Trimorphic Protennoia and the wisdom tradition: Protennoia and Sophia.

Rosemary Halford
University of Windsor

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd

Recommended Citation
https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/4428

This online database contains the full-text of PhD dissertations and Masters' theses of University of Windsor students from 1954 forward. These documents are made available for personal study and research purposes only, in accordance with the Canadian Copyright Act and the Creative Commons license—CC BY-NC-ND (Attribution, Non-Commercial, No Derivative Works). Under this license, works must always be attributed to the copyright holder (original author), cannot be used for any commercial purposes, and may not be altered. Any other use would require the permission of the copyright holder. Students may inquire about withdrawing their dissertation and/or thesis from this database. For additional inquiries, please contact the repository administrator via email (scholarship@uwindsor.ca) or by telephone at 519-253-3000 ext. 3208.
NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.
TRIMORPHIC PROTEANOA AND THE WISDOM TRADITION

PROTEANOA AND SOPHIA

by

Rosemary Halford

A Thesis
submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through the Department of
Religious Studies in Partial Fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree
of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

1990
The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

ISBN 0-315-61867-6
All rights reserved.

©

Rosemary Halford
ABSTRACT

TRIMORPHIC PROTENNOIA AND THE WISDOM TRADITION

PROTENNOIA AND SOPHIA

by

Rosemary Halford

The Coptic writing Trimorphic Protенкоia (Nag Hammadi Codex XIII,1) has a complicated literary stratigraphy that must be respected to permit a coherent thematic analysis. The writing contains superficial Christianization, several Sethian cosmological and baptismal sections and an aretological base layer. A comparative analysis shows that the aretological material demonstrates great affinity with writings of the Hellenistic Jewish sapiential tradition. Non-canonical sapiential speculation demonstrates an increasingly sectarian attitude toward Sophia which led to her outright gnosticization, as attested by Trimorphic Protenkoia.

The many parallels among Jewish Sophia, Protenkoia as a wisdom figure, and the Johannine Jesus confirm that the Fourth Gospel and Trimorphic Protenkoia shared a common ancestor in the Jewish wisdom tradition and also suggest that the ancestor was proto-agnostic.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have helped me to arrive at this stage; I would like to thank the following for their special contributions. I thank Dr. John Deck for teaching me to think philosophically, Fr. Joseph Culliton for opening my eyes to theological questions, and Professeur Jacques Ménard for convincing me of the modern validity of gnostic thought.

Each one of the members of the committee contributed to this effort. My horizons have been broadened by the work of Dr. Sean Kelly in gnostic studies, Dr. Mahesh Mehta in comparative religions, Dr. Dorothy Sly in Philonic studies and Dr. Ralph Johnson in logic. A complicating factor is that this topic is not always logical.

Dr. John Kloppenborg has been my guide through the New Testament; his direction of this thesis has been a model of Christian charity and patience as well as of academic professionalism. In addition, it is through Dr. Kloppenborg's good graces that I was given the very useful pre-publication articles by Gesine Robinson and access to conversations with Steven Skiles. For all of Dr. Kloppenborg's help and guidance, I remain deeply grateful.

In conclusion I wish to thank Maureen Halford Spillane for her computer work and Peter Halford for his constant encouragement, valuable suggestions, and patient proof-reading.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ................................................................. iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .................................................... v
LIST OF CHARTS ........................................................... viii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS ................................................ ix
INTRODUCTION ............................................................. 1

CHAPTER 1, TRIPROT, A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The Nag Hammadi Collection ........................................ 3
Codex XIII, 1 ............................................................. 9
Contents ................................................................. 14
Christian Elements ..................................................... 16
Sethian Material ......................................................... 23
The Stratigraphy of the Writing ....................................... 33
Aretalogical Material .................................................. 34
Conclusion ............................................................... 37

CHAPTER 2, WISDOM LITERATURE

Introduction .............................................................. 45
Egyptian Wisdom Literature .......................................... 48
Old Testament Literature ............................................. 50
The Book of Sirach ..................................................... 55
Wisdom in Alexandria .................................................. 60
Philo of Alexandria .................................................... 65
Jewish Apocalyptic Literature ....................................... 68
Wisdom at Qumran ..................................................... 71
Conclusion ............................................................... 73

CHAPTER 3, SOPHIA FIGURES IN Gnostic LITERATURE

Introduction .............................................................. 75
Gnostic Concepts ....................................................... 76
Higher Sophia ........................................................... 79
Lower Sophia ............................................................ 81
Conclusion ............................................................... 86

CHAPTER 4, PROTENNOIA AND SOPHIA

Introduction .............................................................. 90
Wisdom Motifs Discussed by MacRae .............................. 92
Wisdom Themes Not Discussed by MacRae ....................... 112
Summation ............................................................... 114
CHAPTER 5, PROTEENOIA AND THE JOHANNINE JESUS

The Need for Improved Methodology.................120
Literary Devices......................................124
Wisdom Motifs Discussed by MacRae...............127
Wisdom Themes Not Discussed by MacRae............149
Summation...........................................155

CONCLUSION........................................160

BIBLIOGRAPHY.......................................170

VITA AUCTORIS......................................189
LIST OF CHARTS

Chart 1, Aretological Material..........................39
Chart 2, Comparison of Aretological and Sethian Material..42
Chart 3, Comparison of Sophia and Protennoia.............118
Chart 4, Comparison of the Wisdom Figures Sophia, Protennoia and the johannine Jesus............................159
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ApocJn</td>
<td>Apocryphon of John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuq.</td>
<td>De Fuga et Inventione</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her.</td>
<td>Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres Sit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HypArch</td>
<td>Hypostasis of the Archons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>Legum Allegoriaum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHC</td>
<td>Nag Hammadi Codex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>New Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OT</td>
<td>Old Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spec</td>
<td>De Specialibus Legibus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TriProt</td>
<td>Trimorphic Protennoia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TriProt A</td>
<td>Aretalogical material in TriProt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TriProt B</td>
<td>Sethian and baptismal material in TriProt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

The Trimorphic Protennoia (Nag Hammadi Codex XIII.1; henceforth TriProt) is one of the lesser known writings of the Nag Hammadi collection. The first wave of scholarship on TriProt noticed the striking parallels between TriProt and the prologue of the Fourth Gospel but was content to compare its phrases and vocabulary with the purpose of determining whether TriProt displayed literary dependence on John 1:1-18, or it was the putative source of the Logos hymn, or it was a parallel but independent strand of wisdom speculation. While this inquiry produced interesting but somewhat inconclusive results, it failed to ask the more important questions of how wisdom theology, which underlies both the johannine prologue and TriProt, is employed in these two works and why it was so appealing to their respective authors. In the meantime TriProt has been subjected to an increasingly sophisticated literary analysis with the result that it is now possible to ask much more precise questions: At which of the several literary levels is wisdom influence most in evidence? How is wisdom theology employed at those levels? And what is the relationship of the wisdom traditions in TriProt to the various strands of biblical wisdom, to logos speculation, and to the theology of the fourth gospel?

Since the extant text is obviously the result of multiple redactions, the literary stratigraphy of the
writing is of utmost importance. There is widespread agreement that TriProt is a document of non-Christian gnosticism, yet it does contain a few Christian references or glosses. I will argue that this superficial christianization belongs to a tertiary level of composition, which I call layer C.

Literary analysis clearly shows that the original framework of the writing has been enlarged with Sethian cosmological, eschatological and soteriological material. These sethianized elements constitute layer B. What is of primary interest is, however, the original framework consisting of the aretalogical sections to which Christian and Sethian interpolations were later added. The aretalogical material, which is designated as layer A, belongs to an earlier gnostic or gnosticizing wisdom document.

Layer A is a wisdom monologue in which Protennoia describes herself as the origin and basis of the All. Since in this cosmic role and as a redeemer figure, Protennoia resembles Sophia, analysis of the wisdom background of TriProt is important. I will argue that it is in this earliest layer of wisdom material that TriProt has features in common with the fourth gospel.
CHAPTER 1
TRIPROT. A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The Nag Hammadi Collection

The Nag Hammadi library is a collection of Greco-
sophical and theological writings in Coptic found near
Chenoboskion, Egypt in 1945.1 As the thirteen codices were
gradually translated and made accessible for study during
the 1970's and 80's, a number of points became clear
regarding the concept of gnosis and the gnostic religion
generally. For the first time gnostic self-definitions
became available.2 No longer are scholars dependent on the
patristic heresiologists for information concerning gnostic
beliefs and practices. "This discovery," writes Gedaliahu
Stroumsa, "has radically transformed the study of a
phenomenon known until then almost exclusively through the
polemic writings of its bitter opponents."3 Birger Pearson
contends that it is no longer possible to consider
gnosticism "... simply as an aberrant form of

1 For an excellent introduction to the topic see the issue
dedicated to the Nag Hammadi library, written with J. E.
M{nard as consultant: "Une d{couverte fondamentale: la
biblioth{que gnostique de Nag Hammadi," Histoire et
Arch(ologie 70, (1983). See also The Nag Hammadi Library
in English (ed. James Robinson; San Francisco: Harper &
Row; Leiden: E.J. Brill; 1978) 1-25. Hereafter cited as
NHLE.

2 NHLE, 3.

3 Gedaliahu Stroumsa, Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic
Christianity... unworthy of serious study."

As George MacRae points out, "for a growing number of scholars now clearly in the majority... certain Nag Hammadi tractates enable us to rule out one of the oldest and most enduring options, namely that Gnosticism is to be seen as an heretical offshoot from Christianity."

The evidence from Nag Hammadi has not only put to rest the classic Christian heresy theory, but it has also redeemed the gnostics from the charges of libertinism levelled at them by the patristic heresiologists. Freed from the rhetorical slander of early Christian polemic, gnosticism is now seen to be worthy of study on its own

---


5 George MacRae, "Nag Hammadi and the New Testament," *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas* (ed. B. Aland; Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978) 149. The primary gnostic sources of the Nag Hammadi collection contain non-Christian writings as well as a number of texts that have been secondarily and superficially christianized; this implies the existence of non-Christian, perhaps even pre-Christian gnosticism.

6 George MacRae, "Why the Church Rejected Gnosticism," *Self-Definition* 1:127. See also Robert Grant, "Charges of Immorality against Various Religious Groups in Antiquity," *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions presented to Gilles Quispel on the occasion of his 65th birthday* (eds. R. Van den Broek and M. J. Vermaseren; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980) 161-170. Patristic charges of libertinism are not substantiated by the primary gnostic sources of Nag Hammadi and may be dismissed as a standard rhetorical device of polemic argument. As the Roman authorities accused the Christians, so also the Christians accused the gnostics.
merits. There are, however, as yet no definitive answers to the questions posed by historians of religion concerning the origins of gnosticism, nor to the question posed by biblical scholars as to the classification of gnostic writings and their relationship to the New Testament.

The Nag Hammadi collection was originally thought to be the library of a gnostic group or monastery hastily hidden when the heretics were under persecution by more orthodox Christians. Torgny Säve-Söderbergh cautions against this simplistic view: "... we should not take it for granted, as has sometimes been done, that the texts were collected by a Gnostic congregation or by a Gnostic believer." The library is complex and heterogeneous: "The dogmas of the different texts are impossible to bring under one single denominator and all the texts were hardly even acceptable as holy scriptures to one and the same congregation or single Gnostic believer." 

Examination of the packing material in the leather envelopes containing the texts now clearly relates the bindings, at least, to the Pachomian monastery in the

8 Ibid., 4.
9 Ibid., 3.
vicinity of the discovery. It is difficult, however, to place such an unorthodox set of books in that context since Pachom was known as an orthodox and intolerant monk and the Pachomian monasteries have a tradition of "... a negative attitude towards all kinds of heretics." Nevertheless, Säve-Söderbergh concludes that "for the success of the Pachomian struggle against the heresies a thorough knowledge of their opponents was undoubtedly of importance... and even if they despised heretical books they could not avoid to study them in order to be able to refute them." Säve-Söderbergh also maintains that there is little doubt that all or most of the texts of the Gnostic library were originally composed in Greek and it is not necessary to assume that the translations were always made by Gnostic believers - some of them may even have been translated by their opponents for a proper refutation.

Frederik Wisse and James Robinson disagree; their logic seems more compelling because it is based on physical evidence rather than hypotheses. "The care and religious devotion reflected in the manufacture of the Nag Hammadi library hardly suggest that the books were produced out of

11 MacRae, "Nag Hammadi," 151.
13 Ibid., 12.
14 Ibid., 12-13
antagonism or even disinterest in their contents, but rather reflect the veneration accorded to holy texts." 15 Wisse points out that the scribal colophons conform to the closing squiggles found in other monastic manuscripts. It should be noted that they lack the kind of disparaging remarks and warnings which one expects to find with heretical books copied for the purpose of refutation. 16

J. Robinson concurs:

These scribal notes, together with the scribes' care to correct error and even add small explanatory glosses and reading aids, tend to indicate that the scribes were of a religious persuasion congenial to the contents they were copying. 17

A further difficulty with Säve-Söderbergh's refutation hypothesis is the care with which the library was hidden: burial in a sealed jar, itself protected in a cave, certainly suggests safekeeping. The usual method of disposal of heretical works was by burning or immersion in water. 18 J. Robinson notes that "the fact that the Nag Hammadi library was hidden in a jar suggests the intention not to eliminate but to preserve the books." 19

Corroboration of this conjecture is provided by two of the

15 J. Robinson, NHLE, 17.


17 J. Robinson, NHLE, 18.


texts of the library which refer to their being stored for safekeeping in a mountain until the end of time.20

If Säve-Söderbergh's conclusion that "the library cannot reflect the dogmas of one sect, however broadminded and syncretistic"21 remains open to question, another point is more certain. The writings do not conform to the heresiologists' description of various gnostic groups and their beliefs: "the heresiologists' sects at times do not correlate well with the new texts, in that the new texts often do not clearly fit the previously assumed sects, or fit several, but not one to the exclusion of the others."22 Thus, attempts at a facile classification are frustrated by the lack of trustworthiness of the reports of the Church Fathers23 and by the internal diversity of the Nag Hammadi collection itself. MacRae describes this diversity:

Not only does it contain an even greater variety of literary genres than the New Testament ('gospels', acts, epistles, apocalypses, dialogues, treatises, revelation discourses, prayers, etc.), but in terms of content it

------------------
20 Ibid., 20-21.
embraces several different types of works, both Gnostic and non-Gnostic. 24

Among the latter texts there are three previously known Hermetic writings, some Christian wisdom literature and a passage of Plato's Republic badly translated into Sahidic. 25 Among the gnostic writings are several that are unmistakably Valentinian or Christian gnostic while others are only superficially christianized.

Codex XIII, 1

Unlike the other codices of the Nag Hammadi library, the leather cover of Codex XIII is missing. 26 J. Robinson suggests that the eight leaves now referred to as Codex XIII were removed from a separate codex in late antiquity and placed inside the front cover of Codex VI. 27 The motive of this placement was a concern to preserve the integrity of the essay within the perhaps limited space of the Nag Hammadi library. 28 J. Robinson emphasizes the external considerations: "the size of a tractate may have been more decisive in determining whether it should be included at a

24 MacRae, "Nag Hammadi," 151.
25 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
certain place than was content (within of course certain limits)." 29 Thus Codex XIII was placed inside the front cover of Codex VI, not because of any readily apparent affinities of content but because the two are similar in size. 30

J. Robinson observes that "Codex XIII made use of at least one roll, but since only eight leaves were preserved, one cannot readily assess the original size of the codex as a whole." 31 Based on the number of missing pages and the length of the long version of the ApocJn, Yvonne Janssens conjectures that the original contents consisted of a long version of the ApocJn, the untitled tractate known as On the Origin of the World (II, 5 and XIII, 2) and TriProt: "In this way Codex XIII would have formed an important barbelognostic triptych." 32 If Janssens' hypothesis that the ApocJn was eliminated because the library already possessed several copies is correct, 33 her hypothesis may lend support to J. Robinson's conjecture that the present library derives from at least three smaller collections. 34


30 J. Robinson, "Inside the Front Cover," 82.


32 Yvonne Janssens, La Prôtennoia Trimorphe (Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi, Textes 4. Québec: Presses Université Laval, 1978) 2.

33 Ibid.

34 J. Robinson, NHLE 15.
The physical evidence of the cartonnage indicates that binding and copying of the Nag Hammadi library took place sometime shortly before 350 c.e.\(^{35}\). The author of TriProt and its place of composition are unknown;\(^{36}\) the tractate was originally written in Greek and a small number of Greek words are retained in the text. At an unknown date the text was translated "... from Greek into the Sahidic dialect of Coptic (with Lycopolitan deviations)".\(^{37}\)

John Turner holds that the first compositional layer of TriProt, the aretological material, probably existed before 100 c.e.\(^{38}\) and that the present form of the essay may have been reached by 150 c.e.\(^{39}\). G. Robinson cautions that because of its complex redactional history, the question of the date of composition of TriProt remains problematic,\(^{40}\) but she nevertheless estimates that the final form of TriProt may have been reached by the beginning of the second

\(^{35}\) Bentley Layton, The Gnostic Scriptures (Garden City: Doubleday, 1987) 86. All citations of the TriProt text are from Layton's translation unless otherwise noted.

\(^{36}\) Ibid.


\(^{39}\) Ibid., 74.

\(^{40}\) G. Robinson, "Trimorphic Protennoia (NHC XIII, 1)," 4.
century of the common era. It is one thing to determine a terminus ad quem for composition based on the cartonnage. But since no datable references are contained in the document, it is impossible to determine with any certainty the actual date of composition, and a fortiori impossible to know the date of composition of its various component parts.

Present comprehension and translation of the text are made more difficult by the "unfortunately badly lacunary state of the manuscript;" it is particularly the top lines of each page that are not intact.

As recently as 1977 Robert Wilson could observe that study of this text was only beginning: "We are not yet at the stage of definitive editions and accepted versions." Janssens' establishment of the French text came about in two steps. The first edition of Prōtennoia Trimorphē which appeared in Le Muséon in 1974 was based only on photographs of the Coptic text; her second and definitive version in 1978 benefits from Jacques E. Ménard's meticulous

---------------------

41 Ibid.


examination of the papyrus itself. For this reason I rely on Janssens' translation of the Coptic; however, for this paper, citations are from the most recent English translation, that of Bentley Layton.

The other leading scholars of TriProt are the Berlin group with Hans-Martin Schenke, Carsten Colpe and Gesine Robinson (formerly Schenke); the latter established the definitive German translation and commentary. The German scholars disagree with Janssens on both reconstruction and interpretation of the text.

Manuscript evidence joins Codex XIII with Codex II; J. Robinson explains that they are the only two codices which we know lacked Coptic pagination; their dimensions are very similar 28.0 vs 28.4 in height, 13.9 vs 13.8 in width at the centre of the quire; the scribal hands are so similar they have been at times taken to be by the same hand; the two codices have at least one tractate in common (On the Origin of the World).


46 Gesine Schenke, Die Driegestaltige Prottenoia (Nag Hammadi Codex XIII) Texte und Untersuchugon 132 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1984).

47 The Berlin group have endeavoured to present a complete and unbroken text but some of their reconstruction is questioned by other scholars. See Ménard's review of G. Schenke's Die Driegestaltige Prottenoia (Nag Hammadi Codex XIII) in Biblioteca Orientalis 42, no.516, (1986) 718.

48 J. Robinson, "Inside the Front Cover," 81 and Janssens, La Prótennoia Trimorphe 2.
The fibre direction is unusual in codices II, XII, and XIII: these codices, or parts of them, are an exception to the usual rule that horizontal fibres face up.49 The relevance, if any, of these scribal and codicological similarities is not immediately apparent. As J. Robinson observes, "much codicological information does not readily aid in sub-classifying the material."50

Contents

TriProt is a gnostic revelation discourse. The text is divided into three sections which proclaim the three descents of the heavenly redeemer, Protennoia. First she appears as Father or Voice: "It is I who am first thought, the thinking that exists..."(35:1); second as Mother or Sound: "It is I who am the sound that was shown forth by my thinking"(42:4); and third as Son or Word: "It is I who am the Word that exists..."(46:5).

