuition, we shall attempt to examine them as contributing to three major themes: spirit, knowledge, and divinity. The structure of this unit may be presented in this manner:

[22] ἔστιν
γὰρ ἐν αὐτῇ πνεῦμα **νοερόν** ἅγιον
μονογενές πολυμερές
λεπτόν
εὐκίνητον τρανόν
ἀμόλυντον
σαφές ἀπήμαντον φιλάγαθον
ὀξύ
[23] ἀκώλυτον εὐεργετικόν φιλάνθρωπον
βέβαιον ἀσφαλές ἀμέριμνον
παντοδύναμον πανεπίσκοπον
καὶ διὰ πάντων
χωροῦν
πνευμάτων
νοερῶν *καθαρῶν*
λεπτοτάτων

[4]Alice M. Sinnott, *The Personification of Wisdom* (London: Routledge, 2017), 163-164.

[5]Cf. Jose Vílchez Líndez, *Sabiduría* (Madrid: Editorial Verbo Divino, 1991), 258.

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The above division into three columns or groupings corresponding to the proposed themes reveals three inclusions: πνεῦμα…πνευμάτων; νοερόν/λεπτόν …νοερῶν/λεπτοτάτων[6]; ἅγιον…καθαρῶν (all in v.22 … v.23).

1.1 Sophia and the Spirit

To proceed with an interpretation of the twenty-one attributes necessitates an explanation of the statement that introduces them: "For in her, there is a spirit" (7:22b). On the one hand, "spirit" in this statement can be understood to mean an innate quality of Wisdom; her spirit. On the other, "spirit" can be understood as an entity that dwells in her; the "Spirit" that is in her. In examining the uses of πνεῦμα in the book of Wisdom, it has been observed that it occurs 20 times with the following distribution in meanings:

Spirit of God	Spirit of Sophia	Human Spirit	Wind
1:5	1:6	2:3	5:11
1:7	7:7	5:3	5:23
9:17	7:22	7:23	7:20
11:20 (2x)		15:11.16	13:2
12:1		16:14	17:17

It is instructive to see the context in which the nine occurrences are used as the spirit of God and the spirit of Sophia.

In 1:4-7, Wisdom, spirit and God are tightly enmeshed so that it is difficult to take one of the three apart. Verses 4 and 5 forms a parallelism: Wisdom not entering where there is deceit and the holy spirit fleeing from deceit. This parallelism seems to imply that Wisdom and spirit are one. Moreover in v.6 Sophia is described as a "spirit friendly towards humans"

[6]Cf. Helmut Engel, "'Was Weisheit ist und wie sie entstand, will ich verkünden,'" in *Lehrerin der Gerechtigkeit,* edited by Georg Hentschel and Erich Zenger, *Erforder Theologicsche Schriften* 19: 75.

(φιλάνθρωπον πνεῦμα). In the same verse, the firmness of Wisdom on blasphemers is related to God who is the one who knows what lies in their hearts. In a way this also implies that Sophia knows what God knows. Verse 7 indicates that the "spirit" being talked about in verses 5 and 6 is that of the Lord. This forms a chain of close relationships or synonymity of terms.[7] Both ἅγιον and φιλάνθρωπον are among the attributes enumerated in 7:22c-23.

Wis 7:7 further strengthens the argument of interrelation seen above. It is God[8] invoked by Solomon and yet it is the spirit of Wisdom who responds. Again in 9:17, Wisdom and the Holy Spirit are sent by God to enlighten man. Is what we see a literary device that expands a single simple statement into a compound form? Perhaps "Who have learned your counsel, unless you have given wisdom and sent your holy spirit from on high?" simply means "Who have learned your counsel, unless you have sent your spirit of wisdom from on high?" C. Larcher calls this *une identification pratique*[9] between divine Wisdom and the divine Spirit. What he observes is a comparison already made between Wisdom and the Spirit in various O.T. texts which is further developed in the book of Wisdom. The result is an assimilation of activities which the Spirit has by Sophia. An example is the similarity between the exhortation to the King in Wis 6:22ff. and Solomon's desire for Wisdom in Wisdom 8 in comparison to Isa 11:2-8. What is attributed to the Spirit in Isaiah is attributed to Sophia in the book of Wisdom.

[7]Joseph R. Dodson, *The "Powers" of Personification: Rhetorical Purpose in the 'Book of Wisdom' and the Letter to the Romans* (Boston: Walter De Gruyter, 2008), 101.

