

14th Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies

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Working Title: Renewing and Reforming Wisdom in Wisdom of Solomon

I. INTRODUCTION

The week of July 5, 2018 the Episcopal Church in the US debated and then voted to revise its Book of Common Prayer to include more expansive images and language for God. Needless to say, it has been contentious. I experienced the creation of the UMC hymnal, which was a revision of the former Methodist hymnal. Need to say, it was contentious. And then there's the UMC debate over how it should address LGBTQ issues, which has been beyond contentious. In each situation there are predictable camps: those who want no change, those willing to accept some changes, and those wanting radical changes.

Spring semester I taught Second Temple Literature. We see in the literature of that period the various ways the post-exilic community struggled to make sense of life in diaspora and to what extent to resist or accommodate¹ to Hellenization. The literary responses include the writings of Philo, who is most assimilated to Hellenism; a new genre, apocalypticism, that supported resistance even to death; rewritten scripture like Jubilees, retelling the story for a new time that emphasized adherence to Torah; DSS texts that created new communities, new rules, and new practices apart from Jerusalem. There aren't always clear lines demarcating resistance and accommodation. My favorite example is 4 Maccabees, the story of a mother and her seven sons who are gruesomely tortured by Antiochus IV Epiphanes because they refuse to eat pork. Yet the story is written in elegant Greek and to uphold the Greek virtue of reason. In addition to tensions with outside groups, the literature also wrestles with tensions within Ioudaismos.² These tensions are similar to the current debates, there were some who wanted to draw the circle tightly and limit who is to be included among the Ioudaioi and what constituted Ioudaismos, some were willing to accommodate somewhat, and some were more willing to accommodate to aspects of the Gentile world.

Without any standardized “canon,” I would be hard pressed to categorize these as renewal, reform, or revival. Instead I find myself thinking in terms of adaptation or upgrades. I’m thinking of adaptation as humans, animals, and plants are finding ways to adapt to climate change. And I’m thinking of upgrades in terms of the infernal and interminable upgrades to software and hardware systems that are forced upon us because someone decided a change was needed. One of the adaptations and upgrades that took place in the Second Temple period was to the older wisdom literature of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes.

A noted feature of the older books is that there is no mention of the themes particular to ancient Israel from the historical and prophetic literature. There are no covenants, temple, priests, nation, Davidic king, or Torah. The book Sirach, while originally written in Hebrew in Judea, was translated into Greek for the diaspora community in Egypt sometime between 190-185 BCE according to the Prologue. Wisdom of Solomon was probably composed in Greek in Alexandria around the early first

¹ I'm using accommodation just for brevity. A more nuanced position is that of John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE-117CE)*, (Univ. of Cal. Press, 1999), 92-98. He distinguishes a range of positions on assimilation (social integration), acculturation (language/education), and accommodation (use of acculturation).

² Because “Jew” and “Judaism” are anachronistic for the period and because of the history of anti-Semitism, I am following the suggestion of Kohn and Moore to use the Greek words and leave them untranslated. Thus, Ioudaismos (“Judaism”) and Ioudaioi (“Jews”). See Risa Levitt Kohn and Rebecca Moore, *A Portable God: The Origin of Judaism and Christianity* (Rowman & Littlefield; Lanham, MD, 2007), 57-58.

century BCE.³ One of the adaptations of these books is to the Greek language, either translated from Hebrew as Sirach was or originally written in Greek as WisSol was. An upgrade, if you will, is that both books incorporate the particular back into the general world view of wisdom. I describe Sirach to my students as Proverbs 2.0, proverbial literature that reflects the Hellenistic context. Wisdom of Solomon is the 2.0 version of the skeptical wisdom texts; there are similarities to both Ecclesiastes and Job in that WisSol also asks the question of divine justice and whether God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked.

Because I find the Institute's theme to be somewhat opaque, I borrowed language from other working groups in my proposal. The first borrowing is from the Interreligious Studies working group. Their call notes that Interreligious Studies "needs to explore the intertextual and intercultural makeup of the Christian scripture and the faith it witnesses to, recognizing that Christianity from the initial stages was profoundly affected by Judaism and that the global spread of Christianity resulted in intercultural interpretations of the Gospel message." I would add that Christianity was also profoundly affected by Hellenism and that the "intertextual and intercultural makeup of ... scripture" started long before Christianity. My interpretation of their statement is that if we see how the Bible itself engages in intercultural interpretation, then we might better understand our own intercultural interpretations. Because I'm working on a commentary of Wisdom of Solomon, I'm drawing from my work on that to demonstrate how the personified figure of wisdom, Sophia, is influenced by the Greco-Roman form of the Egyptian goddess Isis.

