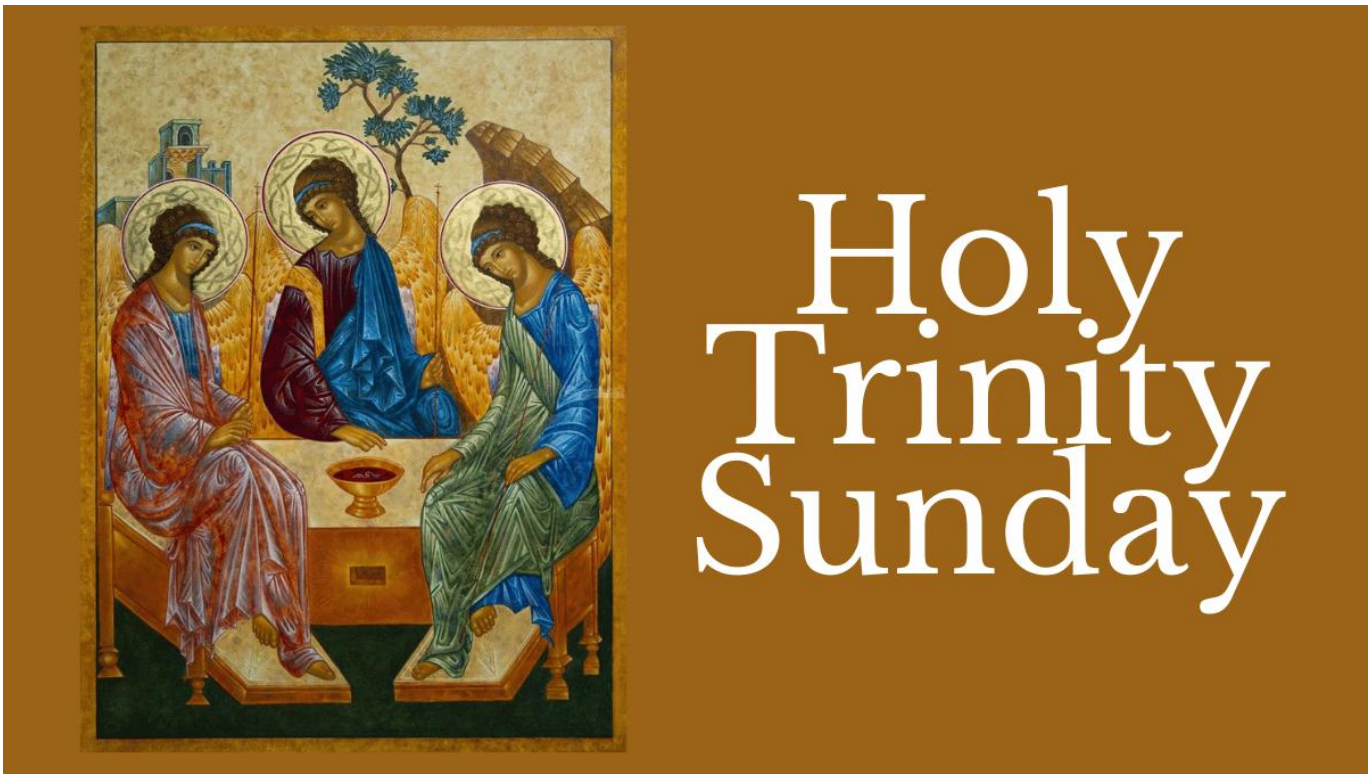


Holy Trinity Sunday

The celebration of Holy Trinity Sunday — the Sunday dedicated to honoring the mystery of the Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) — has an interesting development in the history of the Catholic Church. In the early Church (first few centuries), there was no specific feast day solely dedicated to the Holy Trinity. Instead, belief in the Trinity was celebrated implicitly in almost every Mass, because Christian worship was (and is) always directed to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. The early Church was more focused on defining the doctrine of the Trinity, especially during controversies like Arianism (which denied the full divinity of Jesus). The Council of Nicaea (325 AD) and later Council of Constantinople (381 AD) formally articulated Trinitarian doctrine.