[8]Note that "God" is the implied addressee of the call but is not explicitly stated in the LXX text. However, the NRSV translates so that the text goes "I called on God, …".

[9]Chrysostome Larcher, *Études sur le livre de la Sagesse* (Paris : Gabalda, 1969), 364.

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There is a certain amount of ambiguity in the πνεῦμα found in 11:20. First of all, most translations of the phrase ὑπὸ πνεύματος δυνάμεώς σου express the idea "by the breath of your power." The NAB differs with its rendition "by your mighty spirit." This translation underlines the power of the spirit that acts and states it in a direct manner. The more common translation may come to the same meaning using a metaphorical interpretation of the expression. Second, using NAB's translation, the spirit is attributed to God as the second person singular addressed in this verse refers back to Wis 10:20 where Lord is the logical antecedent. However, if the common translation were followed, an ambiguity arises as "the breath of your power" recalls Wis 7:25 describing Sophia as "the exhalation of the power of God." This usage mirrors the O.T. description of God's breath as רוּחַ or wind manifesting God's "terrifying majesty."[10]

Due to this ambiguity, one is encouraged to think that God and Sophia are but one reality and that a defining aspect of this one reality is the spirit. The spirit of Sophia is the same as the spirit of God. Thus, when most scholars refer to the twenty-one attributes as "attributes of Wisdom" even if those attributes are grammatically attached as modifiers of "spirit," the understanding is that spirit is an innate quality of Wisdom and not a separate entity in itself. From this perspective, Sophia can be viewed as spirit (Wis 1:6) or imbued by the divine Spirit (Wis 7:22b). This explains how she is capable of all that is attributed to her and all that she is capable of

[10]Cf. Rainer Albertz and Claus Westermann, "רוּחַ *rûah spirit,*" *in Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (TLOT), edited by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, translated by Mark E. Biddle, 3 vols (Peabody, Hendrickson, 1997), 1206; Larcher, *Études sur le livre de la Sagesse,* 365: "On pourrait songer à une simple imitation des textes bibli-ques parlant de la rouah qui est en Dieu, qu'il possède: à l'instar de Dieu, la Sagesse possèderait, elle aussi, une *rouah*, un pneuma."

doing. The spirit, through which her attributes are conceived, "takes care of explaining how Wisdom can communicate all the sciences to Solomon."[11] That Wisdom is spirit is shown likewise by the attributes "mobile" and her being able to move "through all spirits."

1.2. The Incisive Knowledge of Sophia

Among the twenty-one attributes, the first in the list is νοερός. It is also used as a term of inclusion reoccurring at the end of the list and thus marking vv.22b-23 as a sub-unit of the pericope. This precedence and use of the word as a term of inclusion implies the overarching characteristic of Wisdom. Whether both were deliberately devised by the author or unconsciously positioned, it is undeniable that when one talks or thinks of Wisdom, the first thought that would come to mind would be "knowledge" or its cognate concepts. The word ἅγιος which is naturally paired off with πνεῦμα and could have come before νοερός to be right beside πνεῦμα but is placed only second. This is another subtle indication that the author's interest lies in defining Sophia itself and not the spirit. Putting ἅγιος next to πνεῦμα would have highlighted the spirit and rallied all the attributes to itself rather than behind Sophia.[12]

[11]Larcher, *Études sur le livre de la Sagesse,* 367.

[12]Cf. Larcher, *Études sur le livre de la Sagesse,* 365: "Ainsi, on peut mettre aisément au compte des influences bibliques les textes (surtout VII, 7 et IX, 17) où la sagesse principe supérieur de connaissance s'identifie avec un pneuma; sans oublier cependant que les milieux grecs n'avaient cessé d'attribuer à une inspiration ou à un souffle divins les facultés les plus mystérieuses ou les plus étranges de l'esprit de l'homme. De plus, l'auteur veut insister sur le fait que la Sagesse est communiquée ou agit sous la forme d'un pneuma, tandis que les textes bibliques antérieurs voient surtout en elle un effet de l'Esprit divin (cf. Is. xi, 2)."

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The immediate context yields a very rich number of images that links to Wisdom's broad "intelligence." Just before the enumeration in v.22a, Wisdom is depicted by Solomon as the one who taught (ἐδίδαξεν) him. Teaching even in the layman's situation presupposes a minimum of intellectual capability on the part of the teacher. More so is required of Wisdom who initiates Solomon to the secrets of the universe. A beautiful parallelism shows how this attribute is divine and not merely human in Wis 7:7:

> Therefore I prayed, and understanding was given me;
> I called on [God], and the spirit of wisdom came to me.