The second borrowing is from the Worship and Spirituality working group. That group asks how do "the three "chief means [of grace]"—prayer, searching the scriptures, and the Lord's Supper—contribute to renewal and revival? How do they envision and practice God's desire for our transformation and the flourishing of humanity?" Wisdom of Solomon is also interested in the transformation of his community. In a context where keeping the traditional Jewish "means of grace" (Sabbath observance, circumcision, and kosher laws) was less fraught than in Judea, he developed a new "means of grace," that was more suited to the educated context of Alexandria. The author sets forth a plan of education for becoming wise. The author develops a pedagogy to teach readers how to do this through the observation of the world, development of a personal and intimate relationship with Sophia, and finally a move to a kind of mystical union with Sophia through prayer.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Ioudaioi in Jerusalem and Judea were challenged under Hellenistic rule. One challenge was the constant battle between Ptolemies and Seleucids to lay claim to the strip of land on the eastern Mediterranean. The Seleucids finally won control of the region in 198 BCE. While Antiochus III allowed the Ioudaioi to live according to their ancestral laws, his successor, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, adopted a platform of complete Hellenization. When you read the texts of the Second Temple period from Judea, it is clear that issues of identity are front and center. What do you do when the Greek king says, "Be Greek or die!"? (1-2 Macc). How do you know when you're "Jewish" and not Gentile? One response was to double down on Torah observance, in particular keeping the sabbath, circumcision, and keeping kosher. These were not the only areas focused on, but they were easily observable identity markers. The Qumran sectarian documents focus not only on observing the boundaries of Torah, but also on creating rigid boundaries for the community that must also be observed.

There are more gaps in our knowledge of life for Ioudaioi in Ptolemaic Egypt. Writings that

³ Most scholars argue that WisSol was written later in the early Roman period, possibly as late as 41 CE. I am persuaded by Horbury that to the extent that we can identify influence of WisSol in Romans, the text had to have existed long enough for it to both travel to Jerusalem and to have obtained a level of authority that Paul would be influenced by it. William Horbury, "The Christian use and the Jewish origins of Wisdom of Solomon," in John Day, et al., editors, *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honor of J. A. Emerton* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 182-196.

come from Egypt (biblical and non-biblical) and archaeological evidence paint a different picture in Egypt in general and in cosmopolitan Alexandria in particular. Unlike the near constant battles in Judea and the oppression of the Seleucids, Ioudaioi were more thoroughly integrated into Hellenistic society than in Judea. We know that Ioudaioi served in Ptolemaic armies, at various levels of the Hellenistic administration, and actively participated in trade. While they lived primarily in the “Jewish Quarter” of Alexandria, they were not restricted to that one area. They governed their own affairs and were able to establish their own religious institutions, including synagogues. We know from inscriptions that some synagogues had royal patronage, which meant they were comfortable in giving honor to both the Most High God and to the Gentile rulers. Names from funerary inscriptions show a mixture of Greek, Jewish, and Egyptian names within households. In Alexandria, those Ioudaioi associated with the administration had access to the gymnasium and other Hellenic cultural traditions. In the identifiable Ioudaioi writings there is less overt hostility to Hellenism. The most hostile text might be *Joseph and Asenath*, which upholds traditional values of Ioudaismos. Joseph is especially hostile to Egyptian animal worship, which is also an element in WisSol (15:18-16:1). However, ridicule of Egyptian animal worship was a trope throughout the ancient. There appears to be less of the traditionalist vs. modernist debate than was seen in Judea. Although they did not have full autonomy under the Ptolemies, they lived life relatively autonomously and were a part of the life of Alexandria.⁴ In Gruen’s language, “This was symbiosis, not syncretism.”⁵

This situation would change once control shifted from the Greeks to the Romans, which resulted in changes in taxation and citizenship definitions that were detrimental to the Ioudaioi community. Tensions erupted in the form of riots against the Ioudaioi in Alexandria in 38 CE and 40 CE, which ultimately changed the lives of Ioudaioi in Alexandria forever. I do not see evidence of these later conflicts in WisSol, despite scholars’ efforts to date WisSol to this period (see footnote 3). While life was hardly free from conflict, even under the relatively more benign Ptolemaic rule (as is evident in WisSol), the life lessons of WisSol do not reflect a situation of intense persecution.