Janssens notes a curious circularity within the triple manifestation:

It is certainly a question of a trinity: the Father, the Mother, the Son (p. 37). As an image of the Invisible Spirit, Protennoia is the Father of all the aeons, but also the Mother from which the All has received its image (p. 38). Then the perfect Son (p. 37) is manifest to the Aëons which emanated from him (of which he is then the


Father... so that the Father, the Mother and the Son really (only) are one! 51

Kurt Rudolph concurs that TriProt describes an essential unity within trinity: "... 'the doctrine of the Epiphany' - the cosmological and soteriological role of the personified 'first thought' of the primal Father is developed in the form of a trinitarian doctrine." 52 G. Robinson notes the androgyny of the three forms of the divine triad: "as the first thought of the primal Father, the Invisible Spirit, she has a masculine aspect whenever she represents him. But as his partner (42.8) she has a female aspect, and appearing in the Logos she bears the aspect of divine sonship." 53

Reading between the lines, as he himself recommends, 54 Rudolph concludes, "behind the Protennoia there also stand features of a universal deity, such as the gnostics frequently employ of their dialectic thinking; we recall the figure of Wisdom." 55


53 G. Robinson, "Trimorphic Protennoia (NHC XIII, 1)," 3.

54 Rudolph, Gnosis, 71.

55 Ibid. 141.
Christian Elements

Valentinianism, a major form of Christian gnosticism, is usually considered the crowning glory of gnosticism; it is one of the greatest and most influential gnostic schools.\textsuperscript{56} According to MacRae, Valentinianism is authentic Christian gnosticism which attests to an ongoing trajectory from non-Christian to Christian gnosticism.\textsuperscript{57} Pearson holds that the \textit{Apocryphon of John} (NHC III,1) may elucidate this trajectory since one can clearly discern in \textit{ApocJn} multiple stages of literary development, and the redactional process of christianization.\textsuperscript{58} Thus the compositional history of \textit{ApocJn} appears analagous to the classic example of \textit{Eugnostos the Blessed} (NHC III.3; v,1) a gnostic writing provided with the Christian framework of a dialogue between Christ and the disciples. In this revised form it is also found in the Nag Hammadi collection as the \textit{Sophia of Jesus Christ} (NHC III.4). However, it is the writings that are non-Christian, perhaps even pre-Christian, that are of primary importance to gnostic studies today.\textsuperscript{59}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{57} MacRae, "Nag Hammadi," 149.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Stroumsa, \textit{Another Seed}, 6.
\end{itemize}
Following Martin Krause's classification of the Nag Hammadi library, TriProt is an example of a "... Christian reworking of originally non-Christian writings."\[^60\] J. Robinson includes TriProt among those texts that have an occasional but unmistakable Christian reference which, however, seems so external to the main thrust of the text that one may be inclined to think it was added by a Christian editor, translator or scribe to what had been originally composed as a non-Christian text.\[^61\]

Most scholars concur that the christianization of TriProt is secondary and superficial,\[^62\] a Christian veneer.\[^63\]

An example of secondary christianization is found in the inserting of the name Christ in a list of synonyms that comprises a prose introduction to a probably traditional hymn: "They praised the perfect child, the anointed (Christ), the deity, the only begotten..." (TriProt 38:22-3). Similarly, in a cosmological text, it is said that the eternal realms or aeons had been engendered by the deity, the anointed one (Christ), who was himself engendered (39.7).\[^64\] This appending of the name "Christ" is ill integrated into the text. As G. Robinson observes: "It may \[^60\] MacRae, "Nag Hammadi," 152.

\[^61\] J. Robinson, NHLE, 9.


\[^63\] Pearson, "Jewish Elements," 153.

\[^64\] For this point I follow the translations of Turner and Janssens. Layton states that the Coptic text may be corrupt here (p.92 note b); however, his use of an active rather than a passive verb does not seem justified.
also be noted from other Sethian texts that this seems to have been the simplest way to 'Christianize' externally a gnostic text."65 Even Wilson, with his position in favour of the integral character of the Christian elements in TriProt, admits that these two usages of the name of Christ may be secondary.66

Wilson asserts that the usage of "Christ" in "they (the archons) thought that I was their Christ" (49.7) appears more integral to the text.67 The manuscript, however, is so lacunary at this point that it is well-nigh impossible to evaluate his judgment. Again it is noteworthy that the possibly Christian reference occurs in the baptismal material of Layer B, not in the aretalogical kernel (or base layer A) of the writing.

An interesting, possibly Christian, gloss occurs at 37:31. In a prose narration Protennoia, or more precisely the sound which derives from Protennoia's thinking and exists as voice, asserts that she anointed the only-begotten one. The manuscript is damaged and the actual use of ΧΡ (a standard scribal abbreviation of Christos), is conjectural. Layton's reconstruction reads: "|the| only-begotten, who is


66 Wilson, "The Trimorphic Protennoia," 52.

67 Ibid.; Turner's translation.
the anointed (Christ) whom I myself anointed with glory" (37:30-31). In this context of anointing, the possible reference need not be specifically Christian at all. Certainly the Jewish tradition also refers to "anointed ones". Since anointing seems to been an integral part of early Christian baptismal rites, it may well have been important in gnostic baptismal circles as well.

Protennoia states: "For a third time I showed myself forth to them within their bodies, existing as a verbal expression (or Word)" (47:13-15). Layton notes that the use of the word "bodies", or literally "tents" is a traditional metaphor of the fleshy body as the residence of the inner person or self. In the Hebrew wisdom tradition, Sirach uses the same vocabulary to express the fact that God commands Wisdom to pitch her tent and find a dwelling place in Israel (Sir 24:8). Similarly, in the johannine prologue the Word dwelt (Jn 1:14, eskenosen) among us. Stroumsa, however, asserts that this reference in TriProt is to Jesus Christ: "...on his third appearance the saviour is called

\[\text{\textit{Gnostic Scriptures}}, 91.\]

\[\text{\textit{Gnostic Scriptures}}, 98 n.47a.\]
logos in TriProt 47:13-15 where the reference to Jesus is manifest."71 While the reference is to divine presence, the terminology is not specifically nor necessarily Christian; Stroumsa appears to have been misled by the use of the word logos. Thus Stroumsa's designation of TriProt as a Christian gnostic work,72 needs modification to indicate the superficiality of the christianization. Stroumsa's error does, however, point out the affinity in vocabulary and imagery between TriProt and the sapiential tradition.

A clearly Christian but puzzling element is found in the ending: "I put on Jesus; I extracted him from the accursed wood; and I made him stand at rest in the dwelling places of his parent" (50:13-16). The reference is clearly to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ; however, the docetic christology of gnosticism more often refers to the crucifixion as apparent73 rather than accursed. In Turner's view, the final redaction of the writing was made not by an apostolic or orthodox Christian but by a redactor whose interests were polemically Sethian:74 this hypothesis does not really clarify the image.

Following the interpolation concerning baptism (47:35-48:35), G. Robinson discerns a double interpolation (49:7-

71 Stroumsa, 98-99.
72 Ibid., 100.
73 Rudolph, Gnosis, 169.
74 Turner, "Literary History," 65 n.4 and 75.
49:22 and 50:12-15) describing the incognito descent of Protanennoia. She notes that this interpolation not only interrupts the ongoing train of thought but also that the concept of an incognito descent is common in Christian gnosticism but is completely foreign to other parts of TriProt.\textsuperscript{75} She suggests that the passage only makes sense if it is read as a gnostic attempt to illuminate or correct certain christological titles and concepts applied to Jesus by early Christianity.\textsuperscript{76} Thus, H.-M. Schenke concurs, the interpolation is best understood as a polemic against orthodox Christianity.\textsuperscript{77} This is not to suggest that this double interpolation was of necessity developed in view of a specific NT text. G. Robinson holds rather that "the imprecise allusions to titles indicate that one has to do with orally circulating tradition."\textsuperscript{78} Her conclusion is that the whole double interpolation "... might have been an independent fragment of tradition, which in the process of the Christianizing of Gnosticism found its way into our text and thus effected an overlaying of diverging strands of tradition."\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{75} G. Robinson, "Prologue," 12.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid. and J. Robinson, "Sethians," 648 citing G. Schenke.


\textsuperscript{78} G. Robinson, "Prologue," 13.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 14.
Although the academic consensus that TriProt is only superficially christianized is strong, it is not unanimous. Since Janssens' original position was that TriProt was a Barbeloite text and therefore Christian gnostic,\(^2\) there was no need for her to discuss secondary christianization. More recently she admits that "it is very possible, as a number of exegetes maintain, that the Trimorphic Protennea underwent a later Christianization."\(^3\) Unfortunately, she does not disassociate herself from Wilson's hypothesis that TriProt may have been a Christian gnostic essay subsequently de-christianized.\(^2\) Wilson provides neither a logical explanation of how the hypothetical de-christianization of TriProt took place nor does he present textual evidence to support his conclusion that "... the Christian element in the text as it now stands is rather stronger than the Berlin group have recognised."\(^3\) Wilson's logic is not compelling, as a number of scholars point out. H.-M. Schenke contends that Wilson "... exaggerates the value of the occurrence in our texts of single words of the New Testament as being an indication of Christian influence."\(^4\) C. M. Tuckett concurs: "There is nothing in TriProt to suggest that the


\(^3\) Janssens, "Fourth Gospel," 242.

\(^2\) Ibid., 243.

\(^3\) Wilson, "Trimorphic Protennea," 54.

author was acquainted with synoptic tradition, even indirectly. Alleged links with that tradition turn out to be illusory."86

Thus, I agree with G. Robinson's position that TriProt is not only a valuable example of non-Christian gnosticism, but is significant because "... the individual Christian motifs and elements that have flowed into it attest already the discussions of the variegated religious streams in the early period of Christianity."86 Moreover, if one accepts the academic consensus that TriProt is a Sethian writing, then TriProt supports the view that "... in the case of Sethianism there never took place a genuine penetration of Christian thought, in the sense of a fusion such as one finds for example in Valentinianism."87

Sethian Material

If one can readily agree with the Berlin group that TriProt demonstrates a superficial christianization, it is more difficult to agree entirely with their unqualified classification of the work as Sethian.

Hans-Martin Schenke has borrowed the term "Sethian" from the patristic heresiologists88 to describe the

phenomenon of an early gnostic sect and system, i.e. a complex of interconnected basic beliefs and basic concepts. According to Pearson, the essentials of the Sethian-Gnostic system include the following elements:

the figure of Seth, son of Adam, who functions both as a heavenly being and as a redeemer, and whose spiritual descendants constitute the Gnostic elect; a primordial divine Triad of Father (sometimes called 'Anthropos' or 'Man'), Mother ('Barbelo'), and Son ('Autogenes', 'Adamas' etc); four 'luminaries' (Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithe, and Eleleth) of the divine Son Autogenes; and an apocalyptic schematization of history, focusing on the judgment of the Creator and his archons in the flood, in fire (Sodom and Gomorrah), and in the end-time.

In addition, Pearson notes that Wisdom or Sophia, as well as the evil demiurge Yaldabaoth, are found in the Sethian system but are not considered specifically Sethian since they occur in other early gnostic writings as well. J. Robinson points out that a similar inference, that the presence of the name Barbelo is not a specific characteristic of Sethianism, could also be drawn. Gesine Robinson, however, accepts the designation of the writing as Sethian because of the reference to Barbelo, the female deity of the Sethian divine triad.

------------------
91 Ibid.
It is difficult, however, to accept the unqualified classification of TriProt as Sethian since the name Seth and the term Sethian never appear in the writing. Nevertheless, both H.-M. Schenke and Pearson include TriProt in the Sethian text group. Carsten Colpe describes TriProt as "... clearly Sethian" and "... a classic within the Sethian corpus." G. Robinson clearly admits the textual absence of the name Seth but asserts that TriProt's Sethian classification is confirmed by the designation of Protennoia as Barbelo - the female deity of the Sethian divine triad. It is, however, important to note that the one equation of Protennoia and Barbelo (38:9) occurs in a prose section that Turner considers a Sethian expansion of the original document. As a Sethian redactor related Protennoia to Barbelo, so also Turner suggests both figures can be related to Sophia speculation:

In the gnostic texts, Sophia functions at many levels under various names in a highly complex

94 Schenke, "Phenomenon," 588 and Birger Pearson, "The Figure of Seth in Gnostic Literature," Sethian Gnosticism 475.


96 Ibid., 122.

97 G. Robinson, "Prologue," 4 and "Trimorphic Protennoia (NHC XIII, 1)," 3.

98 Turner, "Literary History," 63.
way. She functions as a creator and savior figure on a higher level as the divine Thought, which increasingly distinguishes itself from the high deity through various modalities, and which gives rise to the divine image in which man is made. 99

In contrast to those scholars who attempt to define and interpret Sethian gnosticism are those who debate the very existence of such a system or sect. Wisse is the most vehement:

The heresiological references to the Sethians appear to be due to a wrongheaded approach and false assumptions. We are forced to the conclusion that there never was a sect properly or improperly called Sethian. The name should be eliminated from the lists of gnostic schools and sects. The views and books which until now have been called Sethian will need another and better-founded explanation. 100

R. Van den Broek concurs and refers to the "alleged Sethian sect." 101

Whether or not a Sethian sect or system ever existed, TriProt is included in the German reconstruction of the Sethian system. This is primarily because the mythological material in TriProt corresponds closely to the Gospel of the Egyptians (NHC III,2), 102 the base writing of the Sethian reconstruction effort. 103 Thus MacRae refers to TriProt as

99 Ibid. 57.
100 Wisse, "Stalking," Sethian Gnosticism 573.
"...apparently Sethian" while the Berlin group is more emphatic: "... the material presupposed in the whole is the Sethian system." 

The characteristics of Sethian gnosticism are elucidated by H.-M. Schenke's analysis: "... the occurrence of the figure and name of Seth (along with his equivalents such as 'child of the child' or 'Allogenes') in our text group seems to me essential and basic." TriProt does not meet this basic and essential criterion. Pearson reviews one possible reference to Seth and concludes that TriProt does not meet this criterion "unless the term 'son of man' in Trim. Prot. 49:19 is to be understood as referring to a manifestation of Seth." This is possible but not certain since in other works "... it does not appear that Seth is ever given the simple title 'Son of Man' either in his heavenly or his earthly manifestation."

Secondly, Schenke considers as especially characteristic "the self-designation and self-understanding of our Gnostics as the 'seed of Seth' which runs throughout...


107 Pearson, "Figure of Seth," 486 n.49.

108 Ibid. 486.
these texts, either verbatim or in the form of synonyms ('the unshakeable race', 'great race', etc.).

Pearson agrees that an important feature of gnostic speculation on Seth is the idea that the gnostics constitute a special 'race' of Seth. He considers this self-designation to be the most important feature of what may be called Sethian Gnosticism. Again TriProt does not meet this criterion since the terms 'seed of Seth', 'race of Seth', 'great race' and 'unshakeable race' do not occur.

Certainly the gnostics addressed in TriProt are considered, or consider themselves to be a special group, a people set apart from the rest of humanity. This self-understanding is not necessarily gnostic or Sethian, as the Hebrew scriptures clearly attest. Protennoia teaches "all those who were offspring of the light" (37:19); this gnostic designation is not specifically Sethian. In this context G. Robinson asserts that "... the whole text is permeated with the basic Sethian concept of Gnostics as the seed or offspring of Seth." Yet the author of TriProt only specifies that Protennoia's followers are offspring and children of the light. Later redactors and readers related

109 Schenke, 591. In his study of the gnostic designation The Immovable Race (NHS 29; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), Michael Williams cautions against equating Sethians and the immovable race (204-207). There are no references to TriProt in the text and only four in the notes.

110 Pearson, "Figure of Seth," 489.

this concept to Seth and to Christ, but the syncretistic milieu of the first centuries must have provided referents other than Seth and/or Christ exclusively. Sophia, for instance, presents another possible referent.

According to Rudolph, Protennoia's soteriological role as a gnostic redeemer figure is clearly parallel to the role of Seth in the Sethian text group. Pearson explains that "in the Trimorphic Protennoia the role of Seth has been bypassed; the heavenly Mother ('Protennoia') puts on Jesus herself, without first having become manifest as Seth." Surely one is justified in asking why, if the role of Seth has been bypassed, the tractate should still be classified as Sethian.

As part of the rationale for designating TriProt as Sethian, the Berlin group cites the colophon of the essay: "A Sacred Scripture written by the Father with perfect Knowledge" (50:23). They suggest that Seth as the Father of true humanity is to be understood as the Father who authored TriProt. Such a reading is a possibility but remains conjectural and totally without textual basis. The colophon of Codex VII reads: "This book belongs to the fatherhood. It is the son who wrote it. Bless me, 0 father. I bless you, 0 father, in peace. Amen." (127:28-32). Both J.

---

112 Rudolph, Gnosis, 140.
113 Pearson, "Figure of Seth," 497 n.88.
114 J. Robinson, "Sethians," 647 citing the Berlin group.
Robinson and Wisse relate the 'fatherhood' to the monastic leadership of the monastery.\textsuperscript{115} Although the colophons may differ in that the one in TriProt appears more integral to the text, while in Codex VII the colophon is clearly scribal, it is clear that Seth is not the only possible paternal referent.

The cosmology referred to in TriProt presents mythic characters which also figure in clearly Sethian writings. Pearson's summary of the essentials of the Sethian-gnostic system\textsuperscript{116} includes the presence of the four luminaries or light givers (Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithe and Eleleth). In TriProt there are references to these figures at 38:33 to 39:5 and at 48:29; for H.-M. Schenke this would clearly argue for including TriProt within the Sethian group.\textsuperscript{117} G. Robinson considers the Demiurge Yaltabaoth = Saklas = Samael (39:27f) to be part of the Sethian system;\textsuperscript{118} in contrast, Pearson contends that the figure of Yaldabaoth is not specifically Sethian for it occurs in other early gnostic systems and mythic structures as well.\textsuperscript{119}

In summary, it may be said that TriProt does not meet certain fundamental criteria of the Sethian text group:

\textsuperscript{115} J. Robinson, \textit{NHLE} 18 and Wisse, "Early Monasticism," 435, n.15.

\textsuperscript{116} Pearson, "Development," 153.

\textsuperscript{117} Schenke, "Phenomenon," 597.

\textsuperscript{118} J. Robinson, "Sethians," 647 citing the Berlin group.

\textsuperscript{119} Pearson, "Development," 153.
neither the name of Seth nor the self-designation of the gnostics as the race of Seth is found unambiguously in the text. Nevertheless, there clearly are similarities with other writings which are preoccupied with the figure and role of Seth, most notably in the area of cosmology. It seems noteworthy that all the material which H.-M. Schenke considers indicative of Sethianism are in the second person plural. This is a clear grammatical difference from the atretological material of Layer A and corresponds to the material which Turner's compositional analysis of TriProt designates as sethianized\textsuperscript{120} (Layer B). Thus Turner's judgment that the original essay was secondarily sethianized and then christianized at a later stage of redaction would appear to be more precise than the Berlin group's unequivocal classification of TriProt as Sethian.

H.-M. Schenke describes his methodology as that of an archeological "specialist in ancient ceramics able to reconstruct the original form of a vessel without difficulty from a surviving handle or fragment of a rim."\textsuperscript{121} With less charity and more wit Wisse compares Schenke's attempted reconstruction of the Sethian system to a zoologist searching for fossil remnants of unicorns.\textsuperscript{122} Schenke, for his part, seems to have approached TriProt as a tailor might

\textsuperscript{120}Turner, "Literary History," 63-4.

\textsuperscript{121}Schenke, "Phenomenon," 594.

\textsuperscript{122}Wisse, "Stalking," 565.
evaluate an old costume. He notes and dismisses the most recent refurbishing and then classifies it, neglecting to observe that his classification is based on alterations to the original garment. I will avoid becoming involved in the controversy surrounding the existence and/or the stalking of elusive Sethians. I cannot, however, avoid questioning the accuracy of the nearly ubiquitous classification of TriProt as Sethian.

Gesine Schenke's analysis of TriProt does make some distinctions between the "original garment" and later additions. She notes that

the framework is considerably enlarged by means of cosmological, eschatological and soteriological material that in its concrete formation corresponds especially to the variant of the Sethian system that is at the basis of the Gospel of the Egyptians III.2.123

If one accepts that these enlargements are Sethian, or correspond to a variant of the Sethian system, surely the tractate as a whole should be designated as sethianized rather than Sethian. Just as Janssens' original description of TriProt as Christian gnostic has been superseded by the more precise studies of the Berlin group, their designation of the work as Sethian needs qualification. Certainly I accept that the cosmology presupposed in TriProt is Sethian, but as Turner's compositional/redactional analysis indicates, it would be more accurate to say that the work has been sethianized. Thus I suggest that TriProt should be

designated a gnostic writing, markedly sethianized and superficially christianized.

The Stratigraphy of the Writing

Bentley Layton considers the work as a whole to be a wisdom monologue which moves back and forth between poetry (parallel strophes) and prose (running narrative).\textsuperscript{124} His introduction does not, however, distinguish between the rather intrusive sections - the cosmogony and uranography, the 'true history' of humankind and the excerpt from a treatise on baptism\textsuperscript{125} - and those materials inherently part of a wisdom monologue i.e. the self-descriptions and exhortations. Janssens points out that most of the work is in the first person singular with the exception of some passages in the first or second person plural; it is not clear who are Protopennoia's interlocutors in these passages.\textsuperscript{126} Rudolph's summary of the work cites only those parts in the first person singular.\textsuperscript{127}

I consider these grammatical indications to be important because they help define the literary layers; the ego proclamations may indeed form the original essay. It is this original kernel of the writing, designated Layer A, which shows such interesting affinities with other writings

\textsuperscript{124} Layton, \textit{Gnostic Scriptures}, 87.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 86.
\textsuperscript{126} Janssens, "Fourth Gospel," 230.
\textsuperscript{127} Rudolph, \textit{Gnosis}, 141-144.
in the wisdom tradition. Since the aretalogical sections have an integrity and structure apart from the insertions, they are considered to be the base text, composed prior to the insertions. The cosmological, "historical" and baptismal sections cannot stand on their own, independent of the aretalogical sections.