Praying is obviously "calling on [God]" and the gift of φρόνησις is none other than the spirit of Wisdom. This understanding is elaborated further in the knowledge of things in the universe, "both what is secret and what is manifest," which is given by God but as Solomon professes, he has learned through the teaching of Sophia (Wis 7:15-22a). Wis 8:4 explains how Sophia is party to God's knowledge being his initiate. Thus, her knowledge extends to history and what comes in the future, her ability to discern through riddles, signs and wonders, and the inner working of the seasons (Wis 8:8). In Solomon's prayer for Wisdom, he says that "she knows and understands all things and she will guide me wisely in my actions". This all-knowing attribute of Sophia establishes her νοερός characteristic to be beyond the limitations of mere human intellect.

This intelligence is further distinguished by qualities of discernment and clarity. Discernment is shown in the attributes subtle (λεπτός) and keen (ὀξύς) while clarity in τρανός and σαφής. The ability to see different levels of reality and the sharpness by which that is accomplished is apparent in her dispensation of the virtues (8:7), her ability to understand and solve riddles (8:8), and the good counsel she lends to the king

(8:9). The penetrating depth with which ὀξύς characterizes Sophia's understanding and knowledge of things is further crystallized with clarity. In most translations, τρανός and σαφής are rendered as clear and distinct. The first is translated by Winston as "lucid" with his indication of how this term is used by Philo to mean clear impressions and in an Isis Aretalogy as referring to clear knowledge.[13] The word τρανός appears only three times in the LXX (in Wis 7:22, 10:21, and Isa 35:6). In both the other occurrences, it modifies tongue thus rendering the idea "clarity of speech". While it is not totally impossible to apply this meaning to our text, it must be recalled that Sophia does not speak in the book of Wisdom and thus renders this meaning a weak option. The interpretation of Winston is preferred since "lucidity or clarity of knowledge" fits better in the context of 7:22b.

1.3 The Holy, One and All-Powerful God in Sophia

In the structural analysis above, the third column reveals an inclusion of the pair ἅγιον–καθαρὸν. While the more commonly cited inclusions are those of same words, here we propose an inclusion composed of two different words but related terms. According to Procksch ἅγιος becomes commonly used only in the Hellenistic period. A lot of this usage is seen in the LXX thus it is undeniable that the term received much influence from Hebrew and any discussion must refer to the Hebrew term קדשׁ. Often, material relation is seen between holiness (קדשׁ) and purity (טהר). The first is the cultic term while the second is the ritual term[14]. In

[13]Cf. David S. Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 181.

[14]Cf. Otto Procksch, "*Ἅγιος*," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament I* (TDNT), edited by Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, Gerhard Friedrich, 10 vols (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1977), 89.

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the Akkadian and Arabic derivations, the stative verb form means both "to be holy" and "to be pure."[15]

The word "holy" in the Old Testament carries with it not only the inherent purity that is asserted above. Above this basic relationship is the word's assignation to divinity and all that relates to the divine. For example, in the LXX, ἱερόν is never used to refer to the temple sanctuary. Instead, τὸ ἅγιον or τὰ ἅγιον is used to indicate that it belongs to YHWH and not to a pagan god.[16] Holiness carries with it also various connotations of divine "power and significance"[17] (2 Sam 6:6f; Isa 6:3). This divine might is expressed by the all-encompassing characteristics of παντοδύναμον and πανεπίσκοπον in v.23. The power and the image of one who oversees is best pictured by Isaiah's vision in the temple of God seated on a throne high above and his robes covering the temple (Isa 6:1).

At the center of the inclusion are five attributes that flow logically from the idea of purity. Basic to the conception of purity is being free from any form of blemish or defilement (ἀμόλυντον). This is followed by ἀπήμαντον which can have both passive and active connotations. In a passive sense, it directly supports the idea of purity by meaning that it cannot undergo corruption or mutation. In terms of action this bears a predisposition to do no harm.[18] Opposite to doing what is harmful is embracing or loving what is good (φιλάγαθον) and actively working for the good (εὐεργετικόν). C. Larcher affirms that the word φιλάγαθον has "two probable applications: a natural inclination of the spirit towards

[15]Cf. Hans-Peter Müller, "קדשׁ *holy,*" *TLOT III,* 1104.