III. BORROWING #1

A. UPGRADING WISDOM

My first Oxford Institute my paper was on the personification of wisdom (Hokmah חכמה) in Proverbs. Since the Institute Theme was Trinity, Community, and Power my focus was the relationship of Hokmah⁶ to God and to the sage (humans), primarily using a literary approach and a feminist hermeneutic.

Both Sirach and WisSol upgrade personified Wisdom, who in Greek becomes Sophia (σοφία). Because my focus is on WisSol, I’ll just say this briefly about Sirach. There is very little Hellenistic influence on Sophia beyond the use of the Greek language for translation. One adaptation to Sophia is the incorporation of aspects of the Mosaic covenant. In ch. 1, though the basic picture of Hokmah is familiar, Sirach adds in v. 26,⁷ “If you desire Sophia, keep the commandments, and the Lord will lavish her upon you.”

The main adaptation occurs in ch. 24. First, Sirach associates Sophia with the tabernacle tradition. It is Sophia who comes to “dwell” (tabernacle, tent) among the people in Zion (Sir 24:8, 10-

⁴ Summarized from Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002. 67-68.

⁵ Ibid., 68.

⁶ I tend to use Hokmah when referring to personified wisdom in Proverbs and Sophia when referring to personified wisdom in Sirach and WisSol. I use Hokmah Sophia to refer to the tradition of personified wisdom as a whole. I’d be interested in knowing whether this works for you or if you have other suggestions on how to distinguish between personified wisdom as a whole and in the Hebrew and Greek language literature in particular.

⁷ Biblical references are to NRSV unless otherwise indicated.

11). Eventually Sirach associates Sophia with Torah (24:23). The implication of ch. 24 is to make clear that Torah, just like Sophia, is God's preexistent and eternal creation, which has always been and always will be. Torah is how the Ioudaioi in Hellenistic Jerusalem know that God does indeed dwell among them, which was the same aim as the tabernacle (Exod 17:7; 25:8; 29:45-46).

WisSol adapts Sophia by also incorporating aspects of Israel's particular history and themes. This is most evident in the recital of Israel's history in ch. 10, which tells the story from Adam to the exodus only it is Sophia, and not YHWH who saves.⁸

Unlike Sirach, WisSol specifically incorporates Hellenistic vocabulary, literary devices, and philosophy throughout. With respect to Sophia, one of the new additions from earlier iterations is the list of twenty-one attributes in 7:22-23. The listing of attributes is similar to other Greek writings. The Stoic philosopher, Cleanthes, assigned twenty-six characteristics to "the good."⁹ In a hymn to Zeus, Cleanthes described the god as "many named" (*πολυώνυμε*).¹⁰ "Many named" (*πολυώνυμον*) is also a characteristic of the Egyptian goddess Isis in Hellenistic aretalogies, which are descriptions of Isis's wondrous deeds and qualities.¹¹ The author of the letter of James provides a shorter list of attributes of the "wisdom from above" (Jas 3:17). WisSol borrows this tradition to give many names to Sophia. Nowhere in the canonical literature is there a similar list of God's many names.

I will return to these attributes below, but here I want to comment on a few of the attributes.

"Unique" (*μονογενῆς*). Literally "one genesis." In Greek this word is used primarily to refer to someone who was an only child, without brothers and sisters.¹² Though used of humans, it is only used in canonical literature in reference to a divine being when used of Sophia and Jesus.¹³ Jesus might be God's only begotten son, but Sophia can claim to be God's only begotten daughter. While the word could more broadly refer to someone who was unique, unparalleled, incomparable (TDNT:4, 738), which is how it is rendered in NRSV, we will leave aside why NRSV avoided translating it "only begotten."

There are five words in the list that occur nowhere else in the Septuagint. These are: "manifold" (*πολυμερές*),¹⁴ "mobile" (*εὐκίνητος*),¹⁵ "loving the good" (*φιλάγαθος*),¹⁶ "irresistible" (*ἀκάλυπτος*),¹⁷ and "beneficent" (*εὐεργετικός*).¹⁸

"All-powerful" (*παντοδύναμος*). Christians know this word through the theological doctrine of God's "omnipotence." In patristic literature, it is used only of God. It occurs two other times in WisSol referring to God's "all-powerful hand" (11:17) and "all-powerful word" (18:15). As familiar as this concept is today, the writer of Wisdom appears to have coined this Greek word in order to describe Sophia.