In contrast to Layton, G. Robinson does emphasize that the text was subjected to several stages of redaction.\(^{128}\) Turner similarly signals the importance of the literary history of \textit{TriProt}, which he considers an elaborated descent hymn. Turner's hypothesis is that \textit{TriProt} underwent three stages of composition.\(^{129}\) Unravelling these various compositional and/or redactional layers is important because only in that way can the document be accurately classified and compared with other writings of the wisdom tradition, of the Nag Hammadi corpus, and of the New Testament.

\textbf{Aretalogical Material}

The underlying basis of the tractate, Layer A, is the consistent \textit{ego eimi} self-predications of Protennoia\(^{130}\) in an introduction (35:1-32) and in three further aretalogies of about forty lines each in the same style. (See Chart 1, page 39)

\(^{128}\) G. Robinson, "Trimorphic Protennoia (NHC XIII, 1)," 4.


\(^{130}\) Ibid., 62.
The first of these three aretalogies describes the advent or descent of Protennoia (35:32-36:27 and 40:29-41:1).

The second aretalogy, Protennoia as Sound (42:4-27), clearly demonstrates how the redactional process elucidated by Turner works. Protennoia states: "I have put myself within those who are worthy in the thinking of my unchangeable eternal realm (aeon)" (42:26); the text is here interrupted by an insertion describing the nature of the realm. The word "realm", the catchword, suggests to the Sethian redactor the necessity of explaining this concept in Sethian terms. This second aretalogy resumes at 45:2-12, but is again interrupted by a clarification of what happens when one enters perfect light (45:13-20). After this baptismal interpolation based on the catchword "light", the second aretalogy concludes (45:21 to 46).

The third aretalogy proclaiming Protennoia as the Word is similarly made up of several sections 46:5-7, 47:5-23. 49:6-23. 50:9-20.131

With Turner, I consider these aretalogical statements to be the kernel of the writing and designate it "Layer A".

The second phase of composition was the expansion of the tripartite aretalogy by means of six doctrinal insertions. These interpolations have strong parallels with

131 I have followed Turner's division of the third aretalogy; G. Robinson does not always agree with Turner's division of the text.
Sethian mythological material; I designate this second compositional stratum "Layer B". The first and longest insertion (36:27 to 40:29) narrates in prose the establishment of four eternal realms, the emanation of wisdom or afterthought and of Sakla (Satan), and very briefly describes the creation of the universe and of Adam. The second insertion is described in the text as a mystery: it elucidates the loosening of the bonds of flesh by which the underworld powers enslave Protennoia's fallen members (41:1-42:2).

A third insertion (42:27 to 45:2) is also called a mystery; it is an apocalyptic narration of the final struggle at the end of the world, the judgment of the celestial powers and a lament by the powers. The ending of the fourth insertion (46:7 to 47 top) is uncertain because of the damaged state of the manuscript; the interpolation is, however, close to the ideas expressed in the original aretalogies. The theme of non-recognition is elaborated in the fifth insertion (47:24 to 49 top) which also includes an intrusive section on baptism.

The sixth and last insertion (49:22 to 50:9) teaches about the significance of the baptismal ascent ritual. Turner notes that throughout these interpolations the redactor has drawn on traditional Sethian material. Thus the kernel of the document is aretalogical while the second compositional layer is sethianized. Chart 2 (page 42) not only demonstrates the contrasts between the aretalogical
layer A and sethianized layer B, it also shows the similarities of layer B of TriProt to the typically Sethian writing The Gospel of the Egyptians.

After circulation as a sethianized tractate in this form, Turner holds that the final stage of composition seems to have been the incorporation of Christian materials into the archeological portion of the writing. I refer to these tertiary Christian elements as "Layer C".

Conclusion

With this background of the stratigraphy of the writing and aware of the dangers of superficial classifications, I will examine in more detail the kernel of the writing, aretalogical layer A. Colpe holds that TriProt is a "classic" within the gnostic corpus as a whole and points out the relevance of the wisdom background of the writing:

the document itself contains implicit indices of its antiquity - naturally only relative and not absolute chronology as far as tradition-history is concerned - inasmuch as the sapiential speculation which is at the basis of the document, from which gnostic mythology could have developed and into which the latter can again be transformed, still remains clearly visible.

Thus the wisdom tradition merits further study. The question for TriProt seems analogous to the one MacRae poses concerning the relationship between wisdom, gnosticism and johannine theology: "... is the Fourth Gospel an

\[122\] Turner, "Literary History," 64.

\[133\] Colpe, "Traditions," 122.
independent development from the wisdom tradition or is it part of a larger movement of speculation in which Gnosticism also reinterprets wisdom?"134 Since the aretalogical layer A of TriProt seems to witness precisely that gnostic reinterpretation of the wisdom movement, an analysis of the sapiential background of the writing is imperative. The challenge is to attempt to determine where Protennaia, as a wisdom figure yet a classically gnostic redeemer figure, fits in the wisdom trajectory.

134 MacRae, "Gnosticism," 95-6.
Chart I

Aretalogical Material

**Introductory aretalogy:** 35:1-31

Protennoia introduces herself in all her comprehensiveness, sometimes using antithetical imagery for her self-definitions.

It is I who am first thought (35:1)
It is I who am the movement...in whom the all stands at rest (35:2-3)
I am invisible within the thinking of the invisible (35:7)
I am incomprehensible, existing within the incomprehensible and moving within every creature (35:10-1)
It is I who am the life of my afterthought (35:12)
It is I who am vision (35:22); it is I who am invisible (35-24)
I am the most innumerable of all beings. (35:29)
It is I who am the entirety, having [existed (?) before] everyone. (35:31)

**First Aretalogy:** 35:32 to 36:27 and 40:29 to 41:1.

Protennoia describes herself as she descends to reveal herself to her own.
It is I who am perception and acquaintance (36:12)
I am a sound (35:32).
It is I who am laden with sound (36:9)
It is I who am perception and acquaintance (36:12)
It is I who am the sound that exists, bestowing sound upon everyone (36:14--15).
I personally showed myself forth among all those that had recognized me (36:22)
And I dwelt with my own who were there |hidden| within them, bestowing power |...|, (and) |imparten| image unto them. (40:30-33)
It is I who am their parent. (41:1)

Second aretalogy: 42:4 to 42:27, 45:2 to 12
Protennoia descends for a second time presenting herself as Mother and call.
It is I who am the sound that was shown forth by my thinking. (42:4)
It is I who am the Mother of the sound (42:9)
And I came, for a second time, in the manner of a woman (42:17)
And I project a voice |of the| sound into the ears of those who recognize me (45:10-11)
And I am calling you (plural) to enter the superior, perfect light. (45:12)
For it is I who have imparted image unto the entirety. (45:23)
And it is I who have put breath into my own. (45:28)
And I ascended and proceeded into my light. (45:30)

Protennoia reveals herself for the third time as verbal expression or Word.

I am the [verbal expression (Word)] (46:5)

For a third time I showed myself forth to them within their bodies, existing as a verbal expression (or Word). (47:13-14)

And I hid myself within them until such time as I might show myself forth unto my siblings. (47:22)

And I shall bring my posterity in to the holy light, in incomprehensible silence. Amen. (50:18-19)
Chart 2
Comparison of Aretalogical and Sethian Material

**Sound Images**

**Aretalogical layer A of TriProt:**

I am a sound... ((35:32)

It is I who am laden with sound (36:9)

It is I who am the sound that exists, bestowing sound upon everyone. (36:14-15)

It was through me that the sound came to exist (45:27)

**Sethianized layer B of TriProt:**

Now the sound that has derived from my thinking exists as three compartments: Father, Mother, Son - a voice existing perceptibly. (37:20)

**Other Sethian material:**

Three powers emanated from it: namely, the father, the mother and the son, which are self-manifest beings, from the incorruptible parent's living silence. *(Gospel of the Egyptians* 50:23)
Person of Meirothea

Aretalogical layer A of TriProt:
It is I who am the |...| the completion of the entirety, namely Meirothea, the glory of the Mother. (45:8-9)

Sethianized layer B of TriProt:
She who is called Meirothea, the incompreensible womb, the unrestrainable and immeasurable sound. (38:14-5)

Other Sethian material:
Thence there emanated the great cloud of light, a living power, the mother of the holy incorruptible beings of the great powers, the Moirothea. (Gospel of the Egyptians 60:30)

Person of Eleleth

Aretalogical layer A of TriProt: no reference

Sethianized layer B of TriProt:
Next a verbal expression (or Word) emanated from the great luminary Eleleth and it said, "It is I who am the ruler. Who is the one of chaos? And who is the one of Hades?" And at that moment its light appeared, shining bright because it possessed afterthought. (39:13-18)

Other Sethian material:
After five thousand years, the great luminary Eleleth said "Let something rule over chaos and Hades." And a cloud |...| "material wisdom" (Sophia) appeared. (Gospel of the Egyptians 68:5-8)
Theme of Creation

Aretalogical layer A of TriProt:
And |I| radiated |upon the| darkness.
It is I who brought forth the |water(?)|.
It is I who am hidden in waters
It is I who, within my thinking, radiated the entirety part
by part. (36:5-8)

Sethianized layer B of TriProt:
And the great demon began to order eternal realms (aeons) in
the manner of the eternal realms that exist (40:4-6)

Other Sethian material:
And it |established| the four |aeons|. By means of the word
(or verbal expression) it established |them|. (Gospel of the
Egyptians 60:19-21)
CHAPTER 2
WISDOM LITERATURE

Introduction

The common denominator of wisdom literature is preoccupation with and reflection on the human situation. James Wood writes, "these writings are the literary precipitate emerging from the gathered wisdom of many generations, during which men have reflected on what it means to be a human being." 1 Similarly Gerhard von Rad views wisdom as "man in search of himself." 2

James Crenshaw, however, cautions against definitions that are so comprehensive as to be unusable; he prefers a tripartite definition of wisdom thought. For him wisdom literature deals first with man and nature as man attempts to ensure human survival by studying and classifying natural phenomena. Secondly, wisdom treats of man and human relationships in family and society. Finally -- and particularly in the Hebrew tradition -- it examines the relationship between man and God. 3


2 Gerhard Von Rad, Wisdom in Israel (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972) 309.

3 James Crenshaw, "Prolegomenon," Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom (New York: KTAV Publishing, 1976) 4. To the modern theologian, sensitized to the use of sexually inclusive language, these repetitions "man and..." may seem offensive. However, much of the wisdom literature studied here has evolved in patriarchal societies. Certainly in the Hebrew wisdom writings the attitude toward women, particularly foreign women, is misogynous. In this light,
In the Hebrew sacred writings, wisdom literature consists of the Old Testament books of Proverbs, Job and Qoheleth or Ecclesiastes and the apocryphal books of Sirach or Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon. Both Crenshaw and Roland Murphy, however, caution against simply equating wisdom literature with these Hebrew writings. Crenshaw asserts that all simple definitions of wisdom literature "founder at one point or another, for wisdom is an attitude, a body of literature and a living tradition." 4

Murphy elaborates that Jewish wisdom literature expresses an understanding of reality and should not be equated simply with the teachings of the sages:

The sapiential understanding of reality was shared by all Israelites; it was not a mode of thinking that belonged to only one class. The mentality was far broader than the literary remains that have come down to us as "wisdom literature". 5

The world view underlying this wisdom movement is comprehensive. The personal, the social and the cosmic spheres are inter-related and dependent on underlying divine order, even if - on the surface - life may appear chaotic. The sage's own verbal expression mirrors the world reality, i.e., it may be superficially opaque because of figures of

______________________________________________________________________

it would distort the linguistic and cultural realities of the writings if one tried to accommodate modern sensibilities by using sexually inclusive language: the literature is not inclusive.


speech and poetic devices. Ultimately, however, wisdom communicates and mediates divine order. In a similar way human existence is ambivalent: it participates in the chaos of human life but is also a reflection of the divinely ordered world.

Generally, in sapiential speculation the role of the sage is to observe human experience and to articulate the society's conventional wisdom so that it can be repeated as proverb on appropriate occasions.\(^6\) This type of conventional wisdom available in proverb form relies on a stable social order for the continued validity of its insights and the opportunities to present those insights. When the social structures are threatened, however, conventional wisdom has to be re-assessed in order to reflect the new cultural realities. Since the biblical development of the mythic personification of Wisdom belongs to this process of reflection it is of prime importance for this study.

In order to clarify the attitude expressed in the literature classified as "wisdom," I will first survey some Egyptian parallels that pre-date the Hebrew writings. Then I will examine canonical and apocryphal wisdom writings in order to establish an historical connection with the sapiential elements in TriProt. My focus will be the personified Wisdom (Sophia) as she appears in the biblical

tradition and is elaborated in the writings of Philo and in apocalyptic and Qumran texts. Since the divine figure of Wisdom is radically transformed in gnostic writings, I will compare Protznooia of TriProt with gnostic descriptions of Sophia in the next two chapters.

Egyptian Wisdom Literature

Much of the oldest wisdom literature in Egypt and the ancient Near East is prescriptive. The instruction genre includes material dating from as early as the third millennium b.c.e.; it appears to have remained very stable for well over two thousand years.7 The material is practical wisdom on how to succeed in life: it not only deals with personal and domestic matters but also includes advice concerning the problems of public administration.8 Kloppenborg stresses the prudential aspect: self-discipline and discretion are necessary not only in private life but also for the statesman to be effective in his dealings with superiors and underlings.9

Sapiential advice is not simply pragmatism or opportunism, however; the instructions are not merely "a gospel for go-getters."10 Fundamental to the teachings is


8 Wood, _Wisdom Literature_, 25-27.

9 Kloppenborg, _Formation_, 272.

10 W. Lee Humphreys, "The Motif of the Wise Courtier in Proverbs," _Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary_
maat - who is both a goddess and the principle of divine order with which the moral life of human beings ought to conform. 11 McKane holds that "order is ultimately not a political concept but a theological doctrine." 12 Diane Bergant also emphasizes the importance of the concept of divine order throughout the ancient Near East: "cosmic order is an expression of divine power and wisdom. Compliance with sapiential admonitions brings one into harmony with this cosmic order. The authority that lies behind these admonitions is divine." 13

As the courtier or apprentice statesman performs appropriate service to the pharaoh, he serves the god/king, son of the creator, establisher of maat. Thus, regardless of his own personal or political motives, he perpetuates the underlying conviction that the creator has established the world order and, as a wise man, he acts in harmony with that order. Humphreys asserts:

thus, it was upon maat that the courtier founded his life, upon that which defined and informed the universe itself. He avoided the passionate man

---


11 I follow the convention that Maat is the goddess while the principle is maat; similarly Wisdom is the personified mythical being while wisdom is a virtue or principle.


13 Diane Bergant, What are they saying about wisdom literature? (New York: Paulist, 1984) 42.
who had lost sight of the created order. The silent man is one whose life is in harmony with the foundations of creation; the man given to appetites and lust transgresses maat.14

In later Egyptian writings the characteristics and functions of the goddess Maat are absorbed by the goddess Isis.15 The influence of both Maat and Isis are found in later biblical, non-canonical and gnostic writings related to the theme of wisdom.

Old Testament Literature

As part of the civilization that was the ancient Near East, the Hebrew writers of Old Testament wisdom imitated and adapted the Egyptian instruction genre and reinterpreted the theological theme of maat, relating it to the lordship of Yahweh. P. E. Bonnard's comparative analysis of the goddess Maat and the personified Wisdom of Proverbs enumerates ways in which the literary descriptions of the two figures are similar. Nevertheless he concludes that the essential differences outweigh the characteristics in common - Maat has been completely assimilated and reinterpreted by the biblical writers.16


The editor of the anthology known as the Book of Proverbs presents prudential material like that found in Egyptian wisdom literature. Proverbs 22:17 - 23:11, for example, demonstrates a substantial number of literary links to The Instruction of Amenemope. The purpose of the sage in giving this secular commonsense advice is so that the student/reader will trust in the Lord (Prov 22:1).

Throughout the Book of Proverbs there is emphasis on the concept of order; not maat, of course, but fear of the Lord as the beginning of knowledge (Prov 1:7 and 9:10). This same emphasis is found as a divine pronouncement in Job 28:21

"Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom."

Walter Brueggemann suggests that this formula governs the wisdom of Proverbs, even where it is not explicitly verbalized:

This wisdom is not sheer prudential ethics, pragmatism or utilitarianism. It has a theological foundation in the lordship of Yahweh, in the confidence of his good purposes and the resultant confidence about the orderliness of life, the reliability of healthy conduct, the integrity of a community, and the meaningfulness of human history.

Crenshaw concurs that the concept of order lies at the heart of wisdom thinking.


19 Crenshaw "Prolegomenon," 27.
Crenshaw holds that the introduction of the notion of fear of the Lord as the first principle of wisdom is the first stage of theologization of essentially secular wisdom speculation. What is more relevant to this study, however, is the second stage of theologization, i.e., speculation concerning the hypostasis of wisdom as divine presence in the world. In Crenshaw's view,

the personification of wisdom functions to bestow authority upon wisdom, and to demonstrate divine concern for mankind.... This claim of a personification of God in wisdom, although not fully developed until the Wisdom of Solomon, affirms that God has placed in the human mind a point of contact between heaven and earth, and that this rational principle dwells among the people of Israel in a special manner. 20

Conventional wisdom, both Egyptian and Hebrew, is threatened when drastic social or cultural changes challenge human confidence concerning the validity of divine order in life. Burton Mack holds that the emergence in Proverbs of a personified Wisdom figure is due primarily to socio-cultural crisis and theological reflection on the implications of the crisis. 21 He asserts that the cruel realities of the Babylonian exile and its aftermath forced OT wisdom writers to rethink wisdom, "...to acknowledge the dislocation of wisdom from the social fabric, but to affirm that its insights and concerns were valid nevertheless." 22 This

20 Crenshaw "Prolegomenon," 25.
21 Mack, Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic, 144.
22 Ibid., 145.
process of reflection led to the personification of wisdom, the figure first found in Proverbs 1-9, who is based not in the collapsed social structures but in the cosmic order.

The emergence of the personified Wisdom is of major importance. As Elizabeth Johnson notes, in the Hebrew tradition the richness and variation of imagery describing Sophia is unsurpassed by any other personification of a divine attribute.23 Another point which emphasizes the significance of personified Wisdom is the seemingly inexhaustible elaborations of Sophia by later writers with radically differing theological perspectives. Variations of the Sophia figure are found in canonical, apocalyptic and gnostic texts.

This mythic conception of Wisdom describes Sophia as a divine figure present at the creation of the world, who appears in the world seeking recognition. Her function in post-Exilic Israel at the time of the composition of Proverbs is to be a mediator between a seemingly hidden God and men confused by social breakdown. In Mack's words,

_the figure of wisdom becomes the language expression for a category of 'knowledge' which does not belong to man as man on the basis of observation and human experience, but which may now be understood as God's wisdom, a wisdom which stands over against man and confronts him with itself._24


Wisdom is no longer that which can be gained by human observation and teaching (wisdom of experience). Rather she is theological wisdom who "...confronts men on completely new grounds of authority. She is now the wisdom of God." 25

In the Book of Proverbs, Sophia begins as a street preacher with a strident but familiar prophetic message of reproach (Prov 1:20-33); she threatens calamity to those who do not listen and promises security to those who follow her counsel. However, in this manifestation, Sophia goes beyond the usual prophetic call for repentance; she is equated with life itself (4:13) and she asserts that whoever finds her finds life (Prov 8:35). After insisting that she is speaking words of truth (8:6-9) and that even royal power is at her discretion (8:15-16), Wisdom reveals her role as the first of creation (8:22-3). She describes her closeness to God, her rejoicing before God and her delight in his creation (8:30-1). The section concludes with an exhortation to heed Wisdom's message and be rewarded; those who reject Wisdom do so at their own peril (8:32-36). This theme of the rejection of Wisdom will be elaborated in Jewish apocalyptic literature.

In Sophia's last appearance in the Book of Proverbs she is a gracious hostess inviting the unwise to attend a banquet, to leave simpleness and walk in the way of insight

25 Ibid.
(9:1-6). Throughout the Book of Proverbs Sophia both invites and challenges human beings.

To summarize with Johnson's words, "Sophia is a beneficial, right-ordering power in whom God delights and by whom God creates; her constant effort is to lure human beings to life." 26 Johnson's term "right-ordering power" indicates the importance of the whole concept of divine order underlying wisdom speculation and the figure of Sophia. The Egyptian concept of maat as divine order is transformed by biblical writers to fear of the Lord. Then, even when social crises make the present world appear chaotic, the divine figure of Wisdom emerges to invite her followers to a new theological understanding.