[16]Cf. Procksch, "*Ἅγιος*" 95.

[17]Here we see a dynamistic concept of holiness (cf. Müller, "קדשׁ *holy,*" 1110).

[18]Cf. Giuseppe *Scarpat, Libro della Sapienza* (Brescia, Paideia, 1989),119.

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the good comparable to that which inspires virtue, thus the spirit is holy or the emphasis is on its benevolence, because it wants and seeks only the good of creatures in its universal activity"[19]. This inclination towards the good of creatures can be manifested in particular as a beneficent stance towards human beings (φιλάνθρωπον) or what some would translate "humane" and yet others "friendly to humans."

The attributes that precede and follow the central attributes seem to unify them under the unique (μονογενές) and yet multi-faceted (πολυμερές) character of the divine. This singularity is also supported by three other qualities of solidity (βέβαιον), confidence (ἀσφαλές), and security (ἀμέριμνον). Even from lexical point of view, the presence of four *hapax* terms among the attributes in this group helps to highlight the uniqueness of that which is being described.

2. Sophia in Motion (7:24)

This verse is carefully worded so that it creates a very smooth transition from vv.22b-23 to vv.25-26. In this verse there is an intensification of two attributes already mentioned in the previous verses —mobile and undefiled— putting Wisdom now "directly in the divine medium".[20] Within itself, a two-part structure is evident:

[24] πάσης	γὰρ	κινήσεως κινητικώτερον	σοφία
διήκει	δὲ	καὶ χωρεῖ διὰ πάντων διὰ	τὴν καθαρειότητα

The γάρ marks a delineation signaling the end of the previous section and the beginning of a new one. H. Engel sees the separation of this verse from the previous but at the same time affirms a clear association because of the similarity in content between v.23de (καὶ διὰ πάντων χωροῦν [πνευμάτων…]

[19]Larcher, *Livre de la Sagesse,* 487.

[20]Cf. Vílchez Líndez, *Sabiduría,* 259-260.

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καθαρῶν) and v.24b (καὶ χωρεῖ διὰ πάντων [διὰ τὴν] καθαρότητα)[21]. In fact in v.24a γάρ also flags the reader to an accompanying change in the subject. The "spirit" is left behind and now Sophia is directly treated as the subject. In the same manner the δὲ signals a break dividing v.24b from v.24a. The subject continues to be Sophia but another aspect regarding her activity independent of v.24a is presented in v.24b.

With this syntactic formation, Larcher suggests a separate interpretation of the first stich from the second stich.[22] His perspective is focused on explaining "motion" in v.24a and shifting to "purity" in v.24b. There is a validity to this approach specially when dealing with the philosophical school that sees motion as a form of imperfection and therefore inconsistent with other transcendental qualities. What Larcher outlines is an explanation of Sophia's motion as a mode of her perfection indicating that her movement is superior to the movement of all other beings so that she becomes the universal principle of motion and at the same time she is immediately (or simultaneously) present in all beings because of this movement. Likewise, he develops his explanation of purity as Sophia's transcendental and metaphysical nature justified by her intimate relation with God. This reference to God makes her different and superior to all other creatures of God.

This two-part, two-explanation approach is a good starting point but, in our opinion, it has to be explained as one unit. Vílchez Líndez agrees with Larcher's idea on motion and sees v.24b as a deepening and expansion of Sophia's power over beings due to her purity. He asserts that this transcendental quality introduces us to the very origin of Wisdom which is the divine. Neither does he develop an explicit unity between

[21]Cf. Engel, "Was Weisheit ist und wie sie entstand, will ich verkünden," 75.

[22]Cf. Larcher, *Livre de la Sagesse*, 493-496.

v.24a and b but what we propose as a solution may already be hinted by his understanding of v.24b as "underlining and amplification" of Sophia's power.[23]

The key to a unified explanation of v.24 is Sophia's mobility. She is seen as continually in motion in both stichs of v.24. Verse 24a qualifies this mobility as superior (shown in the comparative κινητικώτερον) over all other movements while v.24b provides the application of her mobility in the use of two verbs of motion, διήκω which means "pervade" or "extend and reach out" and χωρέω meaning "to move far and abroad". For us it is the second stich which validates Larcher's interpretation of Sophia's mobility in the first stich that "the author wanted to express in this way not only the universal causality of Wisdom, but also her immediate presence in all beings, an active and personal presence."[24]

This mobility of Sophia recalls the three attributes implying motion (εὐκίνητος, ἀκώλυτος, χωρέω) which were grouped under the spirit. From that connection with the spirit, the author shifts to divinity, the other category we created by reasoning that the superiority of Sophia's mobility is caused by her purity καθαρειότης[25] (here recalling the attributes ἅγιος and ἀμόλυντος).