"Overseeing all" (*πανεπισκοπος*). Like the previous word, this is also a compound word. The preposition meaning "all" is attached to the word *ἐπισκοπος*, which in the NT is often translated

⁸ This is similar, but not identical, to Sirach's recital of Israel's "famous men" in Sir 44-50. This is another way Sirach updates wisdom literature by incorporating Israel's historical narrative.

⁹ *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta* (Vol. 1, no. 557, p. 126) <https://archive.org/details/stoicorumveterum01arniuoft> (accessed 7/9/15)

¹⁰ <http://www.koxkollum.nl/cleanthes/hymnofcleanthesclearich.pdf> (access 7/10/18)

¹¹ P. Oxy. XI:1380, 97, 101.

¹² In Septuagint it is used of Jephthah's daughter (Judg 11:34), of Sarah and Tobias in Tobit (Tob 3:15; 8:17). In the NT, it is used for a widow's son (Luke 7:12), Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:42), and of a father's son possessed by a demon (Luke 9:38-40).

¹³ δόξαν ως μονογενούς παρὰ πατρός "the glory of the father's *only son*" (John 1:14; also John 1:18; 3:16, 18;).

¹⁴ In GNT only in Hebr 11:1 as an adverb.

¹⁵ Not used in GNT

¹⁶ Titus 1:8

¹⁷ Acts 28:31

¹⁸ In a related but different form in Luke 22:25

“bishop.” The word means “overseer, guardian, watcher.” In Greek literature, Judaism, and Christianity it functions in a two-fold sense, God as overseer and to designate human supervisors (TDNT:1, 608-614). The compound means “overseer or guardian of all.” Sophia is the mother of all bishops! This is another word that the author appears to have coined to describe Sophia.

It is evident that the author both borrowed Greek words not previously found in Hellenistic Jewish writings, but also *created whole new words* in order to describe Sophia. Some of the attributes are also attributed to the Logos by Philo. For example, Philo describes the Logos as “subtle” (*λεπτός*) (*Alleg.* 3:170). Just as Sophia is “mobile,” the Logos is capable of *rapid motion*, since as Creator of all things it was before everything and passed by (or outran) everything (*Cher* 28). Given more space and time I could make a case that the Prologue of the gospel of John is essentially another upgrade of Sophia in order to incorporate Sophia into emerging Christology.

B. ISIS AND SOPHIA

The major upgrade of Sophia is the way the author borrows from the Hellenized views of the Egyptian goddess Isis. There is a similar borrowing in Proverbs where the image of Hokmah borrows from Ma’at, the Egyptian goddess of wisdom. What I have done in the commentary is to start with the Greek texts that actually talk about Isis, which has not been the approach of previous studies. The approach is the same that Steve Schweitzer took when he examined the Egyptian texts on Ma’at. In this way we are better able to make comparisons between the two figures. The texts I worked with are primarily aretologies, which praise Isis in various ways, but there are also hymns and a historical text. I worked with the eight texts that are closest in time to WisSol. I will not bore you with the twenty-pages of analysis. You will have to buy the commentary for that! Instead I will bore you with my conclusions. I basically follow the conclusions that Steven Schweitzer set out in his comparison of the Egyptian goddess M’aat and personified Wisdom in the book of Proverbs.¹⁹

First, there is not a one-to-one relationship between the two (*ibid.*, 127). Sophia is clearly recognizable as the Hokmah Sophia of Proverbs and Sirach. There is no attempt to disguise Sophia as Isis.

Second, there are clearly connections that can be made between the two. That is, there are aspects of Sophia that can only be explained by reference to Isis. Foremost among these is Sophia’s role as Savior (Wis 10:1-11:4), which is unique to WisSol among the canonical portrayals of Hokmah Sophia. The saving role of Sophia in ch. 10 seems to be directly influenced by Isis, since savior was one of her core functions.²⁰ Isis is named as “savior” (*σωτέρα*) in Isidorus Hymn 1:26, Maroneia Aretalogy line 11, and P. Oxy. 1380: 22, 55, 76, 92. In addition to saving, Glicksman argues that the Sophia who pilots the ark (10:4), has power over bodies of water (10:19), assists prisoners (10:14), is associated with celestial bodies (10:17), and possesses wonder working power (10:21) are all derived from Isis.²¹ Sophia as “throne companion” (Wis 9:4) is also clearly derived from Isis (Andros Aretalogy 138-140; Kyme Aretalogy §45). In addition, both Isis and Sophia share specific attributes such as “holy.”