As heresies continued in the Post-Nicene era and the Church's doctrine matured, there was a growing desire to have a specific liturgical celebration that explicitly honored the Trinity. By the 8th century, some monasteries, especially in parts of France and Germany, began celebrating a local feast in honor of the Holy Trinity. In the 9th–10th centuries devotion grew, especially promoted by monks and theologians (like the Benedictines). In the 11th century Pope Alexander II reportedly opposed making it a universal feast, saying that the Church daily honored the Trinity liturgically. However, the idea continued gaining ground in various regions.

Pope John XXII (reigned 1316–1334) finally made the Feast of the Holy Trinity an official, universal celebration for the entire Roman Church. It was placed on the Sunday after Pentecost, a symbolic time: after celebrating the coming of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost), the Church turns to glorify the full mystery of the Triune God. The Sunday after Pentecost is well suited because Pentecost celebrates the final event of God's self-revelation (sending the Holy Spirit), and Trinity Sunday reflects on the fullness of God's mystery as revealed in salvation history. In the Roman Rite, Trinity Sunday is now a Solemnity, the highest rank of liturgical feasts.

Eastern Catholics (those who follow Eastern liturgical traditions but are in full communion with Rome) do not have a "Trinity Sunday" exactly like the Roman Rite. However, they celebrate Pentecost very grandly and immediately afterward honor the Trinity. Pentecost Monday is sometimes called "Monday of

the Holy Trinity." The Easter Catholics retain a sense of the early Church in that their entire liturgical season after Pentecost (called "Ordinary Time" in the West) is considered living in the light of the Trinity.

The Gospel Readings

Before the reforms of Vatican II, each year, the same Gospel was read on Holy Trinity Sunday: Matthew 28:18–20: "*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit…*" The role of the Holy Spirit in animating the nascent Church was made clear in the Great Commission. After Vatican II, with the creation of the three liturgical years, there was a broader and more varying use of readings in the Sunday gospels in general. The same held true for Holy Trinity Sunday. Accordingly, the selected gospel reading vary with the liturgical year:

- A: John 3:16-18, "*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son….*"
- B: Matthew 28:16-20, "*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit*"
- C: John 16:12-15, "*But when he comes, the Spirit of Truth, he will guide you to all truth*"

Year A emphasizes the Father-Son-Spirit mission. Year B highlights the Father's love expressed in sending the Son. Year C shows the Spirit's role in leading the Church into full truth. Even with the different readings, the core theme every year remains the same: God is One in Three Persons, revealed through salvation history.

Here in Year C, if you have been following the Gospel readings from weekday Masses, you will find that this Sunday gospel is very much in continuity with those readings. They come from the Farewell Discourse within the Gospel of John. A synopsis of the discourse can be understood as: the warning of Jesus' coming death, that He is going away to a place they know and where the Father has a room prepared for them, not to worry, the Holy Spirit will come to enlighten their minds, enflame their hearts and remind them of all they have been taught. On Pentecost Sunday, just a week ago, that promise was fulfilled with the coming of the Holy Spirit. Before fully entering "Ordinary Time" in the liturgical year, we shift gears to celebrate Holy Trinity Sunday followed by Corpus Christi.

Trinity

As some critics rightly point out, nowhere in Scripture does the word "Trinity" appear. Their argument is then that the idea of a Holy Trinity is a human doctrine. Yet, Christians are baptized in the ***name*** of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: not in their ***names***, for there is only one God, the almighty Father, his only Son and the Holy Spirit. Call it what you will, but the long Christian tradition has been to refer to his revealed truth as the Most Holy Trinity. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains: "The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the hierarchy of the truths of faith. The whole history of salvation is identical with the history of the way and the means by which the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, reveals himself to men 'and reconciles and unites with himself those who turn away from sin." (CCC§234).

The Church distinguishes between theology (*theologia*) and economy (*oikonomia*). "Theology" refers to the mystery of God's inmost life within the Blessed Trinity and "economy" to all the works by which God reveals himself and communicates his life. Through the *oikonomia* the *theologia* is revealed to us; but conversely, the *theologia* illuminates the whole *oikonomia*. God's works reveal who he is in himself; the mystery of his inmost being enlightens our understanding of all his works. So it is, analogously, among human persons. A person discloses himself in his actions, and the better we know a person, the better we understand his actions.