Pulling back to the larger picture, it is to be noticed that v.24a forms an inclusion of sorts with v.22a. While v.22a does not technically belong to our pericope, it supports the idea of v.24 as a transitional verse.

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[23]Cf. Vílchez Líndez, *Sabiduría,* 260.

[24]Larcher, *Livre de la Sagesse,* 495.

[25]This word appears in the form *καθαρότης* in *Codices Vaticanus, Alexandrinus,* papyrus fragment of the Sinaiticus corrector, and minuscule manuscript 253. The difference is orthographic and does not affect the meaning of the word.

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v.22a – ἡ **γὰρ** πάντων τεχνῖτις ἐδίδαξέν με **σοφία**

v.24a – πάσης **γὰρ** κινήσεως κινητικώτερον **σοφία**

This is something already seen right at the beginning of the book where in a similar structure Sophia is described as a "friendly spirit:

1:6a – φιλάνθρωπον **γὰρ** πνεῦμα σοφία

The "outer frame" formed by verses 22a and 24a, according to Neher provides a mode of inserting the *pneuma* related attributes as something that operates within Wisdom. It corresponds exactly to v.22b, "there is a spirit in her," animating and determining Sophia.[26] Thus this structure provides a connection for all the spirit attributes to the main subject who is Sophia.

3. The Five-fold Metaphor on Wisdom (7:25-26)

This unit of the pericope presents the closest and most direct link between Sophia and God. Sophia is now presented with five divine characteristics without the mediation of the spirit as was done in v.22b-23. A simple but well-designed structure is discernible:

25 ἀτμὶς γάρ ἐστιν τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ δυνάμεως
καὶ
ἀπόρροια τῆς τοῦ παντοκράτορος δόξης εἰλικρινής
διὰ τοῦτο οὐδὲν μεμιαμμένον εἰς αὐτὴν
παρεμπίπτει
26 ἀπαύγασμα γάρ ἐστιν φωτὸς ἀϊδίου
καὶ
ἔσοπτρον

[26]Cf. Martin Neher, *Wesen und Wirken der Weisheit in der Sapientia Salomonis* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 114.

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ἀκηλίδωτον τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνεργείας
καὶ
εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτου

For ease of identification, we have aligned to the left all the adjectives that introduce the divine attributes. All exhibit the feminine ending in the nominative (functioning as predicate nominative) in reference to a feminine subject or antecedent. Aligned towards the right are the divine attributes all in genitive form as extensions of the predicate nominative.

Sophia is the implied subject with both γάρ ἐστιν introducing the metaphors referring back to the nearest logical antecedent in v.24a (γάρ…σοφία). Each of the five metaphors is marked by the γάρ ἐστιν and the καί. In v.25c, an extended explanation of the second metaphor is inserted. This interrupts the flow of the enumeration for which, in our opinion, the author necessarily had to terminate the sentence there and restart the list with another γάρ ἐστιν. Continuing with a καί in v.26a would have left the three remaining metaphors hanging. Another possible explanation for the division of metaphors between verses 25 and 26 is the affinity of the adjectives used. The first two have similarities just as the last three seem to go together.

In these two verses, the author engages the reader into a graphic description of Sophia. The use of "metaphors, not pure concepts, so that what is meant is included in the symbolism of images [like] origination, emanation, reflection, mirror and image,"[27] is a key to understanding this unit as an expression of the Sophia-God relationship. This symbolic language is the closest the author could have expressed the idea but,

[27] "...metáforas, no puros conceptos, por lo que lo significado queda englobado en el simbolismo de las imágenes efluvio, emanación, reflejo, espejo e imagen...". Vílchez Líndez, *Sabiduría*, 260.