Third, there are features that are similar but not perfectly parallel. For example, the words “clear” and “distinct” are used of both Isis and Sophia but in different contexts. Both Isis and Sophia have qualities of “many” and “all,” but with different shadings. Isis is all-seeing while Sophia

¹⁹ Steven Schweitzer, “The Egyptian Goddess Ma’at and Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9: Reassessing Their Relationship,” in Eric F. Mason, et al., eds., in *A Teacher for All Generations: Essays in Honor of James C. VanderKam: Volume One* (Leiden: Brill 2012), 113-132.

²⁰ This is one of two themes developed by John S. Kloppenborg, “Isis and Sophia in the Book of Wisdom,” *HTR* 75 (1982): 67-73.

²¹ Andrew T. Glicksman, *Wisdom of Solomon 10: A Jewish Hellenistic Reinterpretation of Early Israelite History Through Sapiential Lenses* (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2011), 154-155.

“oversees all.” The aretalogies vary in whether Isis speaks in the first person (“I am”), is addressed in the second person as “you,” or is described in the third person as “she.” The canonical portrayal of HokmahSophia is similar. There are places in Proverbs and Sirach where HokmahSophia speaks in the first person, and other places where she is addressed in second or third person. Sophia is only spoken of in the third person in WisSol. The strongest of these “similar but not quite” connections is the way each works in creation. Isis is responsible for much of what we would call science – biology, astronomy, agriculture, medicine. She herself does not actually create them but “discovers” them and shares that discovery with her followers. In contrast, while a sage also learns about what we would call science, what is primary is not learning the science but learning about Sophia. A sage studies creation not only for how it may be useful in life, but also to learn what it reveals of the nature and character of Sophia since Sophia was part of the fabric of creation.

Fourth, there is also much that is different. In WisSol the family life aspect of Isis in establishing marriage, ensuring fertility, and ordering the family is most clearly absent. Sophia is not involved with the fertility of the earth or of humans as was Isis. Sophia is not directly portrayed as a healer, nor is she associated with enabling civilization by establishing cities, giving laws, creating language, or upholding justice, which are all attributed to Isis.

Fifth, there is no direct borrowing of Isis without significant revision and adaptation for a Yahwistic setting. This is evident in the way that there is no worship of Sophia in the manner that devotees worshipped Isis through regular festivals and rituals. Isis was known as the teacher of religion, teaching where, when, and how to show devotion to her, or any god. This is not true for Sophia. There is no direct prayer to Sophia in the way that Isis was directly appealed to in prayer. Sophia is not worshipped at particular places, in specific ways, or at particular times. Sophia is necessary for a sage to know the ways of YHWH, but prayer and worship is still directed solely to YHWH. As Sophia is an initiate into the ways of God, the author described how to become an initiate into the ways of Sophia as a means to an end not an end in itself. Sophia is distinct from YHWH, but she is not a separate deity in the way Isis and Osiris were. While Isis is adapted to a Yahwistic setting, there does not appear to be an attempt to argue for Sophia’s superiority over Isis or to denigrate Isis. The author is not trying to turn Ioudaioi away from following Isis to following Sophia – except by implication that the only way to YHWH is via Sophia. There is no contest nor competition between Isis and Sophia, at least, not that I see, in contrast to the contest and competition between YHWH and Baal.

C. DISCUSSION IDEAS

What do you think of how WisSol upgraded wisdom literature “for the present age” of its time? What would you find problematic to do in our own present age? What do you think would work? Where would identify such upgrading in the church in general and in Methodism in particular? Where do you think Methodism needs to upgrade to be able to clearly proclaim the gospel today? Do you think the presence of a female divine(like) figure is important for today? What would it look like to upgrade HokmahSophia for today?