The Book of Sirach

The collection of wisdom writings known as the Book of Sirach was written in Hebrew by a professional scribe, Jesus the son of Sirach, in Jerusalem about 180 B.C.E. Soon after 132 B.C.E., in Alexandria, ben Sira's grandson translated the Hebrew text into Greek. 27 The writings attest to Jewish concerns in the ongoing conflict between Judaism and Hellenism. Alexander Di Lella characterizes the approach of Jesus ben Sira as conservative:

26 Johnson, "Jesus," 265.

27 "Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach," The Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha (Revised Standard Version; eds. Bruce Metzger and Herbert May; New York: Oxford, 1965) 128.
his (the scribe's) purpose was not so much to engage in a systematic polemic against Hellenism, but rather to convince Jews and even well-disposed Gentiles that true wisdom is to be found in Jerusalem, not in Athens; in the inspired books of Israel, not in clever writings of Hellenistic humanism. 28

Central to this effort is the figure of Wisdom.

The book of Sirach contains two sections, each of which begins with an encomium on Wisdom. The first hymn of praise to Wisdom is based on the opening statement "all wisdom comes from the Lord" (Sir 1:1). Created by God (1:9) before the rest of creation (1:4), Wisdom's role is to be a gift, a sign of divine love (1:10); she brings material benefits (1:16-17) as well as long life (1:12, 20; 4:11-15). These rewards of Wisdom highlight the role of Wisdom as mediatrix between God and her followers: "The Lord will bless the place she enters" (4:13), "The Lord loves those who love her" (4:14).

Sophia as a mediator figure is intriguing and controversial. Bonnard denies that Sophia ever had an existence apart from Yahweh and insists that the personified divine figure is neither a goddess "nor a semi-divine figure intermediary between God and man." 29 The more nuanced position of Martin Hengel, however, seems closer to the text itself. He holds that there was a Jewish tendency, also found in Hellenistic Platonizing philosophy, to make the

29 Bonnard, "De la sagesse," 133; my translation.
divine absolutely transcendent and to introduce intermediary beings, such as Sophia or angels.\footnote{Hengel, \textit{Palestinianism and Hellenism}, 1:155 and 2:100 n.309.}

As a mediator, Sophia is available. The point is made both in chapter four and in the concluding poem of Sirach (51:13-30) that Wisdom is available to those who seek her.

In poetic sections in Proverbs 8:4-31 and Sirach 24:3-22, 30-34, Wisdom speaks in the first person singular offering unmistakeable parallels with the Isis aretalogies.\footnote{Ibid.} One of these parallels is the assertion that "alone I have made the circuit of the vault of heaven and have walked in the depths of the abyss" (Sirach 24:5).

Sirach's hymn of self-praise by Sophia in chapter twenty-four significantly advances the discussion concerning the nature of wisdom. The monologue begins with an identification of Wisdom with the creative word of God (Genesis 1) and with the pillar of cloud, the locus of God's presence (Exodus 13:21-2; 14:19-20; 33:9-10, 40:34-5). God commands Wisdom, in her search through the created world for a resting place, to dwell in Israel (24:8). Next Jesus ben Sira equates Wisdom and the Torah: "All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law which Moses commanded us" (24:23). Given this identification, Johnson writes, "...the universality of cosmic Sophia was associated with the particular history of Israel and its precious..."
Crenshaw holds that this incorporation of the sacred history of Israel into the wisdom tradition represents a third stage in the theologization of sapiential thought.\textsuperscript{33}

The new exclusivity of this third stage of theologization has a number of implications. The previous universality of wisdom literature becomes restricted to the particular history of Israel and the Torah.\textsuperscript{34} Hengel considers this restriction a violent break: "the universal wisdom becomes the possession of a limited number of elect, the people of Israel or the pious devoted to the law."\textsuperscript{35} The apocalyptic, Essene, and gnostic writers further elaborate this theme of the exclusivity of the elect, those who follow and/or possess Wisdom.

The equation of Wisdom and Torah in Sirach 24 reinterprets the Tabernacle/Exodus language. Also by its identification of Sophia with the Law, it relates the value of the scribal schools and of Hellenistic culture in general to a specifically Israelite law code. David Winston notes that this equation is an "...uneasy compromise of a Divine Wisdom which pervades the cosmos yet maintains its

\textsuperscript{32} Johnson, "Jesus" 265.

\textsuperscript{33} Crenshaw, "Prolegomenon," 25.

\textsuperscript{34} Johnson, "Jesus," 265 and Hengel 1:161.

\textsuperscript{35} Hengel, \textit{Palestinianism and Hellenism}, 1:161.
concentrated focus in Zion and in the teachings of the Torah, which thus achieves a new universal significance.\textsuperscript{36} Hengel holds that the theological conclusion that wisdom is equated with the Torah would never have developed were it not for the ongoing threat of foreign influence, specifically the controversy with Hellenism.\textsuperscript{37} In this way Hengel's position supports that of Mack that it is always in the face of socio-cultural challenges that the wisdom writers make theological reinterpretations of wisdom: "the theological concerns are to understand anew the ways of God and of Israel in a new and difficult historical situation."\textsuperscript{38} Since my focus is on the person of Wisdom herself, I will not explore in depth the many implications of this Torah-wisdom identification. Hengel, for example, holds that the Torah-wisdom identification is the foundation of the Pharisaic movement,\textsuperscript{39} while Johnson considers the concept a decisive step in the formation of New Testament christology.\textsuperscript{40} This point will be discussed in chapter 5 which deals with wisdom motifs in the Fourth Gospel.

The developing wisdom figure is a woman - sister, prophetess and hostess (Prov 7:4, 8:1-36 and 9:1-5) -

\textsuperscript{36} David Winston, The Wisdom of Solomon (Anchor Bible 43; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1979) 36.

\textsuperscript{37} Hengel, Palestinianism and Hellenism, 1:162.

\textsuperscript{38} Mack, "Myth" 59-60.

\textsuperscript{39} Hengel, Palestinianism and Hellenism, 1:170

\textsuperscript{40} Johnson, "Jesus" 276.
contrasted with a foolish woman who is described in sexually ambiguous language. In the Book of Sirach, the sexual imagery describes Sophia herself. Jesus ben Sira uses a series of botanical, and sexually evocative, images to describe the implanting, the blossoming and the fruitfulness of Wisdom's stay in Israel (24:12-17). In the repeated invitations to come to Wisdom and in the benefits to Wisdom's followers, the imagery used has sexual connotations (24:19-21). Erotic descriptions of Sophia are also found in Qumran writings, (11QPsα Sirach).

Wisdom in Alexandria

The Wisdom of Solomon presents Jewish wisdom in the Greek world of Alexandria in the first century b.c.e. or c.e. The presentation is strongly cosmopolitan and, in some ways, defensive, in order to meet the challenges of intellectual Hellenistic culture. Pseudo-Solomon avails himself of eclectic Hellenistic philosophical vocabulary to describe both God and Sophia. In James Reese's words, the work is "...a constructive synthesis to present the role of God's wisdom in the cosmos rather than as an exhortation or a polemic, although these latter intentions permeate the book as a whole."\(^{41}\) The book may well have been preaching to the converted; it was a confirmation for the Jews that

\[^{41}\text{James Reese, Hellenistic Influence on the Book of Wisdom and its Consequences (Analecta Biblica 41; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979) 107.}\]
their own religious traditions were capable of meeting the challenges of the intellectualism of Hellenistic culture.42

The Wisdom of Solomon continues a number of themes concerning the nature of Wisdom, themes originally described in the Book of Proverbs but elaborated here.43 For example, Wisdom guides temporal rulers (Wis 6:1-11, 21-24) and seeks out those who desire to love her (6:12-16). She is ubiquitous and available: "She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her" (6:13); she goes about seeking those worthy of her, and she graciously appears to them in their paths and meets them in every thought (6:16). The rewards to those who love Wisdom are friendship with God (7:14, 27), glory and honor (8:10), delight and unfailing wealth (8:18).

One finds characteristics usually associated with divinity not only in Sophia's works but in the very description of her: "she pervades and penetrates all things" (7:24). Her intimacy with God is emphasized: "she is an initiate in the knowledge of God and an associate in his works" (8:4); she lives with God and is loved by God (8:3). She is described as a breath of the power of God, a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty, a reflection of

42 Scott, The Way of Wisdom, 213.

eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and image of his goodness (7:25-6).

The themes of Wisdom's activity in creation, her close relation to God and her role as teacher of humankind might reasonably be expected in any sapiential writing of the Hebrew tradition.44 What is innovative in the Wisdom of Solomon, however, are the parallels and re-interpretations of the Isis tradition. The goddess Isis had absorbed many of the features of early Egyptian Maat;45 in turn the characteristics of Isis were transferred to the figure of personified Wisdom.

Reese holds that Isis, as patroness of wisdom, has natural affinities with Sophia: "every cultured reader of the period would recognize that the Sage was taking all the gains assigned to Isis by the pagans and assigning them to the God of creation, who alone confers Wisdom upon upright men."46 The purpose of this assimilation is, according to Johnson, "...a creative effort to counteract the religious and social influence of this most popular and religiously attractive deity."47

The parallels between Isis and Sophia and the transference of Isis characteristics and functions to Sophia

44 Kloppenborg, "Isis," 66.
45 Hengel, Palestinianism and Hellenism, 1:158 and Kloppenborg, "Isis," 77.
46 Reese, Hellenistic Influence, 104.
47 Johnson, "Jesus," 269.
do not remain on the superficial level of shared vocabulary. Kloppenburg not only points out the methodological inadequacy of simply comparing isolated parallelisms in the Isis aretalogies and the wisdom monologues, he also analyzes the social implications of the roles and functions shared by Isis and Sophia. 48 Both, for example, bring order to the world: Sophia is said to "reach mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well" (Wisdom 8:1) while Isis proclaims, "I am Isis, sole ruler forever, and I oversee the ends of the sea and the earth. I have authority, and though I am but one I oversee them." 49 What is more important than any one aspect, however dramatically similar the Isis/Sophia parallel may be, is the mythical patterns of the two figures. In the Hebrew tradition, one is accustomed to descriptions of Sophia as an agent or instrument of God but not directly as a saviour herself; nevertheless, in the Wisdom of Solomon the point is explicitly reiterated that men are saved by Wisdom (9:18 - 10:21). Kloppenburg holds that this innovative description of Sophia derives from Isis since Isis is noted for her saving deeds, her ability to save individuals from disaster and to grant favour to supplicants. 50

48 Kloppenburg, "Isis," 61.
49 Cited in Johnson, "Jesus," 270.
50 Kloppenburg, "Isis and Sophia" 67, 70-1.
Similarly, the theme of kingship demonstrates marked parallels in the patterns and functions of Isis and Sophia. In the developing theology of kingship in Egypt, Isis, as patroness, mother and wife/consort of the Pharaoh, grants long life and eternal kingship.\footnote{51} In the biblical tradition, Sophia had been associated with Solomon, king and sage, and with the guidance of temporary rulers (Wis 6:1-11) but did not directly confer kingship. Now, in the Wisdom of Solomon, Sophia is presented as the divine agent by which kings reign (6:20-21), are revered (8:10-16), are guided (9:10-12), are given wisdom (8:2-21) and eternal kingship (6:21, 8:13,17).

The Wisdom of Solomon elucidates some aspects of the tension in wisdom speculation between freely accessible wisdom and hidden and/or rejected wisdom. As previously noted, in chapter six of the Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom is accessible, "easily discerned." Since she seeks out those who desire to know her, they will have no difficulty in finding her (6:12-15). This is consistent with other Hebrew sapiential writings, such as Prov 8:17, Sirach 1:10,26; 4:11-12; 25:7,19, and 34. Yet in chapter nine Solomon prays that God will not reject him but will reward him with the gift of Wisdom.

The shift in focus from Wisdom, completely accessible, to Wisdom, a divine gift to be earnestly prayed for has

\footnote{51} Ibid., 74-5.
antecedents in Egyptian and in canonical sapiential speculation. Maat is described as descending to earth and reascending to heaven;\(^{52}\) Job laments the inaccessability of Wisdom (Job 28:12-15). This theme of the hiddenness or the retreat of Wisdom is most developed in Jewish apocalyptic literature but there are references to hidden Wisdom in Philo as well as the Wisdom of Solomon.

Philo of Alexandria

The Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria continues many of the same themes as the Wisdom of Solomon. Winston points out that there is a remarkable similarity in philosophical ideas and images between the roughly contemporaneous writings of Philo of Alexandria and the Wisdom of Solomon.\(^ {53}\) In contrast to the more simple poetic personification of Wisdom in Proverbs and Sirach, Philo and pseudo-Solomon consider Sophia to be a more complicated ontological reality, an eternal emanation of the deity, a divine hypostasis co-eternal with God.\(^ {54}\) Philo uses a number of images to describe Wisdom as aspects or expressions of God: she is a many-named power; a copy and representation of heavenly virtue; a rock from which flows a spring to irrigate souls; an image of divine excellence; the

\(^{52}\) Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 103

\(^{53}\) Ibid. 34.

daughter of God who is both masculine and feminine; and heavenly nourishment.\textsuperscript{55} The purpose of this varied imagery is to assert the comprehensiveness of Wisdom and to emphasize her intimate union with the divine.

The androgyny of Wisdom is interesting. Philo states that Wisdom's name is feminine but her nature is masculine: 
"...the daughter of God, Wisdom, is both masculine and father, inseminating and engendering in souls a desire to learn discipline, knowledge, practical insight, noble and laudable actions."\textsuperscript{55} This androgyny of Philonic Wisdom is, however, functional rather than ontological. Richard Baer explains that for Philo the categories male and female refer to function and purpose rather than to nature.\textsuperscript{57}

Jean Laporte and Erwin Goodenough concur that Philo describes Sophia in imagery used by biblical authors.\textsuperscript{58}

For example, Philo continues the tradition of using sexual


\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 94-95.


imagery to describe Sophia's intimacy with the divine: "God is the Father of the Universe, Sophia is the Mother; God is the husband of Sophia, the source of Sophia. God and Sophia are mutually sources to each other of 'delight'."\(^59\) In general, however, Philo uses sexual imagery cautiously in order to avoid anthropomorphism.

In descriptions which anticipate the self-descriptions of Protennoia in TriProt, Sophia is comprehensive. She is both the virgin daughter and spouse of God.\(^60\) This imagery is reminiscent of all-encompassing descriptions of Sophia, not only spouse of Solomon (Wisdom of Solomon 8:9) but also spouse and beloved of God (8:3). Kloppenborg relates this mythic pattern of royal spouse and divine spouse to Egyptian kingship.\(^61\)

In an image which prefigures the johannine Jesus as bread of life, Philo juxtaposes the concepts of Logos, Wisdom and manna as heavenly nourishment. As in Exodus (16:4-36) God rains bread from heaven on his people, in Philo, "God distills from on high the ethereal wisdom on minds well endowed and fond of contemplation."\(^62\) This juxtaposition suggests the role of Wisdom as a gift from God

---

\(^59\) Cited in Goodenough, 23.

\(^60\) Ibid.; see also Gilles Quispel, "From Mythos to Logos," Gnostic Studies (trans. Ruth Horine; Istanbul: Netherlands Institute, 1973) 164.

\(^61\) Kloppenborg, "Isis and Sophia," 76.

\(^62\) Fug 137-138; cited in Winston, Philo, 95 and 137 n 79.
and as an intermediary between the divine and human realms. Philo asserts that the Logos, which is often equated with Wisdom, has a mediatory role because the Logos is neither uncreated like God nor created like human beings.\(^63\)

The varying images used by Philo to describe Wisdom attest not only to the syncretistic intellectual milieu of Alexandria but also to the plastic nature of Sophia. She is flexible enough to be described and understood differently in varying cultural contexts.

Winston points out the parallels between the Wisdom of Solomon and Philo. He asserts the Sophia is "...essentially synonymous with the Divine Mind and thus represents the creative agent of the Deity. The similarity of this conception with Philo's Logos doctrine is unmistakable."\(^64\) The key elements of Philonic thought concerning Sophia - her comprehensiveness as a creative agent, her role as intermediator between God and man\(^65\) and her functional androgyny - are ones that are developed further in gnostic thought.

Jewish Apocalyptic Literature

The survey of sapiential speculation has indicated a number of diverging traditions concerning the availability ---
\(^63\) _Her_ 205; cited in Winston, Philo, 94.

\(^64\) Winston, _Wisdom of Solomon_, 194 n.4.

\(^65\) Lala Dey, _The Intermediary World and Patterns of Perfection in Philo and Hebrews_ (SBLDS 25; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975.)
of Wisdom. At times, particularly in canonical literature, Wisdom is available and accessible; there are, of course, exhortations to seek Wisdom. It is God's prerogative to bestow or to withdraw the gift of wisdom; the gift remains conditional on appropriate human response. Thus Sophia the street preacher warns that people will not always find her if they realize too late their need of wisdom (Prov 1:28-33).

More often, however, Wisdom is presumed to be hidden: Job 28, Baruch 3-4 and Sirach 24 presuppose the hidden wisdom schema, but immediately tell the reader that she can be found in the Torah. The appropriate response to Wisdom's revelation is always gratitude and prayers of thanksgiving; Daniel, for example, thanks God for the gift of Wisdom to help him interpret Nebuchadnezar's dream (Dan 2:20-23).

A third depiction of Sophia suggests that she is not merely hidden, but has departed because she has been rejected. The withdrawal of Wisdom becomes a characteristic of the last times.66

The apocryphal writing 1 Enoch makes this point. What was threatened in Baruch becomes reality in Enoch: "Wisdom went forth to make her dwelling among the children of men, and found no dwelling place. Wisdom returned to her place, and took her seat among the angels." (1 Enoch 42: 1-2).

This reascent to heaven is a break with traditional Jewish Wisdom writers who claim that Wisdom finds her home in Israel.

Bultmann emphasizes that the apocalyptic concept of the hiddenness of wisdom is derived from her rejection by mankind. Another example of departed/rejected wisdom is 4 Ezra 5:9-10: "And wisdom shall withdraw into its chamber and it shall be sought by many but not be found."

Not only do the apocalyptic writers stress that Wisdom has departed because of rejection, they also maintain that they are the only ones who do possess wisdom. The fact that she has made herself known to a chosen few means that they are the elect and that the End is near. In the words of the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch: "And many will say to others at that time, where has discretion hidden itself, and where has wisdom fled for refuge?"

Hengel holds that Jewish apocalyptic writers co-relate primal time and end time. Thus, Wisdom, who was active at creation, becomes a logical revealer of the end time. A revealer figure is needed; personal observation and experience are no longer adequate. Hengel asserts that the "...basis of apocalyptic is the notion of the 'revelation' of the hidden Wisdom in the end time."


Ibid.

Hengel, Judaism and Hellenism, 1:205.
of special divine 'wisdom' about the mysteries of history, the cosmos, the heavenly world and the fate of the individual at the eschaton, hidden from human reason."

Hengel also notes that it is primarily the lower social classes who were interested in the eschatological expectation of the End because of their insecure social existence. The leaders who possessed knowledge or wisdom were not only sages in the traditional sense, they were also the elect of their sectarian group.

This concept of the elect as those possessing wisdom is further developed among the Essenes of Qumran while the gnostic writers also use the theme of Sophia's reascent to the celestial realm.

Wisdom at Qumran

W. L. Lipscomb and J. A. Sanders hold that among the Qumran writings of the Essenes there are no true wisdom texts; rather, there is only wisdom terminology superimposed upon an apocalyptic system of thought. There are, however, a few wisdom compositions of unknown authorship. A wisdom psalm, 11QPsᵃ column 18, presents the only known example of the personification of Wisdom in the Qumran

---

⁷⁰ Ibid, 1:250.
⁷¹ Ibid., 1:254.
literature. Wisdom's message is to a specific group, to the elect. Sanders writes: "one receives the impression of a group which is still seeking its identity and is still concerned with its regroupement and its raison d'être." 73

Wisdom's role is to make known the glory of God to simple people (v. 4, 7 and 8), the term that the Essenes use to refer to themselves. Thus the point is made that the elect of the sect are as important as those who offer sacrifice (v. 10-11), an obvious polemic against the Temple in Jerusalem.