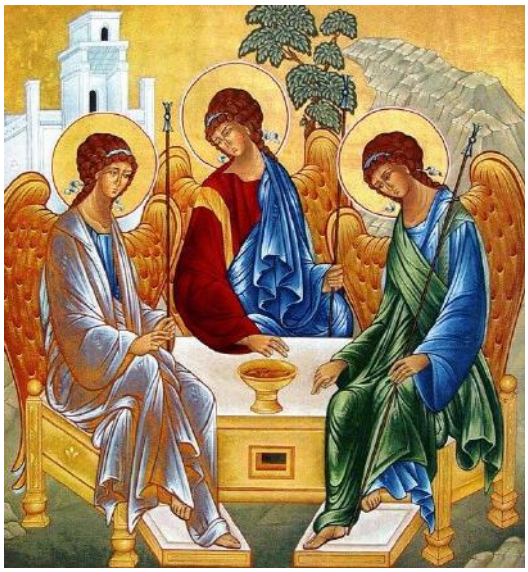
And while the critics are correct in so far as nomenclature, it is the *oikonomia* of what is revealed in Scripture that forms the *theologia* of what we profess and proclaim – as well as the readings selected for the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. Those readings vary with the liturgical year:

- A: John 3:16-18, "*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son….*"
- B: Matthew 28:16-20, "*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit*"
- C: John 16:12-15, "*But when he comes, the Spirit of Truth, he will guide you to all truth*"

Clearly, the "Great Commission" of Matthew 28, including the "name" of the "persons" of Trinity is a pre-eminent gospel to read for this day. Yet there are so many readings that are part of the *oikonomia* about the full nature of God. The Year B readings for Holy Trinity Sunday also share a characteristic with the other years – a selection of readings that reveal the *oikonomia* of the Holy Trinity, often emphasizing one of the "persons" of the Holy Trinity. The gospel of Year C focuses on the coming of the Holy Spirit with clear connection as a continuation of the "mission" that all be saved.

But the gospel is not the only reading for the celebration. In a departure from the normal commentary, rather than the gospel, I hope to offer some insight into the Book of Proverbs and then focus on the *oikonomia* of the Wisdom of God so beautifully described in the first reading.

Rublev's Trinity



Rublev's *Trinity* is one of the most famous religious icons in the world, and it's a deeply symbolic and theological work of art. Painted by Andrei Rublev, a 15th-century Russian monk and iconographer, it visually represents the Holy Trinity — not as an abstract doctrine, but as a deeply relational and spiritual mystery. The inspiration for the icon is the Old Testament story in Genesis 18, where three angelic visitors come to Abraham and Sarah, a scene often called "The Hospitality of Abraham." Yet Abraham and Sarah are notably absent from the scene. This shifts the focus from a narrative scene to a theological vision: not a story about the Trinity, but an icon of the Trinity.

The Three Figures Represent: God The Father (left), the Son (center) and the Holy Spirit (right). All are equal in form and appearance, reflecting the doctrine of co-equality and unity in the Trinity. But subtle symbols distinguish them.

The Father's clothing is a shimmering, almost transparent robe symbolizing divine mystery and transcendence. With serene authority the Father looks lovingly at the Son. In the background is a house — often interpreted as a symbol of the Father's dwelling ("*In my Father's house are many rooms*" – John 14:2).

The Son's clothing is an earth-toned inner garment (symbolizing humanity) and a blue outer cloak (divinity). The Son reaches out to the cup on the table — a symbol of His future sacrifice (the Eucharist and the Passion). In the background is a tree, symbolic of the Cross.

The Holy Spirit's clothing is blue (divinity) and green (new life, regeneration). The Spirit looks towards the Father and the Son in communion and humility. In the background is a mountain, symbolizing spiritual ascent, inspiration, and the hidden workings of the Spirit.

The three figures sit around a white table that resembles an altar. At the center is a chalice with what seems to be a roasted lamb or calf — symbol of the Eucharist, and foreshadowing the sacrifice of Christ.