IV. BORROWING #2

A. OBSERVING SOPHIA

In the symbiotic culture of Alexandria, WisSol, like Sirach, focused less on Torah obedience and more on learning the lessons of God’s actions in Israel’s history. WisSol doesn’t focus on those visible aspects of Jewish identity, but on getting an education, *παιδεία*, perhaps in imitation of the importance of education in Hellenistic culture. In Book II (chs. 6-9), the author sets forth a curriculum for ultimately learning “the counsel of God” and discerning what “the Lord wills” (Wis 9:13). Kolarcik argues that the context for WisSol was in the synagogue where a sage would educate students (young

men) in their religious tradition, perhaps combined with learning obtained in Greek schools.²² It doesn't appear to be an attempt to counter or refute Greek knowledge since the author employs Greek terms and philosophical ideas. Rather, the contrast is with the ungodly in Book I (chs. 1-5). If you do not want to end up like the ungodly, then you should learn what the sage is teaching. A key issue for the ungodly was their "unsound reasoning" (Wis 2:1, 21; 3:10). In contrast, the sage will teach the righteous sound reasoning. In the *sorites*²³ in vv. 17-19, the beginning of wisdom is the desire for instruction, which ultimately ends in nearness to God. When knowledge is power, then there can be no greater power for Ioudaioi than the knowledge of God.

The initial exhortation to the kings and judges in 6:1 is to "learn." We can think of chs. 6-9 as the course syllabus so that they may, in fact, "learn Sophia" (6:9). Book II as a whole, but especially chs. 6-7 are replete with language regarding education, including "learn" (μανθάνω; 6:1, 9, 7:13), "instruct/ion" (παιδεία [6:17; 7:14]; παιδεύω [6:11, 25]), "know/ledge" (γνῶσις [6:22; 7:17]; γινῶσκω [7:21; 8:21; 9:10, 13, 17]), and "teach" (διδάσκω; 6:10; 7:22a; 9:18).

One goal of this course is to gain foundational knowledge of Sophia obtained by observation of creation. Within the wisdom tradition, *Hokmah Sophia* is viewed not just as God's partner in the act of creation, but also as being woven into the fabric of creation itself. *Hokmah Sophia* is the material of creation, the blueprint, and the tools used for building all rolled into one (Prov 3:19-20; Sir 1:9-10, 14-20; 24:5-6). In *WisSol*, Sophia is described as "fashioner of all things" (7:22a), "fashioner of all that exists" (8:6), and who "orders all things well" (8:1). If you want "unerring knowledge of what exists," you learn from the one who has fashioned all that exists. This is accomplished through observing the ways of creation, what traditional Christian theology calls "general revelation."

This is how Sophia can be viewed as the source of all knowledge, including "understanding" (φρονησίς; 6:15; 7:7) and "skill in crafts" (v. 16). Technical expertise has always been as aspect of Hebrew "wisdom." Those who had the skill to create the tabernacle have a "wise heart" (Exod 28:3; 31:6; 35:10; 36:1-4). Ships need those wise in the ways of the sea (Ezek 27:8-9). While the sage's definition of wisdom is broader than that, understanding of how things work is still a key part of being wise. The "structure of the world" that one learns are the categories of knowledge that can be broadly described as astronomical and agricultural knowledge (7:18-20), which was widely known in Hellenistic Alexandria. They account for what is required to sustain food production for a family or community. While there is no exact parallel to this catalog in the Bible or in non-biblical sources, it contains elements that are associated elsewhere in the Bible with King Solomon or YHWH and that appear in Jewish and Greek literature of the time.

The list of Sophia's twenty-one attributes (7:22-23) follows immediately on the description of the unerring knowledge of what exists. In my view, the list of attributes is the result of those observations of nature. When you have adequately learned this knowledge and reflected on it, you learn also of the nature of Sophia. In my longer treatment of the attributes, I note how each attribute might be related to observations of nature. While the connections are not always exact, it wasn't difficult to associate the attributes of Sophia with aspects of nature. I think others have not made this connection because the tendency has been to divide the twenty-one attributes into three groups of seven. In that configuration it is not easy to discern any clear-cut patterns to the list. However, if you divide the attributes into seven groups of three, it is possible to discern associations with nature. Here is one example, the third triad of "clear, unpolluted, and distinct."

²² Michael Kolarcik, S.J., "The Sage Behind the Wisdom of Solomon," in Leo G. Perdue, ed., *Scribes, Sages, and Seers: The Sage in the Eastern Mediterranean World* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 247.

²³ "A set of statements which proceed, step by step, through the force of logic or reliance upon a succession of indisputable facts, to the climactic conclusion, each statement picking up the last key word (or key phrase) of the proceeding one." David Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon* (AB 43; Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1979), 154.