Another sapiential poem, column 21, is an earlier, perhaps the original, version of the alphabetic acrostic poem which concludes the book of Sirach (Sir 51: 13-30). The theme is the value of the pursuit of Wisdom. In the descriptions of her as the writer's nurse, teacher and mistress, and in the insistence on the value of the pursuit of Wisdom, the language is "erotically ambiguous." 74 Sanders holds that "the mots a double entente are intentional." 75 The teacher/author exhorts his students to follow Wisdom as he pursued her in his youth. Sanders notes


75 Sanders "Psalms Scroll," DJD 4:81
that the teacher's message is an appropriate sublimation of sexual desire for the celibates of Qumran: the writer "dedicated his normally developing passions and desires to the pleasures of life with Wisdom, and he did so unstintingly, without pause, without distraction and without respite." 76

These wisdom references in the Qumran writings indicate ways in which Wisdom can be manipulated by sectarian groups. Wisdom becomes not only a possession of the elect but also a sign that supports their particular sectarian self-understanding; the positive value assigned to Wisdom in the OT/scribal tradition is "baptized" by Qumran. Other sectarian groups, the gnostic elect, will later use Sophia figures in both baptismal and sealing liturgies. Wisdom's exalted status lends credibility to socially and religiously marginal groups.

Conclusion

In summary, Sophia's function is not only to bestow authority on wisdom teaching but also to demonstrate divine concern for mankind. Crenshaw insists that this latter point was of particular importance throughout much of the period during which wisdom literature flourished. 77 As Sophia moves from the universal to the particular, from

76 Ibid. 4:84.

mankind to Israel and from Israel to particular sectarian groups within the Hebrew tradition, she is reinterpreted by writers with varying theological perspectives. She becomes the possession of the chosen few, the Elect, a concept that is continued in gnosticism. The gnostics, however, also liberate Sophia from sectarianism; by means of their radical reinterpretation, Sophia regains her universal and cosmological dimension.
CHAPTER 3

SOPHIA IN GNOSTIC LITERATURE

Introduction

Gnostic references to Wisdom/Sophia continue a number of themes found in the Hebrew sacred writings but also reinterpret those themes to fit gnostic reality. Sophia's intimacy with the divine and her association with creation are maintained as she continues to be an intermediary between the divine world and material creation. As in apocalyptic literature, there is emphasis on the descent and revelations of Sophia. When she reascends to the Pleroma, or heaven, her soteriological role is clearly a comfort to her followers. The latter are the chosen ones, the Elect, the children of the light who recognize and possess Wisdom and therefore are destined for salvation. This sectarian mentality, expressed in apocalyptic literature and in the wisdom writings found at Qumran, appears also in gnostic texts.

To elucidate the gnostic Sophia, I will examine some basic concepts of gnostic thought and discuss how the wisdom figure Sophia fits into the gnostic system. A comprehensive analysis of gnostic Sophia is beyond the scope of this thesis; I would, however, like to point out the major themes of gnostic speculation concerning Sophia in order to situate Protennoia of TriProt in that trajectory. My comparative analysis of Protennoia and Sophia (Chapter 4) will discuss a
number of the points in common as well as the differences between Jewish Sophia and the highest gnostic feminine figure.

In the Nag Hammadi collection, Wisdom is associated with every feminine motif: she is the highest feminine element of the Deity, she is the mother of the despised creator God Ialdabaoth, she is associated with Eve/Zoe. The Sophia variations in gnosticism support Kurt Rudolph's position that gnosticism "quite shamelessly exploited the most varied traditions and ideas for its own purposes. Purely mythical beings stand alongside more or less historical figures."¹ In this syncretistic construct, it is not surprising that there are inconsistencies and contradictions in the gnostic depiction of Sophia. In short, there is no one gnostic Sophia.

Gnostic Concepts

The Messina Colloquium defines gnosticism as a system of thought based on the idea that human beings are derived from the divine realm but have fallen into the material world and need to be awakened by the divine counterpart of the self in order to be finally integrated. There is a corresponding descent or "fall" on the cosmic level:

...a downward movement of the divine whose periphery (often called Sophia or Ennoia) had to submit to the fate of entering into a crisis and producing - even if only indirectly - this world.

upon which it cannot turn its back, since it is necessary for it to recover the pneumain.

This gnostic system of thought has theological and anthropological implications.

The gnostics, according to Birger Pearson, simply carry to radical conclusions the tendency of early Jewish theology to stress the transcendence of God over the world.\textsuperscript{3}

Gnostic speculation splits the Hebrew monotheistic Deity into a transcendent unknown highest God and a lower Creator who is responsible for material creation. Since gnostics understand themselves as originating from the highest God, they identify themselves ontologically with the highest God and denigrate the Creator God. The idea of the consubstantiality of the self with the highest God, which is the heart and core of the gnostic religion, means that the biblical notion of the fall of humankind is traced back to a rupture within the deity and, correspondingly, the redemption of humankind is the "restitution" of deity.\textsuperscript{4}

In this construct, salvation becomes a return to the divine by the gnostic elect - a mystical reunification of


\textsuperscript{4} Ibid. 157.\end{footnotesize}
God and self. This return to the divine is also referred to as the "ascent of the soul." Since the reascent journey is fraught with obstacles and danger, there are gnostic redeemer figures, "...revealers or emissaries or messengers, who at the command of supreme God impart the saving message of the redeeming knowledge." George MacRae notes that in some gnostic writings such as the hymn which concludes the longer version of The Apocryphon of John and the aretalogical layer of TriProt, the various female figures such as Ennoia, Epinoia and Pronoia, are very similar to the descending and reascending Jewish redeemer figure, Sophia.

With this background of gnostic concepts, the line of continuity from Jewish apocalyptic thought through to gnostic thought becomes evident. Jacques Ménard asserts that the two trends of thought hold a number of themes in common. First, there is emphasis on the radical difference between the world at large and the Elect, i.e. those eligible for redemption. Second, the two systems are preoccupied with the celestial world and share speculation concerning the descent and ascent of intermediary, angelic beings. Third, there is a strong interest in cosmology.

See Rudolph, Gnosis, 115 and 172.

Ibid., 119.


Both the Jewish apocalyptic and the gnostic believers hold that the approaching end-time will resemble the beginning of creation. Since Sophia was instrumental in the creation of the world, it is only logical that she also is a revealer of the End and will be active at the end of the world.

Higher Sophia

Classic gnostic scriptures concerning creation postulate a spiritual world preceding even the primal chaos of ancient Near East and biblical creation accounts (see On the Origin of the World, NHC II, 5; 97:24–98:11). The solitary first principle is often given a masculine name such as the primal Father, or Forefather of the Aeons.9 Emanating from this supreme deity is the second divine principle, a feminine one, often referred to as Pronoia, Forethought, or as Barbelo.10 MacRae holds that it is this higher female deity or Aeon who "corresponds most immediately to the Jewish Wisdom."11 Rudolph concurs that in TriProt the person of First Thought recalls the figure of Wisdom.12 I refer to this feminine principle as "higher" Sophia in order to distinguish her from the "lower" Sophia associated with creation in gnostic literature.

10 Layton, Gnostic Scriptures, 15.
11 MacRae, "Jewish Background," 89.
12 Rudolph, Gnosis, 141.
The ApocJn describes this "higher" Sophia:

This is the first Thought, his (the supreme deity's) image; she became the womb of everything for she is prior to them all, the Mother-Father, the first Man, the holy Spirit, the thrice-male, the thrice-powerful, the thrice-named and the eternal aeon among the invisible ones, and the first to come forth. (ApocJn 5:4-11).

This description of First Thought as a feminine image certainly parallels Jewish Sophia in her characteristics of pre-existence and comprehensiveness. Further, the description resembles the Philonic Sophia in her functional androgyne. In general, however, the Jewish Sophia remains an instrument of the Deity while the gnostic figure is herself divine.

A similar pattern of a primal deity and then a feminine second principle who recalls Sophia is also found in The Three Steles of Seth (NHC VII,5) where hymnic prayers describe the threefold nature of God. The second hymn of praise (121:20-124:15) reveals a second, a feminine, manifestation of the highest God and relates this feminine figure to salvation and to wisdom (123:16-9).

The pattern of a primal Deity and a second emanation that is feminine changes in Eugnostos the Blessed (NHC III,3 and VI,1). As previously seen in other gnostic writings, the first principle is the unbegotten Father; however, here the second divine principle is his androgynous image called Immortal Man. The female name of this androgynous Immortal Man is All-wise Begettress Sophia (77:4); she is sister and consort of the masculine aspect (77:5) and is called "First-
begotten Sophia, Mother of the Universe whom some [call] Love" (80:5). In union with her masculine aspect she produces divine beings which rule over all creation (77:9). One of these divinities, Son of Man, is said to have harmonized with his consort, another Sophia, and revealed six androgynous spiritual beings whose female aspects all bear the name Sophia. Every feminine aspect of the Deity is denoted as Sophia. It is noteworthy that these Sophia figures, all "higher" Sophias, exist in the divine realm or Pleroma before creation.

Lower Sophia

In contrast to the exalted position of "higher Sophia," the creator God of the Jewish tradition is denigrated as an inferior, or evil, demiurge responsible for evil. The monotheism of the Hebrew tradition is lost in an elaborate cosmology of celestial beings which emanate from the primal Father and thus distance the supreme Deity from the Creator. Pearson points out that "in his aspect as Creator of the world the biblical God is portrayed as a demonic being of illegitimate origin" (Ap. John II 9:25-10:19 and parallels; cf. Hyp. Arch II 94: 5-19). Intimately associated with this lower creator is his mother, Sophia. In order to clarify these various Sophia figures, I refer to the Sophia associated with the creator as "lower" Sophia.

The gnostic denigration of the biblical God as well as the variations of Sophia are illustrated by the ApocJn which contains two female figures, both of which, according to MacRae, are derived from Wisdom. God, the parent of the entirety, is described in all his perfection (2:26-4); then a number of secondary beings, including the higher Sophia, (the highest female aspect of the Deity), are produced. Layton holds that "the web of highly structured emanations that enfold the godhead forms a thick and almost inscrutable barrier between the human world and god, shutting off god from humanity by alienating human beings from the knowledge of the divine."  

In ApocJn there is also a lower Sophia. One of the emanations from the fourth and lowest luminary Eleleth is Wisdom; she wishes to produce an image or offspring but her consort does not agree (ApocJn 9:28-35). For this reason the offspring, Ialdabaoth, is misshapen and imperfect (ApocJn 10:2-7); he takes, perhaps steals, his mother's power and creates the material world.

According to ApocJn, lower Sophia is aware of the imperfection of her offspring and repents (13:32); she is restored to the Pleroma. From there lower Sophia returns to the material world to help in the creation/animation of Adam (19:a30) and of Zoe, Adam's helper (20:19-38). Clearly even

---

14 MacRae, "Jewish Background," 89.
15 Layton, Scriptures, 23.
this lower Sophia is a redeemer figure who repeatedly
descends from the celestial realm to assist humanity in its
struggle to return to the divine origin. In MacRae's words,
Sophia is both the good revealer and the hapless originator
of material creation.\textsuperscript{16}

This ambivalent attitude toward Sophia continues in
Valentinian texts; here lower Sophia's fault is not that she
desired to create autonomously but rather that she desired
to know the Father completely. Because of this aberrant
desire, the lower Sophia gives birth to an aborted figure
Ekhamoth or Achamoth who creates the material world. This
name is derived from the Hebrew word for divine wisdom
\textit{hokmah}. In both Ptolemy's version of the gnostic myth
(1.4.1) and in \textit{The Gospel of Philip} (NHC II:34) Sophia and
Ekhamoth are allied or equated. MacRae suggests that the
Valentinian double Sophia - the higher Sophia and the lower
Sophia, mother of Achamoth - "functions as a device for
further insulating the pleromatic world of Aeons from the
sordid world of material creation."\textsuperscript{17}

The ambivalent attitude toward Sophia is prominent in
the Valentinian anthology \textit{The Gospel of Philip}. In this
writing there are references to two wisdoms (60:10-14); the
lower Sophia is called the wisdom of death. MacRae
considers the two Sophia figures and the equation of Wisdom

\textsuperscript{16} MacRae, "Jewish Background," 97, emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{17} MacRae "Jewish Background," 94.
and death to be "a deliberate contrast to the association of Wisdom and life in the Wisdom literature." MacRae notes that the Jewish attitude toward Sophia was one of confidence while the gnostic attitude of hostility or, at best, ambivalence, expresses the gnostic revolt against Judaism.

The gnostic revolt against Judaism is often expressed as a reinterpretation – and sometimes inversion or perversion – of Jewish themes. At times the gnostics carry to logical absurdity contradictions present in accepted Jewish thought. Jewish Sophia, for example, is simultaneously with God and yet in the world; she is both responsible for creation but opposed to certain aspects of the world such as evil and/or lack of enlightenment. The gnostics have simply distributed these opposing characteristics between the two Sophias.

The complicated gnostic Sophia/Eve/Zoe relationship is interesting too because, as MacRae points out, the celestial Eve of the gnostic myths is much more than the biblical personage. In On the Origin of the World (NHC II, 5), Eve is described in paradoxical images and speaks in the eimi form used in both The Thunder, Perfect Mind (NHC VI, 2) and TriProt. Her proclamations are comparable to those of

18 MacRae "Jewish Background," 95.
19 Ibid., 97.
Sophia/Pronoia in *ApocJn* and of Protennoia in *TriProt*.

Similarly in *The Nature of the Archons* (NHC II,4) there are references to Eve as the female spiritual principle (89:31). In the same text Zoe is the daughter of Sophia (95:5) while in *ApocJn* Sophia is called Zoe (23:20). Also in *ApocJn* both Adam's helper Zoe (20:19) and his wife Eve (22:32) are brought into being with Sophia's assistance. MacRae's conclusion is valid: "there is in many forms of the Sophia myth a close association of Sophia and 'her daughter' Zoe, or Eve; sometimes the two are even identified in the name Sophia-Zoe."21 This, of course, has its basis in the Septuagint creation account in which "Eve" is translated as "Zoe". The logic of this identification allowed, for example, the author of the *HypArch* to make Eve into the agent of redemption.

Ménard emphasizes the correspondence between the gnostic concept of the individual and of the cosmos: what happens to the individual is a reflection of the cosmic level and what takes place on the cosmic level is also valid for the individual soul.22 Thus there is a clear, logical reason for the denigration of Sophia since it is one manifestation of the gnostic revolt against Judaism: as well, it is linked to the Christian denigration of Eve. The

---

21 MacRae, "Jewish Background," 100.

22 Ménard, lecture notes, Université de Strasbourg, Faculté de Théologie Catholique, 1987-88; and MacRae, "Jewish Background," 99.
biblical tradition associated Sophia with creation and the apocalyptic tradition allied Sophia with descents from heaven. In MacRae's view, it is a small but vital step to having the creation of the world result from this descent of Sophia once the descent itself is placed before the world came into being.\textsuperscript{23} An integral part of this vital step is the link between Sophia and Eve.

MacRae's position is that the gnostic postulation of a fall in the Pleroma is a reflection of the fall of man. As Eve/Zoe is responsible for the human fall so too Sophia/Zoe is the cause of cosmic disorder and subsequent material creation. MacRae holds that there may not be...

\ldots a perfect parallelism between the fall of Sophia and the sin of Eve, but they are enough to suggest that the Jewish motif of the descent of Wisdom could be transformed by the Gnostic into a cosmic catastrophe when combined with the mythical precedent of the fall of Eve."\textsuperscript{24}

\textbf{Conclusion}

It is true that the "lower" Sophia, the least exalted of the celestial Aeons, caused or provoked material creation. It is inadequate, however, merely to equate this process of creation with a "fall" and to consider the lower Sophia the only gnostic Sophia. Deirdre Good contends that the female aspects of the first manifestation of the Supreme Deity necessitate a radical revision of scholarly attitudes

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 99.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 101.
toward gnostic Sophia. No longer can the gnostic Sophia
myth simply be equated with her fall from the divine realm
and the subsequent disaster of material creation.25 Good
emphasizes the importance of texts in the Nag Hammadi
collection which describe Sophia as "Genetress, Mother and
Consort to a number of divine beings."26

**TriProt** illustrates Good's position: Protennoia is a
higher Sophia; as well, the document presents a lower
Sophia - an emanation from the lowest of the Aeons (**TriProt**
39:13). The pattern is similar to that of **ApocJn**: with the
fourth luminary Eleleth are additional aeons including
Wisdom or Sophia (**ApocJn** 8:19). This lower Sophia produces
the great demon Sakla or Samael Ialtabaoth (**TriProt** 39:20-8
and **ApocJn** 9:25-10:19) thereby leading to the creation of
the universe (**TriProt** 40:4-7 and **ApocJn** 12:33f).

In both **TriProt** and **ApocJn** the higher Sophia does not
simply glory in her celestial status: she descends to
creation, reveals herself to her offspring, and summons them
to awakening i.e. to gnostic redemption.27 As MacRae
observes, in her descents as a saviour, gnostic Sophia is
very reminiscent of the descending Sophia of 1 Enoch.28

25 Deirdre Good, *Reconstructing the Tradition of Sophia in

26 Ibid.

27 Pheme Perkins "Sophia as Goddess in the Nag Hammadi
Codices," *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism* (ed. Karen
King; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 103.

28 MacRae "Jewish Background," 91.
This descent theme is one of the primary themes in the line of continuity from Jewish apocalyptic to gnostic thought.

In conclusion it may be said that the gnostic Sophias have both theological and anthropological roles. In MacRae's words, Sophia's theological role is to insulate "...the pleromatic world of Aeons from the sordid world of material creation....it is God's Wisdom that is first hypostatized, then split, lest God's transcendence be compromised by the evil world." 29

On the anthropological level, Sophia is a prototype of the human situation. All human beings, or at least all gnostics, have a semi-divine nature, a divine spark trapped in bodily flesh. This explains why the gnostics, as children of the light, are eligible for salvation. They, like Sophia, will return to the Pleroma from where they came. This concept of salvation as a return to the divine is a continuation yet reinterpretation of the Hebrew emphasis on possession of Wisdom as a prerequisite for salvation.

Gnostic Sophia is a many-named and many faceted figure. It is, however, the higher Sophia, "the primary female figure of the Pleroma...part of a comprehensive pattern of

29 Ibid., 94-5.

salvation for herself and her offspring."30 who is of primary interest for this study. Thus I will focus on this higher Sophia as she is found as Protennoia in TriProt A.
CHAPTER 4

PROTENNOIA AND SOPHIA

Introduction

The focus of this chapter is the figure of Protенкоia as she is revealed in the aretalogical layer A of TriProt and how she compares with other wisdom figures, particularly Sophia of the Jewish sapiential tradition. In my comparison of Protенкоia and Sophia I will rely on two classic studies that deal with the Hebrew sapiential tradition. Helmer Ringgren's Word and Wisdom provides a summary of the most important motifs and mythological features of the wisdom tradition.\(^1\) George MacRae's article on the Jewish background of the gnostic Sophia is my second major source for the Protенкоia/Sophia comparison, since it provides a list of points of contact between Jewish Sophia and gnostic Sophia that proves helpful in understanding the Protенкоia figure.\(^2\) Occasionally, I widen MacRae's categories of sapiential motifs in order to focus on the semantic intention of the image used. Also, I reject two of MacRae's themes which are too weakly attested to be considered


genuine sapiential concerns. The wisdom characteristics are summarized in Chart 3, page 118.

In TriProt the most important wisdom figure is Protennoia herself. MacRae cites Quispel and concurs that "it is the higher female deity or Aeon who corresponds most immediately to the Jewish Wisdom." As Kurt Rudolph asserts, the feminine aspect of the higher gnostic deity recalls the figure of wisdom; nevertheless, she is not actually named Sophia, but Protennoia.

The exalted status of Protennoia as the second divine principle contrasts with the confusing picture in TriProt of the wisdom figure actually named Sophia. As previously seen in chapter one, TriProt has been Sethianized. In the Sethianized layer B are references to Epinoia, or the afterthought of the light (39:19 and 30), who with Sakla or Satan emanated from Eleleth, the fourth luminary. The extant Coptic text is damaged, however, and not very illuminating. Bentley Layton provides copious notes to try to make sense of the Sethian material; he suggests that the highly condensed narration of the fall and forgiveness of wisdom and of the creation of the world presupposes the

---------------------
3 Ibid. 91.

reader's acquaintance with a more detailed cosmology, such as the one found in the *ApocJn.*

The text of *TriProt* confirms Deirdre Good's contention that the secondary figure actually called Sophia, Epinoia or afterthought, is of less importance than the feminine figure who is the second divine principle. As well, *TriProt* may confirm Good's position that "Sophia's originally exalted status was antecedent to her independent activity" since the exalted Sophia (Protennoia) is found in the aretological layer A which is compositionally prior to the Sethianized layer B.