The icon has a circular composition, forming a visual theology. The figures are arranged in a circle, symbolizing unity, eternal communion, and divine love. The open side of the circle (facing the viewer) invites participation — an invitation into the divine life of the Trinity.

Rublev's Trinity is a visual meditation on the mystery of God as a communion of love — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — inviting us into that divine life. It fuses Scripture, theology, and art into a single, silent, yet profoundly eloquent image.

The Spirit in Creation

> *22 "The LORD begot me, the first-born of his ways, the forerunner of his prodigies of long ago; 23 From of old I was poured forth, at the first, before the earth. 24 When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no fountains or springs of water; 25 Before the mountains were settled into place, before the hills, I was brought forth; 26 While as yet the earth and the fields were not made, nor the first clods of the world.*
>
> *27 "When he established the heavens I was there, when he marked out the vault over the face of the deep; 28 When he made firm the skies above, when he fixed fast the foundations of the earth; 29 When he set for the sea its limit, so that the waters should not transgress his command; 30 Then was I beside him as his craftsman, and I was his delight day by day, Playing before him all the while, 31 playing on the surface of his earth; and I found delight in the sons of men.*
>
> *32 "So now, O children, listen to me; 33 instruction and wisdom do not reject! Happy the man who obeys me, and happy those who keep my ways, 34 Happy the man watching daily at my gates, waiting at my doorposts; 35 For he who finds me finds life, and wins favor from the LORD; 36 But he who misses me harms himself; all who hate me love death."* (Proverbs 8:22–36)

Context – An Overview of the Book of Proverbs
(*adapted from the Reading Guide by Rev. Donald Senior in "Catholic Study Bible"*)

I would typically provide some insight to the upcoming Gospel, but this passage of The *Book of Proverbs* is captivating and so I thought perhaps we might look at the first reading for the upcoming Trinity Sunday.

Composition. *Proverbs* is a compendium of collections of sayings and instructions. Many of the sayings and perhaps some instructions were composed during the era of the kings of Judah and Israel. (late eleventh to the early sixth centuries BCE). Most scholars believe the book reached final compilation and written form in the period immediately after the Exile in Babylon – when chapters 10-31 were "pulled together – and chapters 1–9 were added as the introduction. There is a verse (25:1) that suggests the materials could be traced to King Solomon and the scribes of the royal court: "*These also are proverbs of Solomon. The servants of Hezekiah, king of Judah, transmitted them.*" This perhaps refers to the task of compiling what seems to have its roots in the traditions of the tribes of Israel. The origin of the material, however, need not be imagined in an either/or scenario. Folk wisdom could have well been taken up and re-expressed by royal scribes. In any case *Proverbs* wins over readers with its compelling portrait of wisdom and inviting them to see life afresh, "wisely," through its wit, originality, and shrewd observation.

Purpose. The primary purpose of the book is to teach wisdom and to young and old alike: "*That people may know wisdom and discipline, may understand intelligent sayings; May receive instruction in wise conduct, in what is right, just and fair; That resourcefulness may be imparted to the naive, knowledge and discretion to the young. The wise by hearing them will advance in learning, the intelligent will gain sound guidance."* (1:2-4) What is being taught is not theoretical knowledge but practical expertise. Jewelers who cut precious stones were wise; kings who made their dominion peaceful and prosperous were wise. One could be wise in daily life, too, in knowing how to have a prosperous household while living a long and healthy life without trouble in God's universe. Ultimately wisdom, or "*sound guidance"* (1:5), aims at the formation of Godly character.