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in a way, the last verses (7:27-8:1) give us the feeling that he is not altogether satisfied hence another round of descriptions. However, this process lends to a certain clarity in the explicitation of the lady Wisdom's identity. A. Niccacci's insight gives a global understanding of the five metaphors at hand:

With respect to the older texts, the Book of Wisdom explicitates the relationship God-Wisdom. She is not only the firstborn (Pro 8) that emanated from the mouth of God (Sir 24), but is his image; she is not only known by the Creator, and known by him only (Gb 28). Rather she knows the created.[28]

3.1 God's δύναμις and δόξα (v.25)

Sophia comes from God. She is ἀτμίς of the Lord above all and ἀπόρροια of the Almighty. Both adjectives give us a sense of Wisdom deriving or originating from God. One is in the sense that she issues forth (effluvium) from God's power while the other pictures her flowing out (effluence) from the glory of the Almighty. It is easy to visualize the movement of gas or vapor as it shoots up from the spout of a kettle with boiling water or of the continuous flow of water on the riverbed. However, with Sophia, we are confronted with a spiritual, non-visual emanation. And yet, the image captures the reality of her being continuously drawing from its source—God's power and glory—and issuing forth as she penetrates all other beings in her purity.[29]

[28]"Rispetto ai testi più antichi, il libro della Sapienza esplicita il rapporto Dio-Sapienza. Essa non è solo primogenita (Pro 8), uscita dalla bocca di Dio (Sir 24), ma è sua immagine; non è solo conosciuta dal Creatore, e da lui soltanto (Gb 28), ma conosce il creato." Alviero Niccacci, *La casa della Sapienza: Voci e volti della sapienza biblica* (Milan: Edizioni San Paolo, 1994), 155. The English translation is ours.

[29]Cf. Scarpat, *Libro della Sapienza,* 70.

Sophia is potent because it is God's power that drives her. She also exudes God's δόξης εἰλικρινής which v.25c explains is the reason why impurities cannot affect or enter her. By this time, one notes how the theme of purity recurs throughout the pericope and how it is expressed by different words: ἀμόλυν̂τον, καθαρῶν, καθαρειότητα, and here εἰλικρινής. Each word contributes to the theme a particular facet of purity. The first the idea that purity is being not defiled or blemished or not having imperfections, the second and third, cleanliness; and the fourth of not containing any foreign element. Again, the recurring insufficiency of any one singular term that can satisfactorily define or describe Sophia is brought to light. This elusiveness underlines further the mystery that shrouds her transcendental nature.

3.1. Sophia, Image of God

Reflecting (ἀπαύγασμα), mirroring (ἔσοπτρον), and imaging (εἰκὼν) divine attributes or divine action are indirect ways of saying Sophia is the image of God. In these three metaphors just as in the previous two, one realizes that dealing with or referring to a particular divine attribute forces us to grapple with the reality of God himself. What does everlasting light represent if not God who is eternal and who is light (1 Jn 1:5) of all light? When one talks of the activity of God, one cannot imagine of the activity without being conscious of the doer—that God is the protagonist of the action. The divine goodness again needs one to act it out. In each of these divine attributes, only an aspect of the divine reality is revealed or expressed and yet the totality of God is made present for he cannot be divided into parts or aspects. So too does it occur with the author's attempt to attach these qualities to Sophia.

In the first two metaphors, the continuity of the flow expresses a unity between Sophia and God. The adjectives

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of the last three metaphors, on the other hand, provide an ambiguous situation. If we take the use of image in Gen 1:27, where man is created in the image of God, it implies a certain alterity in the created in whom resides the likeness of God. But with Sophia, the existence of a separate entity reflecting divine qualities does not seem to be the function of her personification. Rather Sophia, is the Wisdom of God present through his divine attributes. Sophia, in so much as various divine attributes are attached to her, reflects, mirrors, or images only such aspects as the limitedness of human metaphors allow their expression.

4. Another Look at the Characteristics of Wisdom (7:27–8:1)

The analysis of the vocabulary of this section has revealed to us (cf. Chap. I, 3.7) that no new quality or characteristic is developed or attributed to lady Wisdom to add to those already mentioned in the two previous sections of the pericope. They simply reiterate those previously mentioned. What is therefore the function of these last five verses? Of the three major sections, this is the longest composed of 12 stichs (the first with only 9 stichs, the second with 6 stichs, and the transitional verse with 2 stichs). Observing the structure below, we can safely assume that no evident pattern or mode of arrangement presents itself as contrasted to the previous sections examined:

7[27] μία
δὲ οὖσα πάντα δύναται
καὶ μένουσα ἐν αὑτῇ, τὰ πάντα καινίζει
καὶ κατὰ γενεὰς
εἰς ψυχὰς ὁσίας μεταβαίνουσα
φίλους θεοῦ

καὶ προφήτας κατασκευάζει
[28] οὐθὲν
γὰρ ἀγαπᾷ ὁ θεὸς εἰ μὴ τὸν σοφίᾳ συνοικοῦ
ντα
[29] ἔστιν
γὰρ αὔτη εὐπρεπεστέρα ἡλίου
kai. u`pe.r pa/san a;strwn qe,sin
φωτὶ συγκρινομένη εὑρίσκεται προτέρα
[30] τοῦτο μὲν
γὰρ διαδέχεται νύξ
σοφίας
δὲ οὐ κατισχύει κακία
8[1] διατείνει
δὲ ἀπὸ πέρατος ἐπὶ πέρας εὐρώστως
καὶ διοικεῖ τὰ πάντα χρηστῶς

The first section presented a list of attributes by enumeration. The second section presented five metaphors with basic parallelism in its structure. What we see in 7:27–8:1 instead is a free-flowing discussion which now takes Sophia's attributes at random and shows how they allow her to act in all.

This section is introduced with a subtitle by some commentators. Larcher calls it "the universal activity of Wisdom."[30] Vílchez Líndez, on the other hand, calls it "the external activity of Wisdom." He explains how the author moves from an inner exploration of the divine attributes to Wisdom's use of these same attributes "*ad extra*, i.e. in the universe and in our history, especially in the intimacy with the just."[31] Winston offers a subtitle for the twenty-one attributes and then includes this section under the subtitle "Five-

[30]Larcher, *Livre de la Sagesse,* 505.

[31]Cf. Vílchez Líndez, *Sabiduría,* 262.

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fold metaphor describing Wisdom's essence and her unique efficacy" without explaining.[32]

We see two possible themes that can be developed from this section. Verses 27-28 presents the transformative effect of Sophia on all things and all persons so that they are brought closer to God. Verses 29-30 develop the theme of light and darkness. The final verse, 8:1, is a summative statement.

4.1 Sophia: God's Salvific Wisdom (vv.27-28)

In these two verses there is no direct and explicit mention of Sophia as savior. We will find only in later verses such as "and thus the paths of those on earth were set right, and people were taught what pleases you, and were saved by wisdom" (9:18), "when the earth was flooded because of him, wisdom again saved it" (10:4), and "Wisdom rescued from troubles those who served her" (10:9), where Wisdom is explicitly in the act of saving.[33] What we want to assert here is that vv.27-28 set the foundation for Wisdom's salvific claims especially in the latter part of the book. Sinnott cites Wisdom's power to renew things as the reason why she can make holy souls friends of God and the prophets (v.27) and then she moves on to say:

> Wisdom not only does deeds associated with YHWH, but she speaks words that have God like qualities. This female personification of the creative and saving power of God in the world, is active and present in creation, all-knowing, all-powerful, omnipresent, renews all things, works in history to save her chosen people, guides and protects them through their struggles and crises, and carries out functions elsewhere attributed to YHWH.[34]

[32]Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon,* 184.

[33]The verb used in these three verses is sw,|zw "rescue, liberate, save".

[34]Sinnott, *The Personification of Wisdom,* 163.

The verb καινίζω "make things new" coupled with Sophia's πάντα δύναται "ability to do all things" lends to a transformative action—a cleansing that renews things. But the verse moves on to indicate that once things have been renewed, she also can do this to people, making them holy and moving them into this state of holiness, lead them to be friends of God and of prophets.

It is important to note that v.28 holds a key element to Sophia's salvific action. She does not only affect the lives of people, she dwells in them. The companionship that describes this indwelling is akin to a spousal relationship as expressed by the verb συνοικέω. At a deeper level, this cohabitation of Wisdom and the just is the realization of a community of life where the expression of love is freely given because the relation of intimacy is already established.[35] In the end, what is salvation if not that one is brought to this intimate union with God.