**Wisdom Motifs Discussed by MacRae**

1. A first characteristic of both the gnostic and Hebrew traditions is that the wisdom figures are described as personal beings; these differ, however, in one fundamental way: the gender of the figure. The Jewish Sophia is always feminine, often described as a loving woman, bride or hostess. Protennoia, in her first manifestation as the First Thought of the Father, is bisexual, a gnostic ideal. In her second emanation as Meirothea, she is feminine: mother and womb (38:13-14), the

---


7 Ibid., xviii.
womb of the entirety (45:6), the glory of the mother (45:9),
mother of the sound (42:9); "I came, for a second time, in
the manner of a woman" (32:17); "hear the voice of the
mother of your mercy" (44:30). In the Sethian section on
baptism, Protennoia or First Thought is described as mother
(48:31). Nevertheless, Meirothea also clearly states that
she is androgynous, a parent or father without other sexual
partners (45:2). The third manifestation describes her as
the sound or voice of the mother's glory, a male virgin
(46:19-21). Layton's translation of the concluding colophon
uses inclusive language "I am the parent of everyone"
(49:19) while Turner's older translation has "I am the
Father of everyone" (49.20). There is not scholarly
consensus about which word better reflects the Coptic text.\(^8\)

Although this androgyny of Sophia does not have Hebrew
parallels, the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria does
refer to an androgynous or asexual wisdom figure. However,
Baer insists that for Philo the categories male and female
are functional rather than ontological.\(^9\) The androgynous
references are a means of expressing the comprehensiveness
of the figure.

\(^8\) Deirdre Good, "Gender and Generation: Coptic Terminology,
with Particular Attention to Valentinian Texts," Images of
the Feminine in Gnosticism (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988)
24-6.

\(^9\) Richard Baer, Philo's Use of the Categories Male and
Female (Arbeiten zur Literatur und Geschichte des
Hellenistischen Judentums 3; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970) 62-
66.
Gnostic Protennoia and Jewish Sophia are not simply divine attributes; both are described as personal. In Prov 8:3 wisdom is personified as a street preacher; in 9:2-6 she is a hostess inviting others to take part in her feast. Proverbs 8:22-31 provides another progressive step as wisdom is presented as an attribute of God. In Ringgren's words,

it is obvious that Wisdom is here not as an abstraction or a purely poetical personification but a concrete being, self-existent beside God....Wisdom is a hypostasis....a quality of God manifested in the creation ...a quasi-personification of certain attributes proper to God, occupying an intermediate position between personalities and abstract beings. 10

Other examples of hypostatized Wisdom are found in Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-17, 7:24-30, 9:9-12, Sirach 1:1-10, 4:11-19 and all of chapter 24 of Sirach.

MacRae holds that the gnostic writings have a much more exaggerated tendency to hypostatize than do the Jewish.11 Certainly, Protennoia resembles a personal being rather than an abstraction. The self-description in the introductory aretalogy is filled with paradoxical ego eimi statements: Protennoia is movement (35:2) and at rest (35:3); she is first-produced (35:4) and pre-existent (35:5 and 35:31); she is sound and silence (35:22 and 33); she is invisible yet disclosed (35:7 and 9) and vision (35:22). One expects the next phrase to be "I am the alpha and the omega" and those

10 Ringgren, Word and Wisdom, 104.
11 MacRae, "Jewish Background," 88.
terms are indeed used in a hymn of praise to the Word (38:29).

The author of *TriProt* uses images of threeness to describe Protrenoia: she is the one called by three names (35.5), and the Word exists as three compartments (37:23), possessing three masculinities, and three powers and three names (37:26). Other gnostic authors also use images of threeness to describe the supreme perfection of the the divine (*Three Steles of Seth* 120:17; *Gospel of the Egyptians* IV, 51:22; *ApocJn* 5:6). However, it is Hippolytus of Rome who explains the reasoning behind this triple imagery. Hippolytus reports that the gnostic world is tripartite, that is, it is made up of non-engendered, self-engendered and created realms. Any manifestation of the divine must therefore also be tripartite in order to possess all possible powers over all three sections of the universe.12

2. A second major wisdom theme is Sophia's intimate union with God. In the Hebrew sacred writings, Sophia is described as God's breath, emanation, reflection and image (Wis 7:25-6); she is the first of God's creatures (Prov 8:22) and his companion (Prov 8:30). She understands what pleases God (Prov 9:9) and is an initiate in the knowledge of God; she lives with God and is loved by Him (Wis 8:3-4). She both comes from the Lord and is with Him forever (Sir

1:1). The disciples of Wisdom are promised divine love because the Lord loves those who love her (Sir 4:14b and Wis 7:28).

Sophia may glory in her intimacy with God: "I came forth from the mouth of the Most High" (Sir 24:3). Protennoia, however, can boast of equal intimacy with the divine parent. As Barbelo, she is the parent's thinking (36:17), the thinking of the All (36:19). As the sound or voice that has derived from the thinking (36:14), she is acquaintance with the infinites (36:17). The Word that came into being from the sound that emanated from the thinking of the parent (37:3-5) is equally Protennoia. She asserts that she is beyond description: incomprehensible (35:10), innumerable, immeasurable and ineffable (35:27); incomprehensible and immeasurable (36:2); "It is I alone who am ineffable, incorruptible, immeasurable, inconceivable verbal expression" (35:14-15). The repetition of the coptic word atwit is interesting. It is translated by Layton and Turner as "immeasurable" although the English word "incommensurable" more precisely renders the meaning - that which cannot be measured because no appropriate standard exists. Janssens notes that the adjective is frequently used in coptic gnostic descriptions of the divine;13 however, the adjective does not seem to be used in the Jewish sapiential speculation even in the list of Wisdom's

twenty-one attributes (Wis 7:22b-23) where "incommensurable" would seem most appropriate. The adjective is used in a non-metaphorical way to describe the territory of God (Baruch 3:25).

The writer of the johannine prologue is consistent with this tradition of a hypostatized divine attribute existing in intimate union with God when he writes "in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" (Jn 1:1).

3. The theme of Sophia's pre-existence also provides interesting parallels with Protennoia and the johannine Logos. Clearly, in the Hebrew tradition, Sophia existed before the creation of the world: she is described as the first of God's creations, present at the creation of the cosmos (Prov 8:22-29). Jesus ben Sira also describes Wisdom as pre-existent, divinely created and eternal (Sir 1:4 and 9, 24:9) while pseudo-Solomon states that Wisdom was present when God made the world and is the fashioner of all things (Wis 9:9 and 7:22). In spite of her exalted status, Wisdom is, nevertheless, clearly subservient to God.

MacRae points out that gnostic myths usually presuppose some form of pre-existence for gnostic Sophia. Protennoia states that the second manifestation - voice or mother - existed since the beginning in the bones of the entirety (46:10). In *ego eimi* proclamations, Protennoia describes

---

14 MacRae, "Jewish Background," 89.
herself as the first among those who have come into existence (35:4), asserts that she existed before the entirety (35:5), and that she is the entirety having existed before everyone (35:31). These readings must, however, remain tentative because the manuscript is mutilated. Another reconstruction, "It is I who am the womb of the entirety" (45:6) when juxtaposed with the assertion that Protennoia existed before the entirety (35:5), suggests the divinity of Protennoia. The concept that the Sophia figure might be pre-eminent as well as pre-existent would be particularly offensive to Jewish monotheism. Janssens avoids these potential difficulties and/or misinterpretations by refusing to reconstruct particularly damaged parts of the text. In any case, the johannine assertion that the Word was with God in the beginning is quite parallel to Sophia's pre-existence in the Hebrew Wisdom tradition.

4. MacRae considers a fourth wisdom motif to be the description of Sophia dwelling in the clouds. I find this category to be too limited and prefer to refer to the theme of spatial imagery. Certainly the metaphor of dwelling in the clouds traditionally conveys the ideas of proximity to the divine and of distance from humankind. When this type of spatial imagery is used in the OT it is often Sophia who bridges the gap between the divine and human realms.

----------

15 Ibid.
When it is said that Sophia dwells in high places and that her throne is in a pillar of cloud (Sir 24:4), it is clearly reminiscent of Psalm 99 where the Lord speaks to his prophets from the pillar of cloud (Ps. 99:7). In the Book of Job, God, as master of natural phenomena, is said to have put wisdom in the clouds (Job 38:36). In Exodus, Moses leads the Israelites away from the Egyptians accompanied by an angel and a pillar of cloud (Exodus 13:19f) and receives instructions from God in the form of a pillar of cloud (Exodus 33:9-10). As residence in the clouds lends divine authority to Sophia's words, it also establishes her intimacy with God (Baruch 3:29).

Similar spatial imagery is used in TriProt; however, the distance between the sacred and the profane worlds is even farther apart than in Jewish literature. Protennoia instructs those who dwell in darkness or the abyss, i.e. the material world (37:13-14). In contrast to the material world in the abyss is Protennoia who, as Word, emanated from the height (37:5). The gnostic image intensifies the Jewish description of Sophia even though the actual phrase that Protennoia lives in the clouds does not occur.

5. MacRae describes celestial enthronement as the next sapiential theme;\textsuperscript{16} I prefer to use the phrase "imagery dealing with status and authority," because that is the function of enthronement imagery. When God is depicted as

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
king in the Hebrew sacred writings, Sophia/ Wisdom claims authority because she sits by the throne of God (Wis 9:4 and 10) or has a throne in a pillar of cloud (Sir 24:4) i.e., with God. In the aretalogical sections of TriProt, there are no direct references to celestial enthronement. However, I believe that there are images which function analogously to the Jewish metaphors concerning kingship and enthronement; these images claim authority for Protennoia because of her closeness to the divine. She declares that she is unchangeable (42:7), that in her the entirety stands at rest (35:3) and that she became a foundation for the entirety (47:10). Michael Williams' analysis of the theme of stability points out that the desire for stability amid the vagaries of human existence is characteristic of the gnostic experience.17 Thus, Protennoia's co-authority and stability in an everchanging world contribute to her exaltation almost as a "rock of ages" for her followers. These latter follow a deity as eternal and stable as that of the Israelites.

It is interesting that the Sethian redactor makes explicit the implicit links between Protennoia's status, enthronement, and glory. In a prose section introducing the hymn to the Word, the perfect child is said to bestow glory and give thrones to the realms or aeons (38:20). Meanwhile the perfect child, Protennoia in her third descent, "stands

17 Michael Williams, "Stability as a Soteriological Theme in Gnosticism," Sethian Gnosticism 819-829.
at rest within the glory by which it glorified itself" (38:22). Similarly Meirothea – Protennoia in her second descent – calls her followers and promises that when they are enlightened they will be glorified and given thrones (45:13-20). In the rather intrusive Sethian section on gnostic baptism, there are references to enthroners and to enthronement on a throne of the glory of the kinship (48:22-25). All four of these passages are clearly redactional and not part of the original aretalogical wisdom speculation. However, it is clear that by joining the themes of stability, enthronement and glory to the baptismal liturgy, the Sethian redactor makes clear to the gnostics the exalted and authoritative status of Protennoia and what glorious rewards await her followers.

6. The next sapiential motif, that of the identification of Wisdom with a (Holy) Spirit, is unequivocal in the Wisdom of Solomon. The Wisdom who pervades and penetrates all things is described as a breath of the power of God (Wis 7:24-5). This passage joins the concepts of wisdom, breath and spirit which traditional exegesis has noted in Genesis.

This same juxtaposition is also found in the aretalogical layer of TriProt. Protennoia declares that she puts breath into her own and injects the holy spirit into them (45:28-9). The role of the two figures is essentially similar in that they both give divine gifts of spirit and understanding.
The infusion of the spirit of wisdom is not precisely the same, however, in that the degree of voluntarism differs. At times in the Hebrew tradition Wisdom must be sought after and earnestly prayed for, thus Solomon's prayer in chapter nine of Wisdom of Solomon. At other times Sophia actively seeks out followers (Wis 6:13-16). Protennoia follows this mode by searching and actively seeking to awaken those who are asleep (35:21), to call them to enlightenment (45:12).

A second variation on this theme of the joining of Wisdom and spirit is expressed by the Sethaian redactor. He relates the spirit that exists within the soul because of the baptismal mysteries to the celestial spirit which remained when Protennoia descended to earth (41:21); in summary he promises salvation in the spirit because of baptism. This theme of a "spirit baptism" is also found in the Fourth gospel (Jn 1:33; 3:6).

In spite of the minor differences in the degree of human voluntarism involved in the sapiential gift of the spirit, and the Sethian clarification of the juxtaposition of spirit, wisdom and baptism, the theme of Wisdom and spirit shows substantial agreement in the Jewish and gnostic traditions.

7. In the Jewish and Christian traditions, God creates earth and heaven; what is less certain is the role that Wisdom plays in this process. She is created first (Prov 8:22 and Sir 1:4), and is present at the creation of the
world (Prov 8:23-29). If she is beside God, like a master workman (Prov 8:30), it seems likely that she is the assistant or instrument of creation. This description of her as a master worker coincides with the description in Sirach of Wisdom as the fashioner of all things (Sir 7:22 and 8:6). Bringing order out of chaos is an important aspect of creation ascribed to the wisdom figure by pseudo-Solomon (Wis 8:11). She truly is an associate in the works of God (Wis 8:4) perhaps particularly in the formation of human beings (Sir 9:2). Ringgren holds that since she is said to have come forth from the mouth of God, she is identified with the word (Sir 24:3a).\textsuperscript{18} This identification with the word also suggests the assistance of Wisdom at creation, especially as the verse includes a further allusion to creation: "and like a mist I covered the earth."

MacRae's observation that Sophia is at least instrumental in the creation of the world\textsuperscript{19} is well-attested in the Hebrew sapiential tradition; Protennoia's role in creation is more difficult to document. It is a basic presupposition; however, one creation reference (36:5) occurs in a part of the manuscript that is damaged and therefore it is uncertain what was brought forth or produced. A second creation reference is clearer.

\textsuperscript{18} Ringgren, \textit{Word and Wisdom}, 108.

\textsuperscript{19} MacRae, "Jewish Background," 90.
Protennoia declares, "It is I who, within my thinking, radiated the entirety part by part" (36:7).

The whole writing is said to have been "parentally authored" (50:22) and Protennoia asserts that she is the parent of everyone (49:19). Inasmuch as parenthood implies generation, Protennoia is creative but not necessarily on a cosmological level.

There is one explicit and one implicit reference to cosmological creation by divine fiat. In a hymn of praise to the Word it is re-iterated that this child of God gazes at the eternal realms that he has engendered by his will alone (38:26-27). It is very possible that this hymn of praise is older than the rest of TriProt; certainly creation by will and by divine fiat is well known in Egypt and the ancient Near East as well as in Genesis. This concept of creation by divine will may also underlie the statement of First Thought "I, within my thinking, radiated the entirety part by part" (36:7-8).

One can postulate a kind of wisdom triangle between Genesis 1, wisdom literature and the johannine prologue. John emphasizes, by means of antithetical parallelism, that the Logos was the agent of creation. TriProt does not have the same emphasis on Protennoia's role as creator; it is simply stated (36:5-8) but not developed in great detail. Only in the Sethianized section of TriProt is it Sakla who creates the material universe (40:4-7).
8. In the Hebrew scriptures, Sophia communicates wisdom and revelation to men; as a revealer, "a mirror of the working of God" (Wis 7:26), she corresponds to a gnostic revealer figure.

MacRae notes the parallels between the revealing function of Wisdom and gnostic female figures such as Protennoia. Indeed Rudolph uses Protennoia as an archetypal example of the gnostic doctrine of the redeemer. Protennoia states that she is the parent's thinking and from her emanates sound which is acquaintance with the infinites (36:17-19). The purpose of the descent into this world is so that the offspring of the light, i.e. the gnostics, may be rescued from their present material restraints and might enter the place where they had been in the beginning (41:19). Rudolph considers this concept to be one of the essential ideas of gnostic thought. Protennoia reveals not only that she is the sound that exists, but also that she emits sound and bestows sound upon everyone (36:13-15); this image is echoed by the second manifestation of First Thought when she asserts that the sound came to exist through her (45:27).

--------------------
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid. 91.
22 Rudolph, Gnosis, 141.
23 Ibid. 57.
TriProte presents an interesting distinction between the self-revelation of Protennoia in the aretalogical layer and the positions stated in the Sethianized layer of the writing. In the former, Protennoia reveals herself in a series of ego-eimi proclamations; in the Sethianized material Protennoia teaches about the gnostic mysteries: "I shall instruct them about the coming end of the realm" (42:18).24

In terms similar to those describing the acts of Sophia, the Word is said to preach, to instruct and to interpret (37:3-18). It is relevant that the recipients of these activities are always "the offspring of the light" (37:19) and not people in general. This gnostic elitism follows the apocalyptic pattern that it is the Elect who possess Wisdom.

As a redeemer figure, Protennoia communicates knowledge. Rudolph holds that

the content of this knowledge or understanding is primarily religious, in so far as it circles around the background of man, the world and God.... It is a knowledge given by revelation...which gathers together the object of knowledge (the divine nature), the means of knowledge (the redeeming gnosis) and the knower himself....This knowledge is the basis for the process of redemption. A man who possesses 'gnosis' is for that reason a redeemed man.25

24 Emphasis added; TriProte 41:1-2 also shows this distinction.

25 Rudolph, Gnosis, 55-6.
It is considered a contemporary aphorism that "the medium is the message." This saying, however, is also valid for Protennoia, and, as I will discuss in the next chapter, for the johannine Jesus as well.\(^{26}\)

9. Although the Hebrew wisdom figure may enjoy a celestial throne, she does not remain in heaven but descends into our world: "She appeared upon earth and lived among men" (Bar 3:37). MacRae's assertion that "this is a fixed element of the Sophia myth in all its Gnostic variations"\(^{27}\) is supported by all three forms of Protennoia. Some of the examples of this theme of Wisdom's descent also clearly indicate the gnostic anti-cosmic attitude: "I entered the midst of Hades" (36:4); "I descended and got as far as chaos and I dwelt with my own who were there" (40:29-30); "I am the first to have descended" (41:20); "I showed myself forth to them within their bodies" (47:13); "I wore the garment of all" (47:16). In both Sirach and Baruch the motivation for Sophia's descent is divine providence and the desire to bring enlightenment;\(^{28}\) similarly the reason for Protennoia's coming to this world is to enlighten her followers.

One passage in the Sethianized portion of TriProt refers to, but does not clarify, Sophia's previous descent or "fall": "I am coming down into the world of mortals for


\(^{27}\) MacRae, "Jewish Background," 91.

\(^{28}\) Ibid. 92.
the sake of that part of me which has been there since the
day that they overcame the innocent wisdom (Sophia) who
descended" (40:11-15).

10. If the agreement between the Hebrew and gnostic
traditions is very strong on the theme of descent, the motif
of reascent is less common. Ringgren notes that after
Wisdom seeks a dwelling on earth "...it is sometimes said
that she finds one, sometimes that she returns to Heaven."\(^{29}\)
As MacRae observes, in the Wisdom literature the theme of
reascent is generally absent, since the Jewish Wisdom
writers wished to claim that Wisdom finds her home in
Israel;\(^{30}\) however, in 1 Enoch 42 Sophia does reascend to
heaven. This detail of reascent is one of the many points
of similarity between the longer ending of ApocJn and
TriProt: "I shall go up to the perfect aeon" (ApocJn 31:26)
and "I ascended and proceeded into my light" (TriProt
45:29). Not only is Protennoia emphatic that she reascends
to heaven, she also takes her followers with her, "I shall
bring my posterity into the holy light" (50:18). As in 1
Enoch, this has social implications: those who have wisdom
are not of this world.

According to MacRae, Sophia's protection, deliverance
and strengthening of Adam\(^{31}\) is a wisdom theme. I reject this

\(^{29}\) Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom*, 127.

\(^{30}\) MacRae, "Jewish Background," 92.

\(^{31}\) Ibid.
description of the Adam references as a sapiential motif for
two reasons. First, the attestation is weak, occurring only
in the Wisdom of Solomon hymn (Wis 10:1-2) in praise of
Wisdom's protection of the Jewish patriarchs. In general
wisdom literature is devoid of proper names; the name Adam
does not occur in canonical and apocryphal wisdom writings
although Philo does use it.

Second, to follow MacRae's reasoning to its logical
conclusion, each of the Jewish ancestors of the poem - not
named but easily recognizable - would have to be included as
characteristic concerns of sapiential speculation. That
clearly is not the case. The poem is a literary device,
which, as Kloppenborg has decisively shown, functions to
relate Sophia to Isis as divine guide of history.32

TriProt lends support to my contention that Sophia's
association with Adam is not a separate wisdom theme
although it is also possible that it is because TriProt has
been Sethianized that there are no references to Adam.
Generally in gnostic writings Seth, as father of the
gnostics, replaces Adam, father of all humankind.
Nevertheless in TriProt there are no references to Seth by
name although the Sethian baptismal tradition of the Five
Seals and Sethian cosmology are included in the Sethian
redaction of the text.