“Clear” (*τρανόν*) In Greek literature the word is usually related to speech, as in to speak in a plain or distinct manner so that one is understood (see Wis 10:21). This is a useful skill for a teacher. “Unpolluted” (*ἀμόλυντον*). In Greek, the letter “a” attached to something means it is “not” that thing. The verbal form originally meant “to soil, smear with dirt.” When applied to religious and moral spheres, it meant “defile” (TDNT:4, 736). Sophia is *not* any of those things. “Distinct” (*σαφές*).²⁴ There does not appear to be significant difference between this word and “clear.” It is also generally related to speech, especially of seers, oracles, and prophets, perhaps with the sense of “accurate” (LS:2, 1586). It is a common word in Philo, used to emphasize that he is making his proof or argument “clear.” He uses both “clear” and “distinct” together in *Alleg. Interp* 3:121, “For of what advantage would it be to make our assertions clear (*τρανός*) and distinct (*σαφής*), but nevertheless false?”

Clear, unpolluted, distinct seem to fit together. Sophia is clear and distinct because she is unpolluted. I think of the clear waters near Maui where you can see straight down for 200 feet or a clear day on a mountain peak where visibility is 60 miles. When applied to Sophia it suggests to me that her presence and existence should be self-evident and intuitively obvious, even to the most casual observer. She speaks to us, through creation, in ways that we can easily understand and comprehend. There is no ambiguity in what she says and no way to spin it. When applied to humans, I think of the quality of integrity.

Summary: In multiple images the author makes the case that Sophia is out there and that we need to open ourselves to awareness of Sophia’s presence. When we do so, wisdom becomes apparent.

B. RELATING TO SOPHIA

i. Lovers

It is not enough to only observe Sophia from a distance. Another goal of the curriculum is to develop a personal relationship with Sophia. Chapter 6 describes the beginning of this relationship. One must “love” (*ἀγαπάω*) and “seek” her (6:12, 14). The verb for love evokes the sense of covenant commitment, as in “Love the Lord your God” (Deut 6:5).

The same language is also used of Hokmah in Proverbs where one is to “love” and “seek” Hokmah (Prov 8:17). In my first Institute paper on Hokmah I noted that this language is reminiscent of the language between the two lovers in the Song of Songs (Song 3:1-2; 5:6; 6:1). The sage will use the same language to describe his own personal relationship with Sophia (7:10; 8:2). The seeker should also “desire” Sophia (6:13), as well as desire instruction (6:17).

The imagery of the sage and Sophia as lovers continues in ch. 8, where the relationship deepens. The sage is “enamored” (*ἐραω*; see Prov 4:6 LXX) of Sophia and sought her to be his “bride” (8:2), also part of the lexicon of Song of Songs (Song 4:8-12; 5:1). The metaphor of lovers or husband/bride suggests a deep intimacy as opposed to the more distant relationship of observer of Sophia. If she is to be his bride he must bring her to his house, so he “determined to take her to live with me” (8:9; also 8:16 “life with her”). The noun form in 8:16 is *συμβίωσις*, “symbiosis.” The sage and Sophia develop a symbiotic relationship. Wisdom 8:10-16 catalog the benefits that will come with this relationship. The accumulative effect is to reinforce that the relationship between the sage and Sophia truly is symbiotic. In living with Sophia, the Sage takes on, perhaps incarnates, some of her characteristics.²⁴

The dynamics of the husband/wife metaphor in prophetic literature (Hos 1-3; Jer 2-3; Ezek 16, 23) is switched here. It is not the bride/wife who must remain faithful, it is the husband. The intimate relationship with God via Sophia is available to all, but each person has to seek their own individual relationship with Sophia.²⁵

²⁴ The details of the characteristics of Sophia that the sage also exhibits are included in the commentary, but not here.

²⁵ It is important to note that this is still a heterosexual relationship. I address this in the commentary and have contributing voices offering Queer readings of the intimate relationship between sage and Sophia.

ii. FRIENDSHIP

In addition to describing a relationship with Sophia in marriage language, the author also employs the language of friendship. In addition to using ἀγαπάω, the sage also used φίλεω to describe his “love” for Sophia (8:2; also Prov 8:17 LXX). One of Sophia’s many qualities is that “in every generation she enters into holy souls and makes them *friends* (φίλος) of God and prophets” (7:27). Those who manage to become wise also gain “friendship with God” (7:14). One of the many joys the relationship brings is the delight that comes from friendship with Sophia.