4.2 Sophia: The Light that Overshadows Darkness (vv.29-30)

Sophia is the reflection of everlasting light (v. 26a) and we have argued above that this statement could be interpreted so that Sophia herself is everlasting light. This argument is supported and made even clearer by vv.29-30 which compares Sophia to sources of light and light itself. As the everlasting light, she is more beautiful than the sun and she is seen high above all the stars—she is the brightest of all light. For Larcher, the introduction of beauty here reflects not only a physical beauty but one which is transcendent. Because of this incomparable beauty, he says, Wisdom becomes most desirable for companionship. This maintains the link to the previous stich. The stars are often considered mysterious objects often

[35]Cf. Vílchez Líndez, *Sabiduría*, 263-264.

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admired and contemplated upon. For Sophia to be above the stars reinforces such desirable and enticing beauty.[36]

Just as the concept of Wisdom as savior develops more clearly in succeeding texts, the light-darkness antithesis develops also much later in the book (Wis 17:1–18:4). Vílchez Líndez explores these oppositions and says that "evening is the true kingdom of darkness, an apt moment for great misfortunes."[37] A parallelism is formed between vv.30a and 30b where light in v.30a (represented by τοῦτο) is parallel to Sophia in v.30b. At the same time night (νύξ) in v.30a is parallel to evil (κακία) in v.30b. Because Wisdom is the greater light, evil that lurks in the darkness of night will never prevail. Wisdom is light that shines in the darkness dispelling it. Thus, the metaphor of light can also be a parallel to purity. While darkness or evil cannot overpower light, so too that which is defiled or stained is renewed by the purity and holiness of Wisdom.

4.3 A closure (8:1)

"She extends from end to end with vigor and administers all things in proper manner" is a fitting summary of this pericope which attempts at describing lady Wisdom. The first idea that is put across is the breadth of her dominion as expressed by ἀπὸ πέρατος ἐπὶ πέρας literally "from end to end". End here is in the sense of limit or boundary thus the NRSV for example renders it as "from one end of the earth to the other". In other words, she is omnipresent expressing in it all her potentialities such as mobility, freedom of action, omnipotence, universal concern, and penetrating all spirits. This stretching of her reach is manifested εὐρώστως "with vigor" or "strongly" which implies "mightily" (evoking the

[36]Cf. Larcher, *Livre de la Sagesse,* 512-513.

[37]Vílchez Líndez, "La luz en el libro de la Sabiduría", 285.

παντοκράτωρ). Finally, that she administers all things well underlines her love for the good, beneficence, steadfastness, and universal concern. What 8:1 presents is "the active and permanent influence of Wisdom" and "the attribution to Wisdom of the function of universal governance or of Providence. Something which in other parts is a function exercised by God himself."[38]

Conclusion

Our pericope is seen as a three-part presentation of lady Wisdom. Many entitle it as the *Nature of Wisdom* or *In Praise of Wisdom* alluding to the characterization of lady Wisdom or the unveiling of her identity. Intensification is employed in the exposition of this "unveiling". The first section reveals the raw attributes of Wisdom by defining her "spirit" with a list of these qualities. The second section brings the qualities of Wisdom to a higher level of intensity by the use of metaphors and symbolic language. Also, the author shifts from talking about the "spirit" of Wisdom to talking about her and her divine origin. In the third section, all of the characteristics and metaphors of Wisdom from the first and second sections are re-elaborated to reflect not only her nature and identity but now to present her activity and effect upon the universe. Running throughout this three-tiered unfolding of lady Wisdom's identity is a deepening awareness of an increasing closeness between lady Wisdom and God. At a certain point in the pericope, there is a merging of identities so that Sophia's actions become extensions of God's actions. Sophia becomes the mediator of God's presence in the universe.

In the New Testament, much is said of the Father "sending" the Son to the world. The Word that becomes flesh

[38]Vílchez Líndez, *Sabiduría*, 264.

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is central to the Johannine theology and is explored in various ways. But an important aspect is the Father-Son relationship expressed: "I and the Father are one" (Jn 10:30); "I am in the Father and the Father in me" (Jn 14:10). In this sending and incarnation, God is ever present in the universe. One possible conclusion from this is that Sophia represents an earlier form of "sending" that satisfied the need to concretize God's presence. Thus, an abstract concept containing divine aspects took on the personification of lady Wisdom. The figure of a woman stands as the expression of God's self-manifestation. The "incarnation" is the entrance of the divine into human history in flesh and bones. What may be amazing is that later theologians, to grapple with the reality of the incarnation of Jesus, have looked into Sophia and found some needed illumination into the mystery. The Word-made-flesh, Jesus, came into the world through a woman, Mary. In his great wisdom, God manifests his being in both feminine and masculine realities.