32 John Kloppenborg, "Isis and Sophia," Harvard Theological
11. The theme of calling Sophia our sister (Prov 7:4) is another sapiential motif noted by MacRae.\(^{33}\) Again I prefer to widen the category to include familial imagery in general since the semantic intention seems to be to foster fictive familial bonds among the gnostic elect. We have previously seen that the Sethianized layer of \textsc{TriProt}\(^{34}\) presents a later perspective which sometimes clarifies and sometimes changes the ideas expressed in the compositionally prior aretalogical layer. On the question of familial imagery, however, the two layers present many similar images. In the aretalogical layer, for example, Protennoia proclaims "It is I who am the mother of the sound" (42:9) while the Sethianized prose section states, "The sound that has derived from my thinking exists as three compartments: Father, Mother, Son" (37:20).

These familial images present Protennoia as comprehensive, universal, and transcendent.\(^{34}\) Three times Protennoia describes herself as parent (41:1; 45:1 and 49:19) yet she is also womb (38:14; 45:6). In her second manifestation as Meirothea, Protennoia refers to the gnostics as children of thinking and to herself as the mother of

\(^{33}\) Ibid.

mercy (44:29). She is the glory of the mother (45:9) and the mother of the sound (42:9).

MacRae lists Sophia's association with a sevenfold cosmic structure as a sapiential motif.\textsuperscript{35} Since the image occurs only once (Prov 9:1), I reject MacRae's position that it can be considered characteristic of wisdom literature. Rather, it is simply a common astrological motif, a literary embellishment that is neither necessary nor of great significance in either the Jewish or gnostic Sophia speculation. The gnostic parallels to this usage, as even MacRae admits, are tenuous;\textsuperscript{36} there are no references in TriProt to anything comparable to Sophia's association with a sevenfold cosmic structure.

12. Sophia is equated with life in Proverbs (8:35), in Baruch (4:1) and in gnostic literature which associates, and even equates, Sophia with Eve/Zoe. In TriProt the aretalogical assertion is unequivocal: "it is I who am the life of my afterthought" (35:12).

13. The image of Sophia as a tree of life is found in Proverbs 3:18 and presupposed in Sirach 1:20. The Ethiopic Book of Enoch refers to "...the tree of wisdom of which the holy ones eat and by which they acquire great wisdom." (32:3)\textsuperscript{37} Ringgren holds that the association of wisdom with

\textsuperscript{35} MacRae, "Jewish Background," 93
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} Ringgren, Word and Wisdom, 121.
the tree of life was common to all the ancient Near East;\textsuperscript{38} however the opposite idea is found in TriProt and ApocJn. "The root of this tree is bitter and its branches are death, its shadow is hate and deception is in its leaves, and its blossom is the ointment of evil, and its fruit is death and desire to seed and it sprouts in darkness." (ApocJn 21:27-35) In a Sethianized section of TriProt the powers complain about the coming end of the realm. They lament, "For our tree from which we sprouted bears fruit of ignorance and also there is death in its leaves; darkness dwells in the shadow of its branches; and we have harvested it deceitfully and with desire" (44:19-25). These anti-"tree of life" litanies clearly presuppose familiarity with Genesis and with Jewish identification of Sophia and the tree of life; thus, they are an example of gnostic inversion of traditional themes.

Wisdom Themes not Discussed by MacRae

14. It seems odd that MacRae's list of points of contact between the gnostic and Hebrew Sophia omits any reference to the images of light used in both traditions. In Sirach instruction shines forth like the light and like the dawn (Sir 24:27 and 32). Pseudo-Solomon observes that Wisdom's radiance is preferable to that of ordinary light because it is unceasing (Wis 7:10), is more beautiful than

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid. 140.
the sun and stars (7:29) and outlasts the night (7:30); it is a reflection of eternal light (7:26).

The interplay of light and vision images is also found in TriProt: Protennoia declares that she illuminates the entirety (47:28), that she gave birth to the light (45:6), that she is light that yields a living crop 46:16). Gnostics are offspring of the light (37:19 and 40:34); Wisdom is called the afterthought of the light (39:19 and 30). The purpose of Protennoia's manifestations is to enlighten those who dwell in the darkness and to bring her posterity into the holy light (50:18). In a similar vein, Philo uses metaphorical expressions concerning elucidation and equates wisdom with divine light.39 In the Hermetic writings the revealer Poimandres equates light with understanding and divinity40 and explains that God exists as life and light.41 With this background, the juxtaposition of light and life images in the johannine prologue is not at all surprising.

15. Another interesting point of comparison not discussed by MacRae is the way Sophia/Protennoia bestows rewards. In the Hebrew sapiential tradition, the benefits of wisdom vary in proportion to the confidence placed in the

39 Spec. 3.1-6; Spec. 287-288; cited in Winston, Philo, 75 and 159.


41 Ibid.
world itself. In Proverbs Wisdom bestows gifts that are almost exclusively this-worldly, reflecting the stable historical situation of the Jews at the time. There is less confidence in the world during the troubled period when Wisdom of Solomom was written; consequently Wisdom’s benefits are deferred. Eternal rather than present rewards are also stressed in gnostic thought, which has a consistently "anti-cosmic" world view: "...an unequivocally negative evaluation of the visible world together with its creator; it ranks as a kingdom of evil and darkness."42

Proteneina's gifts are not as easy to document as those of Sophia; Proteneina bestows eternity (38:30) and glory (38:20) on the eternal realms or aeons. The rewards to her gnostic followers are concentrated on gnosis and are not at all clear to the uninitiated (e.g. 36:9, 15, 17; 42:10, 14). There is a considerable vocabulary dealing with comprehension, acquaintance, perception and recognition that surely would have been more understandable in a gnostic context and which may well denote rewards to the initiates. The precise meaning of these vocabulary elements remains unclear today.

Summation

MacRae concludes that it is virtually impossible to rule out all influence of the Jewish Sophia on the gnostic Sophia and that it is probable that some kind of use, 42 Rudolph, Gnosis, 60.
perhaps perverse, of the Jewish Wisdom figure lies at the source of the gnostic myth. Protennoia, an excellent example of a gnostic redeemer figure, confirms MacRae's conclusions. On his list of parallels between the two sapiential traditions Protennoia exhibits unequivocal agreement with twelve of the themes, i.e., a personal being, intimate union with God, pre-existence, spatial imagery such as dwelling in the clouds, imagery concerning stability, kingship, enthronement or glory; identification with the Holy Spirit, an instrument of creation, a soteriological role, descent to the material world, reascent, familial imagery and identification with life. Two of MacRae's characteristics, association with Adam and with a sevenfold cosmic structure, were rejected as too weakly attested to be valid sapiential concerns. Concerning the remaining theme, that of Sophia and the tree of life there is no agreement whatsoever; nevertheless the negative image found in the gnostic work presupposes awareness of the more typical tradition. Chart 3 summarizes the conclusions of the Sophia/Protennoia comparison based on MacRae's list of characteristic themes of Jewish sapiential speculation and two other themes not discussed by MacRae.

If, in conclusion, one agrees with MacRae that a Jewish Wisdom figure lies at the source of the gnostic Sophia myth, and one agrees with Colpe that gnosticizing oriental

\[43\] MacRae, "Jewish Background," 94.

\[44\] Ibid.
sapiential tradition forms the common ancestor of both the Prologue of John and TriProt, it is interesting to consider how acquaintance with Protennoia sheds light on this common ancestor. As analysis of MacRae's list of similarities has shown, the common ancestor, like Protennoia, probably was a personal or hypostatized being, pre-existent, integrally united to the divine, instrumental in creation, who descended to this world to fulfil a soteriological role. This being was probably described in familial images and terms of light and life. Less certain is whether this figure was feminine or androgynous, since bisexuality was a gnostic ideal. It is also likely that, rather than being a simple being, it was a triple manifestation of the divine. As Janssens asserts, "viewing the cosmos as a tripartite unit, and believing as they did that some form of salvation or restoration was required for the whole, they taught that the saviour was manifested in the three divisions in a form and manner suited to the mode of being and need of each."45 Evans tries to connect the "threeness" of Protennoia and of the three-part division of the hymn underlying the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel.46

however, to accept Bultmann's thesis of a fully formed Wisdom myth. Integral to this putative myth is the motif of the rejection of Wisdom, a theme not found in TriProt. Protennoia describes herself as available (36:22, 42:25) especially to those who recognize her (45:10, 36:15). In contrast to the references to rejection in the johannine prologue (Jn 1:10,11), Protennoia as a divine revealer resembles the johannine Jesus. The latter continually strives to make known the Father, or in TriProt vocabulary, to impart image, to manifest and make known the divine. Jesus came from the Father into the world as Protennoia came into the world of mortals "temporarily clothed with flesh," i.e. appearing in human form. These parallel descriptions and images of Jesus and Protennoia are the focus of the next chapter.

--------------------

Chart 3

Comparison of Sophia and Protennoia


Characteristics with parallels:

1. Personal being
2. Intimate union with God
3. Pre-existence
4. Spatial imagery, such as dwelling in the clouds
5. Imagery concerning status and authority, such as enthronement
6. Identification with the Holy Spirit
7. Instrument of creation
8. Soteriological role
9. Descent to the material world
10. Reascent
11. Familial imagery
12. Identification with life

Presupposed awareness:

13. Tree of life
B) Themes not discussed by MacRae

Characteristics with parallels:

14. Images of light
15. Rewards bestowed
CHAPTER 5

PROTENOIOA AND THE JOHANNINE JESUS

The Need for Improved Methodology

Past discussion of TriProt and the Fourth Gospel has emphasized the striking parallels between the johannine prologue and the three descents of Protrenoioa. The question of literary dependence has not been resolved. Colpe's list of parallels, which is also cited by James Robinson, indicates that themes which are dispersed in the wisdom writings stand together in TriProt even though not in the same sequence as they are found in the prologue.1 Thus, Colpe infers, TriProt presents an example of the gnosticized ancestor of the prologue. Craig Evans claims to advance the discussion by offering verbal and conceptual parallels from a limited section of TriProt, that is, the third descent of Protrenoioa as Word.2 He maintains that these parallels indicate not only the milieu out of which the prologue

------------------


emerged but also the gnosticizing proclivity present in the
wisdom trajectory.\(^3\)

In contrast to these positions which emphasize the
priority of TriProt, Yvonne Janssens contends that TriProt
is not at all pre-Christian; rather, she holds that it is a
gnostic re-working of the johannine prologue.\(^4\) G. Robinson,
for her part, describes Janssens' comparative analyses of
the two writings as an oversimplification.\(^5\) She maintains
that a more fruitful area of study is the common ancestor of
TriProt and the johannine prologue. For George MacRae and
G. Robinson, the key question is whether the common ancestor
of the two writings is already a gnostic modification of the
wisdom tradition.\(^6\) Their main question is how gnostic the
wisdom tradition had become in the early Christian era.

Discussion of literary dependence is obfuscated by
assertions based only on verbal parallels or lexical

\(^3\) Ibid., 399.

\(^4\) Yvonne Janssens, "Une source gnostique du Prologue?"
L'évangile de Jean: sources, rédaction, théologie (BETL 44;
ed. M. de Jonge; Leuven: Leuven University Press; Gembloux:
Duculot, 1977) 355-8 and "The Trimorphic Protennoia and the
Fourth Gospel," The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in
Honour of Robert McLachan Wilson (eds. A. H. B Logan and A.
J. Wedderburn; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), 229-44.

\(^5\) Gesine Robinson, "The Trimorphic Protennoia and the
Prologue of the Fourth Gospel," Antiquity and
Christianity: Essays in Honor of James Robinson (Sonoma,

\(^6\) Ibid., 3 and George MacRae "Gnosticism and the Church of
John's Gospel," Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and Early
Christianity (eds. C. W. Hedrick and R. Hodgson; Peabody,
elements. Janssens holds that the gnostic author of TriProt borrowed terminology from the johannine prologue and/or Genesis and that these vocabulary elements have a different theological meaning in TriProt. 7 G. Robinson and the Berlin Group argue that TriProt is more primitive because the relevant statements stand in their natural context in TriProt while in the Fourth Gospel "they seem to have been artificially made serviceable to a purpose actually alien to them." 8

This speculation may be interesting but not necessarily fruitful. The weakness of this argument lies in the fact that it remains on the level of verbal parallels and shared epithets without ever acknowledging the two writings' indebtedness to Jewish wisdom speculation. This common ancestor can help elucidate both the gnostic and the Christian writings.

The case for literary dependence (in either direction) is not strong, and - given the nature of the verbal parallels evidence - it is doubtful that any hypothesis concerning literary dependence could be compelling. Rather than asking these questions of literary dependence and priority, I will examine the wisdom ancestry of the Fourth Gospel and compare John's use of wisdom language with that of TriProt. As we have seen in previous chapters, the


aretalogical layer of TriProt is a writing comparable to others in the wisdom tradition, such as Sir 24, Wis 6,7,8, and Bar 3,4. We have noted already that gnostic Protennoia has many features in common with Hebrew Sophia. The question in the Fourth Gospel comparison now becomes how the johannine Jesus fits in this wisdom trajectory and in what ways Protennoia and the johannine Jesus both reflect and transform Sophia. In addressing these questions I hope to elucidate a parallel noted by MacRae: "...a parallel between some of the Gnostic sources in which the ego-proclamation appears and the Fourth Gospel - a parallel not so much in words or explicit allusions, as in religious outlook and religious discourse."9

C. H. Dodd's analysis of the wisdom motifs in the prologue of the Fourth Gospel concludes that "...in composing the Prologue the author's mind was moving along lines similar to those followed by Jewish writers of the 'Wisdom' school."10 However, as we shall see, it is not just in the prologue but throughout the Fourth Gospel that the theme of Jesus' identification with Wisdom is developed.

Certainly the four gospels understand Jesus as a wisdom teacher as well as a prophet in the OT tradition. Raymond

Brown, however, notes an important distinction: "In the Synoptics, Jesus' teaching shows a certain continuity with the ethical and moral teachings of the sages of the Wisdom literature; in John, Jesus is personified Wisdom.\textsuperscript{11} This understanding of Jesus as personified Wisdom is a premise of the present study.

I consider of equal importance Brown's contention that the wisdom literature offers better parallels than other alternatives for the johannine picture of Jesus.\textsuperscript{12} Because Brown insists that wisdom speculation is fundamental to comprehension of the johannine Jesus, I will return to MacRae's study of the the characteristics of the Hebrew Sophia myth.\textsuperscript{13} Just as in the previous chapter I compared Prottennoia to each of the wisdom motifs described by MacRae, I shall now examine how the johannine Jesus compares with the same sapiential themes. The characteristics shared by Jesus and Prottennoia are of particular interest.

\textbf{Literary Devices}

The discourses of Jesus are of special importance because, as Barnabas Lindars asserts, "there is no doubt that the discourses are John's chosen means of expressing

\textsuperscript{11} Raymon Brown, \textit{The Gospel according to John} (Anchor Bible 29 and 29A; Garden City: Doubleday, 1966 and 1970) cxxv.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., cxxiv.

his fundamental theological position." Sapiential language and thought patterns permeate the discourses of the Fourth Gospel. One example is the theme of seeking and finding the wisdom figure, and the dire consequences threatened to those who reject the revealer. Jesus reproaches the Jews for lack of acceptance (Jn 7:34, 8:21) in terms which are parallel to the threats of Sophia if she is not accepted (Prov 1:24-28; Bar 4:1d).

In the Fourth Gospel, those who do accept Jesus become sons of light (Jn 12:36) and are addressed as "my little children" (13:33). In the same way Sophia's disciples are her children (Prov 8:32-33; Sir 4:11, 6:18) and Protennoia's followers are "children of the light" (TriProt 37:19; 40:34; 42:14). What is important here is not specific verbal parallels but rather patterns of thought; more of these will be discussed in my analysis of MacRae's wisdom characteristics.

In both TriProt A and the Fourth Gospel, divine and/or celestial origins of the revealer are apparent both in what is said and the way in which it is said. The ego-eimi statements made by Protennoia and the johannine Jesus are, above all, revelations which obviously develop the "character" of the revealer figure, and typically concern saving truths exclusively mediated. This literary device

has general antecedents in the wisdom tradition: Sophia
often speaks in the first person singular although she does
not use ego-eimi directly. Ego-proclamations on the part of
a deity are widespread in the religious literature of many
ancient cultures of the Mediterranean region and beyond.15
John and the author of TriProt A go beyond Sophia in their
development of dynamics present in sapiential literature.
In the Fourth Gospel and in TriProt A, stress is placed upon
revelation of divine secrets concerning the salvation of
humankind and a corresponding recognition of the revealer of
these saving truths. The ego eimi form provided a
convenient vehicle for the development of these dynamics.

MacRae holds that, given the essentially revelatory
nature of gnostic literature, the ego-proclamation is a
logical literary usage for gnostic literature.16 Similarly,
it is a logical, formal device for revelatory literature,
and for MacRae, especially for gnostic literature.17 Ego-
proclamations are appropriate for revealers/revelation such
as Sophia, Protennoia and Jesus.

15 George MacRae, "Discourses of the Gnostic Revealer,"
Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Gnosticism
Stockholm 1973 (ed. Geo. Widengren; Leiden: E. J. Brill,
1977) 111.

16 Ibid.

17 George MacRae, "Gnosticism and the Church of John's
Gospel," Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and Early Christianity
(eds. Charles Hedrick and Robert Hodgson; Peabody, Mass.:
Hendrickson, 1986) 92.
The *ego*-proclamations of Protennoia in *TriProt A* express the universality and the transcendence of the deity as well as the exclusivity of salvation for her followers. MacRae also suggests that in the Fourth Gospel, John uses the form of *ego*-proclamation not merely to assert that Jesus must be recognized as or identified with the variety of human religious symbolism: bread, light, shepherd, life, etc., but that Jesus in his truest reality *transcends* all of this and is revealed only in the moment of his return to the Father, through death and resurrection, as the love of the Father for men.18

Wisdom Motifs Discussed by MacRae

As previously noted, MacRae's analysis of the Jewish background of the gnostic Sophia myth19 provides a convenient grid for comparing the johannine Jesus to Sophia and Protennoia.

1. A first natural characteristic that the figures of Sophia, Protennoia and the johannine Jesus share is personal existence; each of the three is more than simply a divine attribute. The gender of the figure is not consistent in the writings in question: Sophia is feminine, Protennoia is androgynous and Jesus is masculine. The reality of the personal being is nonetheless unequivocal.

The prologue asserts that the Word became flesh (Jn 1:14) in what John Ashton refers to as the climactic utterance of the prologue:

18 MacRae, "Discourses," 133-4.
19 MacRae, "Jewish Background," 86-101.
The writer's central insight is summed up here—the identification of Jesus Christ, revered and worshipped by Christians alone, with the figure of Wisdom. This stems from the realisation, expressed throughout the hymn, that the history of Wisdom has been enacted by Christ: the divine plan seen at work throughout the history of Israel has actually taken flesh in him.20

Brown notes the contrast between the assertion that "the Word became flesh" and typical gnostic attitudes toward incarnation: the prologue does not merely say that the Word entered into flesh or abided in flesh but that "the Word became flesh".21 In TriProt, more typically gnostic and docetic expressions are used to describe what Rudolph calls the "semblance body": "I showed myself forth in the resemblance of their image. And I wore the garment of all" (47:15--16). Rudolph, however, holds that the two attitudes toward incarnation are not as far apart as is usually supposed by later ecclesiastical christology.22 This position is supported by Brown's analysis of the Fourth Gospel and of the opponents of the author of 1 John.23


21 Brown, Gospel according to John, 31.


in effect, "annulled" the humanity of Jesus. The author of 1 John reprimands these Christians as extremists; the tendency toward docetism, therefore, clearly is not exclusively gnostic.

In the Fourth Gospel, who Jesus really is – the Christ of glory – is of more importance than the earthly Jesus of Nazareth. In Rudolph's words: "it is not the earthly appearance of Jesus which is decisive but his heavenly and otherworldly origin which only faith can perceive." In Brown's view, the johannine Christians who are reprimanded in 1 John merely developed this tendency to an unacceptable extreme.

2. A second sapiential theme which Hebrew Sophia and the higher gnostic Sophia (in this instance, Prottennoia) share is intimate union with God. In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus' closeness to God is described as a filial relationship, which is the means through which status is ascertained. The references to God as Father and Jesus as Son are found in discourse segments (Jn 1:14,18; 3:16,19,35; 13:1,3; 20:31) and in prayer (17:1,5). As well, the words of others, such as John the Baptist (1:34), Nathanael (1:49), Martha (11:27) and the Jews (19:7) confirm the designation of Jesus as Son of God.

24 Ibid., 62.
24 Rudolph, Gnosis, 159.
It is primarily in the discourses of Jesus that his intimate union with his Father is reiterated. John puts in the mouth of Jesus declarations that to know him is to know the Father (8:28); that Jesus speaks of what he has seen with his Father (8:38); that he proceeds from the Father and comes forth from God (8:42); that he and the Father are one (10:30); that the Father is in him and that he is in the Father (10:38). Another image used to describe the intimate union between Jesus and God is that Jesus is in the bosom of the Father (1:18). These metaphors of union claim not an ontological equality but a functional unity of Jesus and the Father. Thus they express a higher christological understanding of Jesus than is found in Paul or the Synoptics. For John, Jesus does what God does: he gives life, judges, raises dead, shepherds, brings salvation. Wisdom is in the same pattern of functional identity with God.