Wisdom. In the ancient Near East (ANE), people assumed that wisdom belonged to the gods, who were wise by reason of their divinity; human beings needed to have wisdom granted them by the gods. Many of the "beginning of the world" accounts found in surrounding ANE cultures depict creation in two stages. In the first stage, human beings lived an animal-like existence, without clothes, writing, or kingship (seen as proper governance). Over time, the gods came to realize that such a low grade of existence made the human race inadequate as their servants, so they endowed the race with "wisdom," which consisted of culture (e.g., kingship) and crafts (e.g., knowledge of farming, ability to weave). Such wisdom elevated the race to a "human" level and made them effective servants of the gods. Furthermore, divine wisdom was mediated to human beings through earthly institutions—the king, scribes (who produced wise writings), and heads of families (fathers, sometimes mothers). These traditional mediators appear in Proverbs – in fact, the book is credited to King Solomon. Throughout the book kings are mentioned as pillars of society (e.g., 16:12–15); writings are a source of wisdom (1:1–7); the father instructing his son is the major paradigm of teaching. Proverbs differs, however, from other wisdom books in concentrating on wisdom itself, treating it as a virtually independent entity and personifying it as an attractive woman. Other books urge readers to perform wise acts, but Proverbs urges them to seek wisdom itself and portrays wisdom as a woman seeking human beings as disciples and companions.

Audience. The original audience of the instructions and sayings seems to have been male. The father addresses his son, marriage is finding a wife, success often is serving the king or farming effectively. The book itself, however, expands the traditional audience of youths (1:4) to include older, more experienced, people (1:5). It broadens the father-son language by mentioning the mother, and incorporates sayings on human experience generally. The father teaching his son becomes a model for anyone teaching a way of life to another person.

Structure. The Book of Proverbs has nine sections. Chapters 1–9 introduce the book, drawing attention to wisdom itself and its inherent value rather than exhorting particular wise actions. The chapters personify wisdom as a woman and draw an extended analogy between finding a wife, or founding and maintaining a house(hold), and finding wisdom. The collections following chap. 9 consist largely of independent, two-line sayings, yielding their often indirect or paradoxical meaning only to readers willing to ponder them. To reflect on the sayings is perhaps what chapters 1–9 mean by living with Wisdom and dwelling in her house.

Place in Our Tradition. The Book of Proverbs places the pursuit of wisdom over the performance of individual wise acts. To seek wisdom above all things is a fundamental option and a way of life. Second, it portrays the quest as filled with obstacles. There are men and women who offer a substitute for the real thing; discernment is required. Third, the book teaches that acquiring wisdom is both a human task and a divine gift. One can make oneself ready to receive by discipline, but one cannot "grab" such a divine gift. Fourth, wisdom is in the world but it is not obvious to people entirely caught up with daily activities. The instructions and the aphorisms of the book can free the mind to see new things. Christians will see in personified Wisdom aspects of Jesus Christ, who they believe is divine wisdom sent to give human beings true and full life. Yet there is a universal dimension to Proverbs, for in its attention to human experience it creates a link to all people of good will.

The genres and themes of *Proverbs* continued on in Sirach, *Wisdom of Solomon*, and the later Jewish writings. The New Testament saw Jesus as a wisdom teacher and employed the tradition of personified wisdom of chaps. 2 and 8 to express his incarnation. The *Letter of James* is an instruction resembling those in Proverbs. Wisdom traditions influenced the *Gospels* of *Matthew* and *Luke* through a common source (see, e.g., Mt 11:25–27 and Lk 10:21–22, which seem to derive their father-son language, at least in part, from the parental language of Proverbs). The *Gospel of John* regards Jesus as incarnate wisdom descended from on high to offer human beings life and truth and make disciples of them, a view largely reflected in Proverbs 1–9.

Commentary

Many commentaries refer to Proverbs 8:22-31 as a celebration of Wisdom from the primordial beginnings. It is as though the scribes are saying, "Look, we are only celebrating in our day, what the Lord has provided for us since the dawn of creation." This shift of focus is marked by the change from "I" (vv.12, 17) to *the* LORD (vv. 22–31). The section begins with "*the* LORD" and ends with *bᵉnê ʾādām* ("*I found delight in the sons of men*"), the climax and aim of God's creative works.

This section, unified thematically by wisdom's connection with God's creative works, falls into two equal stanzas. The first pertains to her origin before creation (vv. 22–26); the second, to her presence and celebration during the creation (vv. 27–31). These two halves are linked by a thematic chiasm:

A, Wisdom's origins (vv. 22–23);

B, the negative state of the creation (vv. 24–26);

B′, positive presentation of the creation (vv. 27–29);

A′, Wisdom's celebration of humanity's origins (vv. 30–31).