Summary: This part of knowing Sophia involves developing a more intimate, even symbiotic, relationship with Sophia, resulting in a virtuous life. Reese argues that the Sage sees wisdom as an ordering principle on every level of creation: physical, ethical, and spiritual.²⁶ We can see “observing Sophia” and “relating to Sophia” as the ordering principle at the physical and ethical levels of creation. Developing a symbiotic relationship with Sophia leads one to live a virtuous life, which seems to be a key lesson of ch. 8. But that is still not wisdom, because virtue is not synonymous with wisdom. The sage now has enough knowledge to know that knowledge of the natural and ethical aspects of creation is necessary but insufficient. The next step will not be achieved through human effort alone. The sage will need to do his part, but ultimately Sophia is “special revelation,” a gift given by God, which moves the Sage to whole hearted prayer.

C. SITTING BESIDE SOPHIA

In the advanced portion of this curriculum, we see Sophia as the ordering of the spiritual level of creation. Throughout, Sophia is portrayed as the mediator between God and humans. Mere mortals, in WisSol do not have direct access to God; what one knows of God is known via Sophia. She is a “breath of the power of God” and “emanation of the Almighty” (Wis 7:25) who comes forth from God to humanity. She is also a “reflection, mirror, and image” (εικών) of God (Wis 7:26). We see God through Sophia.

The sage recognizes that what he knows of wisdom so far is insufficient, that he would not really possess Sophia unless God gives her to him (Wis 8:21), so he prays. He acknowledges that Sophia is God’s “throne companion” (9:4). The Greek word πάρεδρος (“companion”) means “one who sits nearby, attendant.”²⁷ With the addition of “throne,” the image is of King YHWH and his consort Sophia seated side by side, an image familiar from Egyptian iconography.

The reason the Sage prays that God “give” him Sophia is because she comes “from you (God).” This is another reminder that wisdom is both something attained and also a gift or a form of “special revelation.” In 9:9 the Sage explicitly emphasize Sophia’s preexistence. While it is the first mention in WisSol, HokmahSophia’s preexistence is found in the other wisdom traditions (see Prov 8:22-31; Sir 1:4, 9-10; 24:9). Sophia’s presence when God made the world is what gives her access to God’s being and thus know God’s works, what is pleasing in God’s sight, and what is right according to God’s commandments.

This leads to the sage’s next petition that God send Sophia from God’s holy throne (9:4a) to labor at *his* side (9:10). Sophia’s proximity to God is how she knows God’s counsel and what is pleasing to God. Sophia’s proximity to the sage will be the only way he will know these things. In the larger context of the sage’s courtship of Sophia, the prayer sounds like a suitor asking a father for permission to marry his daughter. Thus, the sage has to specifically request of YHWH, “send her” (9:10) and hope that YHWH is willing to “give Sophia” away by sending the “holy spirit” to become the sage’s

²⁶ James M. Reese, *The Book of Wisdom, Song of Songs* (OT Message 20; Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983), 71.

²⁷ This word occurs in the Septuagint only here. Isis is described as the πάρεδρος of the sun in Andros Aretalogy 139; Kyme Aretalogy §45.

throne companion (9:17). This is yet another aspect of Sophia's role as mediator between YHWH and humans. As the one who is privy to God's designs, Sophia communicates those to the humans to whom she is sent. Sophia not only *forms* humankind, she *informs* them. While this is not yet the aim of mystical union with the Divine that later Christian mystics describe, it seems to be on that trajectory.

D. DISCUSSION IDEAS

My initial impetus for this section was considering the question of what it means to envision and practice God's desire for our transformation and the flourishing of humanity. What I find interesting about WisSol is that in a context where definitions of what Ioudaismos looked like were fluid, instead of doubling down on the traditional "means of grace" in Ioudaismos, he offered a supplement to those: to be instructed in wisdom.

We have no way to know to what extent this program for *παιδεία* was practiced or what impact it had on the community of Ioudaioi in Alexandria or elsewhere in the Diaspora. We know that Jesus acted in the role of sage in the gospels and that there is an emphasis on teaching and learning throughout the Second Testament. It would be interesting for a Second Testament scholar to consider to what extent, if any, ideas from WisSol's instruction on wisdom appears in the ST.

For Methodism today, what if, instead of doubling down on our traditional means of grace, who if we offered a supplement, instruction on wisdom and how to become wise? What does Methodism have to say about how to gain Wisdom? What might our pedagogical approach look like?

How do we know wisdom/become wise today? What might we observe of Sophia from creation? What is the role/place of mysticism in Methodism if we think of it in its Greek usage of being a *μυστις* (fem.) *μυστής* (masc.), an initiate into the ways of God?