> *[22] "The LORD begot me, the first-born of his ways, the forerunner of his prodigies of long ago; [23] From of old I was poured forth, at the first, before the earth. [24] When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no fountains or springs of water; [25] Before the mountains were settled into place, before the hills, I was brought forth; [26] While as yet the earth and the fields were not made, nor the first clods of the world.*

The first stanza establishes that Wisdom has precedence in rank and dignity over the rest of the creation. Wisdom's precedence is both qualitative (i.e., begotten, not created) and temporal (i.e., existing "before" any other creature). As a result she is competent to counsel and authoritative when she speaks. The stanza's first strophe represents Wisdom's begetting in the primordial past (vv. 22–23), and its second strophe represents her begetting before the sea (v. 24), land (vv. 25–26), and implicitly sky (v. 27).

Begotten, Not Created. The language of "begetting," "created," and the like has, historically, been the source of great controversies. Beginning at least as early as the apologist Justin Martyr (A.D. 125), Christians, almost without exception, identified Sophia/Wisdom in Proverbs 8 with Jesus Christ. This almost universal interpretation of the passage embroiled the church in controversy about the precise nature of the relationship between God and Christ. From the time of Origen (ca. A.D. 180) patristic exegesis interpreted Wisdom's birth in Proverbs 8:25 as Christ's continual coming into existence. Not all agreed with such understanding. Led by the Alexandrian deacon Arius, a group called the Arians held that there was a time when the Son "was not" and thus the Son was created as God's most exalted creature. They concluded this using Prov. 8:22, "the LORD begot/created me," as their primary text. In contrast, orthodox Christians held that Christ was of the same substance as the Father, the true Son of God, and not a creature. Orthodoxy interpreted Prov. 8:22 by explaining that the ever-existing Son was "created" when he became incarnate. According to his second strategy, the "creation of Wisdom was actually the creation of Wisdom's image in creatures as they were brought into being."

Before all else. The expression "*the first born"*(*rēʾšît*) can also be translated as "in the beginning" which has appeal to the Christian ear given the Prologue of the Gospel of John. Verses 22-25 point to Wisdom (*Sophia*) as perhaps the agent or creative force of all creation. The creation is first described a "what there was not" – depths, fountains, mountains, hills, and fields

Many have noted the movement from the subterranean depth (v. 24a) to the springs leading to the surface (v. 24b) to the visible mountains rooted in the depths (v. 25a) to the hills (v. 25b) to the land and its fields (v. 26) to the sky and its horizon (v. 27). Sea, land, and sky depict the entire universe of the living. All of this is described with reference to human habitation: from the oceans, which is most remote (v. 24), to

mountains, which is less remote (v. 25), and climactically to land, where human beings dwell (v. 26). The latter is progressively intensified from "land" to "open fields" to "arable soil."

An Order from Chaos

> *[27] "When he established the heavens I was there, when he marked out the vault over the face of the deep; [28] When he made firm the skies above, when he fixed fast the foundations of the earth;*
> *[29] When he set for the sea its limit, so that the waters should not transgress his command; [30] Then was I beside him as his craftsman, and I was his delight day by day, Playing before him all the while, [31] playing on the surface of his earth; and I found delight in the sons of men.*

Contextually, in contrast to vv. 22-26, which presented the panorama of the LORD's creative actions in a movement from below to above, vv. 27–29 present them in the reverse direction, moving from the heavens (v. 27a) and its horizon (v. 27b) to the sky and clouds (v. 28a) downward to the fountains of the deep (v. 28b) and the seashores (v. 29b) and finally to the foundations of the earth (v. 29b). Thematically, Wisdom represents the LORD as firmly establishing the cosmic entities that both sustain and threaten human existence. In both sections (vv. 24–27 and 27–29), however, the earth as the realm of human life is the aim of the presentation. All the metaphors for creation in vv. 27–29 signify that each of the cosmic entities on which human life depends are so firmly fixed within the created order that they cannot overreach themselves or be transgressed by another. Were it otherwise, the cosmos would crumble into chaos. Humanity's physical existence depends on a firmly structured universe. The LORD's fixed created order serves as a model of his fixed moral boundaries for human beings to prevent society from collapsing into anarchy.

Wisdom's Role. The previous verses' "*I was there*" gives way to a more intimate description: "*I was beside*..." underscoring Wisdom's pre-existence to the creation and her close proximity to the Creator at the time.

> *[30] Then was I beside him as his craftsman, and I was his delight day by day, Playing before him all the while, [31] playing on the surface of his earth; and I found delight in the sons of men.*

In the final stanza, Wisdom links keeping the ways of Wisdom with happiness - or better translated "blessed." Keeping the ways of Wisdom is a live-long task. The person seeking Wisdom must daily be on watch; the alternative is harm, an unhappy life, or even worse death.

An Epilog

In an earlier post it was noted that there was an association of "Sophia" (Greek for "Wisdom") with Jesus although we typically associate Wisdom with the Holy Spirit. In Second Temple Judaism, *Wisdom* (חָכְמָה / σοφία) was personified as a divine agent of creation and revelation (see Proverbs 8, Sirach 24, Wisdom of Solomon 7–9). Early Christians saw strong parallels between this figure and Jesus especially in New Testament texts such as John 1:1–3 ("In the beginning was the Word...") and Colossians 1:15–17 which present Jesus as pre-existent and active in creation—roles associated with Wisdom. Also 1 Corinthians 1:24 explicitly calls Christ "the power of God and the wisdom (sophia) of God."

Church Fathers like Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Origen interpreted Jesus as the incarnation of God's Wisdom, especially linking Him to Proverbs 8:22–31. Athanasius and Gregory of Nyssa further developed this in Trinitarian contexts, asserting that Christ is *begotten* as divine Wisdom.

Over time, several factors contributed to the association and understanding of Sophia as the Holy Spirit. As the Trinity became more clearly defined (especially after Nicaea in 325 and Constantinople in 381), theologians began to differentiate the *oikonomia* of Father, Son, and Spirit. Since Wisdom had previously been associated with divine action in creation and guidance (roles also ascribed to the Holy Spirit in

Scripture), some theologians began discussing Sophia as the Spirit even as the same theologians began to focus more of Jesus' *oikonomia* as the *logos*.

Notes

Prov 8:22 ***The LORD begot me***: the Hebrew *qānānî* is variously translated as "brought forth," "begot," and "created." The meaning of brought me forth (*qānānî*) has been hotly debated since the Arian heresy. Three interpretations merit consideration. Some scholars contend that *qānâ* means "to acquire or possess," for good reasons.

- This is its meaning in the other occurrences in Proverb and more specifically in connection with acquiring wisdom/knowledge/truth (1:5; 4:5, 7 [2x]; 16:16 [2x]; 17:16; 18:15; 23:23) or of acquiring sense (15:32; 19:8), and once in a commercial sense (20:14).
- It is the normal use of qānâʾ in the rest of the Old Testament.
- Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, beginning a translational tradition that was continued by the Vulgate so interpreted it.
- This interpretation best harmonizes with the statement in Job 28:27 that God discovered wisdom, not that he created it.

The second interpretation, however, "to create," has wider acceptance

- This is a better meaning of *qnh* than "possess" in at least Deut. 32:6 and Ps. 139:13, and probably so in Gen. 4:1; 14:19, 22.
- It better suits the other verbs in Prov. 8:22–26 that speak of Wisdom as coming into existence.
- The LXX, Targumin, and Syriac rendered *qnh* "create."
- Its derivative *qinyān* in Ps. 104:24 most probably means "creatures," for its parallel is *maʿaśeyka* ("your works"). More precisely, however, *qnh* probably means "to beget," "to bring forth," in Prov. 8:22. Procreation is not the same as creation.
- In Gen. 4:1 *qānâ* has a biological sense, "be parent of." A birth context, and so a similar sense, is also found in Deut. 32:6, where God is compared to a begetting Father, and in Ps. 139:13 (cf. Exod. 15:16; Ps. 74:2).103

Sources

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