3. Pre-existence, a characteristic of divinity, is a third wisdom motif in the Hebrew, gnostic and johannine traditions. The prologue reiterates that the Word was with God in the beginning before creation (Jn 1:1-2). When John the Baptist says that Jesus existed before him (1:30), the implication is pre-existence, not simply precedence in age. 27

27 Brown, Gospel according to John, 63.
Unequivocal declarations of the johannine Jesus’ pre-existence are found in his own words. During an antagonistic discussion with the Jews, the latter are astounded at Jesus’ assertion that he was before Abraham (8:58). Similarly, in the priestly prayer, Jesus recalls his glory with the Father before the world was made (Jn 17:5).

In the Fourth Gospel, the motif of pre-existence signifies transcendence of the temporal and limited aspects of human existence. In this way, the motif functions as a polemic against the claims of the followers of other important Jewish religious leaders. Both Moses and Elijah, for example, were the focus of popular traditions and of expectations concerning their return before the coming of the Messiah and/or the day of final judgment. Also, in the late first century, followers of John the Baptist claimed his superiority over Jesus because their Master had baptized Jesus.

4. Spatial imagery is used to indicate proximity to God and distance from humankind: thus, the traditional Jewish description of Sophia as "dwelling in the clouds." Similarly, the gnostic Protennoia teaches those who dwell in the abyss (37:14), thereby emphasizing the distance between the celestial and earthly realms.

Ibid., 46-50.

The johannine Jesus is emphatic that he is not of this world (Jn 8:23) and that he is from above (3:31; 8:23). Brown observes that in the farewell discourse (Jn 13:31–17:26) Jesus not only transcends time and space, he is seemingly speaking from heaven. 30 Jesus meets resistance when he tries to teach about heavenly things (3:12) and to explain that no one has gone up into heaven except he himself, the one who came down from heaven (3:13). This assertion is contrary to the ascent claims associated with Elijah and Moses, claims that were very popular at the time the Fourth Gospel was written. Thus John employs the spatial imagery of the wisdom tradition as polemic to deny the ascent claims of his Jewish contemporaries and thereby to insist on the exclusivity of Jesus' relationship to God.

In the Fourth Gospel, polemic, such as that found in the use of spatial imagery, is a function of the social situation. John deals with the conflict and the exclusion of Jewish Christians from the synagogue by denigrating the current synagogue leadership and by subordinating to Jesus traditional Jewish heroes. John the Baptist, Moses and Elijah are not vilified, but are presented as witnesses to Jesus, the exclusive mediator. In contrast, TriProt does not reveal any polemic analogous to that found in the Fourth Gospel; thus we surmise that the social situation of the author of TriProt did not require a polemical strategy.

Nevertheless, the claim to exclusivity is implicit in the *ego eimi* formula.

Spatial imagery which emphasizes divine proximity does not, of necessity, always imply distance from humankind. Certainly as a street preacher Sophia does not distance herself: she exhorts all to follow her (Prov 1:20-33) and those who accept her become friends of God (Wis 7:27). In a similar way, Jesus parallels Sophia in that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). To all who receive Jesus and believe in him, Jesus gives the power to become children of God (Jn 1:13). I find plausible Martyn's hypothesis that these sapiential concepts belong to the earliest, non-dualistic, parts of the Fourth Gospel; however, distance from humankind is stressed in later, more dualistic material. The insistence that one must be born from above (Jn 3:3-5), the dichotomy between above and below in chapter eight, and the "of this world/not of this world" prayer of chapter seventeen all point to an evolution from the original sapiential thought.

5. Imagery concerning status and authority, such as enthronement, is found in both Hebrew and gnostic sapiential speculation. In a monarchical society, this type of imagery illustrates proximity to the seat of power, whether divine or royal. Thus Sophia's celestial enthronement (Sir 24:4; 31

Wis 9:4,10) establishes her claim to co-authority with the divine.

However, by the first century of the common era, there had been a decline of Hellenistic monarchies, including the Jewish "monarchies" that occurred with the Roman subjugation of the area. Thus, in the Fourth Gospel there are no references to celestial enthronement; John does not seem to accept the ideas of kingship and/or of apocalyptic judgment (such as Mk 14:62 and Acts 2:33) which often accompany that description of enthronement. Generally, in John, imagery of kingship is not used; God is Father rather than king. In this light it is interesting that in the trial before Pilate, the soldiers and Pilate, with typically johannine irony, call Jesus "King of the Jews" (Jn 19:3,14,19,21-22). Perhaps the metaphor of Jesus' kingship is a traditional element, received by John and passed on; it is not, however, reinterpreted or resignified in the same way that many wisdom elements were.

In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus' claims of co-authority with God are linked to his intimate union with the Father - to his divine sonship - rather than to enthronement. In a similar way, Protennoia is not described in royal imagery nor is she enthroned; her claims to co-authority with the first divine principle are unequivocal but also unexplained. It is asserted that Protennoia is the parent's thinking (TriProt 36:17; 42:6) and voice (TriProt 42:7, 14); however,
the author of *TriProt A* does not feel compelled to justify the assertions.

6. MacRae holds that another wisdom motif in both the Hebrew and the gnostic traditions is the identification of Sophia with a Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{32} Protennoia not only provides an example of such an identification, she also demonstrates the life-giving powers of the Spirit (*TriProt* 45:29). The concept of the Spirit as a life-giving principle is known from Jewish literature (Jub 1:23-25) but is developed more fully in the Fourth Gospel.

Though the Spirit and Jesus are distinct in the Fourth Gospel, the johannine Jesus is intimately associated with the Spirit. The traditional claim that Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit (Jn 1:33) is reinterpreted. Here "Spirit" does not serve as a metaphor of apocalyptic judgment (Q/Luke 3:16-17), rather for John, "Spirit" connotes a realm of existence in which perception of the "kingdom" is possible and participation in it becomes a reality (Jn 3:3,5,8). Jesus represents this realm, and mediates it to others. He promises eternal life in the Spirit (3:8), promises the Spirit to his followers (7:39; 15:26) and, in a post-resurrection appearance, gives the Spirit to his disciples (20:22). This gift of the Spirit enables human beings to know and believe in Jesus' revelation (Jn 14:26; 16:13-15) and so to be re-begotten as children of God (3:5-8). In

\textsuperscript{32} MacRae, "Jewish Background," 90.
summary, the author of the Fourth Gospel not only "takes over" the Jewish concept of Spirit, he re-signifies it.\textsuperscript{33} This transformation is in effect a "sapientializing": Spirit is no longer an instrument of judgment but the designation of a divine realm in which humans may participate and without which perception of the divine is impossible.

7. Another wisdom characteristic with strong parallels in the Hebrew Sophia, gnostic Protennoia and johannine traditions is activity in creation. In the Fourth Gospel this wisdom motif is a basic premise reiterated in the prologue: "all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made" (Jn 1:3) and "the world was made through him" (Jn 1:10). It is indicative of the early Christian use of sapiential thought patterns that the only other NT references to Jesus as an agent of creation are also basic presuppositions found in liturgical hymns and prologues (Col 1:16 and Heb 1:2).

Kysar considers the description of Jesus as agent of creation as well as redeemer/saviour to be a leap in the growth of early Christian thought: "so fundamental to the sense and purpose of existence is the revelation of Christ that he must be conceived as the shaping force in the very beginning of existence!"\textsuperscript{34} Kysar seems to me to have a


\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 27.
valid insight here of the decisive importance of Jesus for the early Christian writers; however, his suggestion that the first literary expression of the joining of the concept of agent of redemption as well as agent of creation is found in John 1: 3, 10 and/or Col 1: 15-20 is an exaggeration. Sophia is an active agent in salvation history (Wis 9:18) yet is also "fashioner of all things" (Wis 7:22). It is clear that the matrix of the creator/redeemer juxtaposition is Hebrew wisdom speculation. Out of this sapiential matrix have blossomed both Protennoia and Jesus, creator-redeemers.

8. MacRae considers another sapiential motif to be the communication of wisdom and revelation to humankind. Just as Sophia communicates wisdom and revelation, Protennoia's role as a gnostic revealer figure is essentially the same. Strong parallels exist in the Fourth Gospel as johannine Jesus makes known the Father (Jn 1:18). This soteriological role of Jesus permeates the discourses of the Fourth Gospel (3:16-18; 5:19-24; 6:35-40, 44-46a; 7:28-30; 8:38; all of chapters 14 and 15).

Allied with this theme of communicating the Father's will is Jesus' insistence that he does not speak on his own authority; rather he witnesses to the Father (5:30-40; 8:28; 13:49; 14:11). As well, Jesus asserts that to know and receive him is to know the Father (8:19; 10:25-29; 13:44;

35 Ibid.

36 MacRae, "Jewish Background," 90.
14:1). Summary statements, such as "I and the Father are one," (10:30;) and prayers (17:1-26; 11:41-2) also emphasize Jesus' soteriological role.

The role of Jesus as revealer, "incarnate revelation," is similar to that of Protennoia in that what they reveal is primarily themselves, thereby making known the divine. Kysar observes that in the Fourth Gospel Jesus "stands apart from human teachers, for he is the proclaimer whose proclamation is one with his person. That is, the revelation contained in the words of the johannine Jesus has to do with the identity of the proclaimer." Ashton points out that the antecedent for this type of self-revelation is found in Prov 8:22-31 where Sophia - to borrow a phrase from Bultmann - "reveals no more than that she is the revealer."

The revealers Sophia, Protennoia and Jesus are revelation "incarnate" for those who are open to them, who recognize and accept them. By their very being they invite humankind to accept their message of divine revelation. This level of theology is, however, not always sustained. There is a common tendency to concretize the channels of access to wisdom; thus in Sirach, Sophia is identified with the Torah (Sir 24:8-12), In the Fourth Gospel redactors make

37 Brown, Gospel According to John, cxxii.
38 Kysar, Maverick Gospel, 8.
sacramental additions, and TriProt A is completed by Sethian baptismal liturgy.

The three revealers are not always understood. The Sethian reductor, for example, misses the point that in the araetological material of TriProt "the medium is the message". He expands the original kernel of the writing by adding extraneous material about Sethian cosmology and baptismal practice. In a like way, there appears to be a redactional addition (Jn 6:51c-58) to the johannine "Bread of Life" discourse (Jn 6:26-51b). The primary meaning of the discourse, with its emphasis on the sapiential theme of a messianic banquet, is changed by a reductor who emphasizes only the specifically eucharistic aspect.

9. A sapiential motif found in the Jewish, gnostic and Christian traditions is that of descent: Sophia, Prottennoia and the johannine Jesus all descend to the world. In all three traditions it is difficult to discuss descent without reference to subsequent reascent. Wayne Meeks asserts:

The uniqueness of the Fourth Gospel in early Christian literature consists above all in the special patterns of language which it uses to describe Jesus Christ. Fundamental among these patterns is the description of Jesus as the one who has descended from heaven and, at the end of his mission which constitutes a *krisis* for the whole world, reascends to the Father."41


Godfrey Nicholson concurs:

This schema says, in essence, that Jesus is the one (and the only one) who has descended from above and who will ascend back above. While he is in the world below (i.e. throughout the story of the Gospel) he remains one with the Father who sent him. Those who come to understand Jesus, who come to believe in him, are those few who perceive that he has so descended and that he must ascend.\textsuperscript{42}

Both Meeks and Nicholson stress the uniqueness of the johannine Jesus' descent/reascent in early Christian literature. It must be accepted, however, as Jacques Ménard has decisively shown, that the pattern of a descent/reascent to and from the underworld, is a well-known mythic phenomenon in the history of religions.\textsuperscript{43} According to P. H. Poirier, the gnostic theme of the revealer's temporary sojourn on earth in order to reveal him/herself is often a reinterpretation of this descent/reascent pattern.\textsuperscript{44}

A striking parallel is that the wisdom figures, Sophia, Protennoia and Jesus - all active in creation and redemption - follow a similar descent/reascent trajectory.


\textsuperscript{44} Paul-Hubert Poirier, "La Prôtennoia Trimorphe (NH XIII,1) et le Vocabulaire du Des-census as Inferos," \textit{Le Muséon} 96 (1983) 202.
Integrally associated with the theme of descent is the johannine emphasis, found only rarely in the Synoptic Gospels, that Jesus was sent by the Father (Q/Luke 10:16). The motif of sending is used for God's servants the prophets (Jer 7:25) and this understanding of Jesus, a prophet/servant/son sent by God, is certainly found in the synoptic gospels (Lk 11:49-51, Mk 12). In the Fourth Gospel, however, a higher christology is envisaged; again the basis is a wisdom motif.

Sapiential speculation presents a prudent appreciation of the value of a faithful messenger (Prov 13:7; 25:13; 26:6); Sophia becomes the prime example of such a divine messenger sent forth as requested in Solomon's prayer (Wis 9:10-11).\textsuperscript{45}

John transforms this sapiential background to formulate his idea of Jesus as "the one sent", with the full authority of the one who sends him.\textsuperscript{46} Jesus as envoy is an important christological formulation of the gospel occurring throughout the discourses and in summary statements; there are five references to sending in the so-called "priestly prayer" alone (Jn 17:3,18,21,23,25). The stated purpose for raising Lazarus from the dead is so that the onlookers might believe that Jesus is the one sent by the Father (11:42). W. R. G. Loader maintains that this concept of Jesus sent by

\textsuperscript{45} Feuillet, \textit{Johanne Studies}, 81.

\textsuperscript{46} Brown, \textit{Gospel according to John}, 632.
the Father forms the basis for Jesus' authority.\textsuperscript{47} It also reiterates Jesus' unity with the Father.

It must be noted, however, that the johannine Jesus is much more than just an "envoy". In Schnackenburg's words, The Father has not merely given Jesus authority to speak (12:49), he speaks himself in Jesus (cf 14:10). The sender is here so completely one with the envoy that to "see" the latter is to "see" the former (12:45) and to hear the words of Jesus is to hear the words of God.\textsuperscript{48}

Kysar agrees: "in the envoy the Father himself becomes word in Jesus' words. One hears the Father in the words of Jesus when one hears him correctly; this is especially the case in the 'I am' sayings."\textsuperscript{49}

10. The theme of reascent is, as MacRae asserts, generally not found in the Jewish wisdom writings because Wisdom finds her home in Israel, specifically in the Torah.\textsuperscript{50} In this construct Ashton holds that this Wisdom/Torah identification amounts to a domestication of Wisdom\textsuperscript{51} and that the part of the sapiential tradition which "exhibits no tendency to domesticate Wisdom and attenuate


\textsuperscript{49} Robert Kysar, \textit{The Fourth Evangelist and his Gospel} (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975), 197.

\textsuperscript{50} MacRae, "Jewish Background," 92.

\textsuperscript{51} Ashton, "Transformation," 169.
her mystery"\textsuperscript{52} is more congenial to the thinking of the author of the Fourth Gospel.

The primary example of this minor theme of non-domesticated Wisdom is 1 Enoch 42: 1-2: Wisdom did not find a dwelling place among the sons of man, she returned to her place and took a seat in the midst of the angels. The parallels with the johannine prologue are interesting. The Word comes to his own but his own people do not receive him (Jn 1:11). Jesus, the divine revealer, does not immediately retreat to heaven in the face of adversity; he dwells among his people so that they might behold his glory (Jn 1:14b). Nevertheless is it inevitable that Jesus will return to the Father; he tries to prepare his disciples by means of the "farewell discourses."

Ashton holds that the stream of wisdom speculation which deals with Wisdom failing to find a home among her own people was attractive to the author of the prologue because rejection "was also the experience of Jesus and of the community."\textsuperscript{53} Once johannine Jewish Christians were expelled from the synagogue, the community needed strengthening: "...the conviction that the history of revelation had been reenacted by Christ must have helped to sustain the Christians' sense that they were reliving the rejection undergone by the Revealer."\textsuperscript{54} In Meeks' words, \textsuperscript{52} Ibid., emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid. 164, emphasis by Ashton.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 181.
there is a "harmonic reinforcement between social experience and ideology."\textsuperscript{55}

Although both TriProt and the Fourth Gospel share the theme of reascent, the method and/or description of that reascent is not at all parallel. The departure of Proteanooia is not described in great detail; the author simply states that she returns to the holy light with her posterity (50:18).

In contrast to Proteanooia's simple return to her celestial home, the reascent of the johannine Jesus becomes the focus of an elaborate theological trope. Rather than a simple assumption, ascension or departure, John confronts historical reality and theological problem: the death of Jesus. To many early Christians the horrendous ignominy of Jesus' death by crucifixion threatened to negate any claims for Jesus as a prophet, teacher or divine revealer. However, for John, the reascent to the Father begins on the cross when Jesus is physically lifted up; crucifixion is not ignominy but exaltation and glorification.\textsuperscript{56}

Nicholson notes the theological subtlety of the johannine interpretation of the death of Jesus:

Jesus' death is really his return to the Father; Jesus came to return rather than to die; the focus of attention lies just beyond the cross in the

\textsuperscript{55} Meeks, "Man from Heaven,"\textsuperscript{164.}

\textsuperscript{56} See Brown, \textit{Gospel according to John}, 541, 930-1, 1013.
moment of return - the "hour" of the glorification of Jesus.57

Brown concurs that for John, Jesus' reascent is his return at the appropriate "hour".58 It is clear that with this johannine concept of reascent the wisdom schema has been concretized by John's own theological intentions.

11. The next sapiential motif, that of the use of familial imagery, serves to foster family-type bonds among Sophia's followers whether they are Jews referring to "Sophia our sister" (Prov 7:4) or gnostics who are Protanonia's siblings (47:22 and 29) or children (44:29; 50:16-18). In TriProt, most of the family imagery refers to Protanonia herself59 and relatively little familial imagery is used to describe the first divine principle (the entirety or the all). The latter is only referred to as "father" (or parent) once in the aretalogical layer (36:17) and once in the Sethianized layer (38:9).

It is the usage of God as Father that is the most striking familial image in the Fourth Gospel; John refers to God as Father more than a hundred times. Matthew Villanickel points out that a filial relationship between Israel and Yahweh existed in the OT writings but that there is no parallel for the johannine teaching that believing

----------------------
57 Nicholson, Death as Departure, 167.
58 Brown, Gospel according to John, 1014 and 517.
59 She is mother (42:9), parent (41:1; 45:2 and 49:19), even Father, Mother, Son (37:20).
individuals are actually born of God as children of God (Jn 1:12). 60

The johannine image of friendship is another way that John encourages family-type bonds in the community. As Sophia's followers become friends of God (Wis 7:27), so also Jesus addresses his disciples as friends and asserts that all that he has heard from his Father he has made known to his friends (Jn 15:15). Imagery concerning friendship is not found in TriProt, possibly because the community of the author of TriProt does not feel as threatened as the johannine community. Therefore the fostering of sectarian/family bonds would not be as important a priority as it is for John.

In summary, in the Fourth Gospel the references to fraternal relationships are much less important than the Father/Son relationship which is developed as a prominent feature. Imagery concerning familial bonds and friendship is used to foster and advance johannine sectarianism in the same way that it is used in many Jewish and gnostic sapiential writings. TriProt uses some familial imagery but not in a strongly polemic way.

12. In Hebrew, gnostic and johannine sapiential speculation, the wisdom figure is associated with life. As with other major themes of the Fourth Gospel, the

identification of Jesus with life is introduced in the prologue (Jn 1:5). When the johannine Jesus speaks of life it is clear that ordinary human life is not what is referred to. Jesus teaches about eternal life (3:15-16; 5:21-29), describes himself as living water for eternal life (4:14), as bread of life (6:35), and as the way, the truth and the life (14:6), and asserts that the will of the Father is eternal life for all believers (6:40).

Jesus not only declares that even the dead will live (5:25; 11:25) he also restores the dead Lazarus to human life as sign of his power to give eternal life. Brown underlines the eschatological import of the raising of Lazarus: "what is crucial is that Jesus has given (physical) life as a sign of his power to give eternal life on the earth (realized eschatology) and as a promise that on the last day he will raise the dead (final eschatology)."\textsuperscript{61}

In summary, in the Fourth Gospel Jesus' identification with life is entirely consistent with Sophia (Prov 8:35, Bar 4:1). As well, the johannine declaration is in the form of an ego-eimi proclamation (11:25), the same literary form used by Protennoia to assert that she is life (\textit{TriProt 35:12}).

13. Related to the theme of life is the sapiential motif of Sophia's identification with a tree of life, a motif which also demonstrates the subtlety of johannine

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 437.
theology. John replaces the traditional metaphor of Israel as the vineyard of the Lord (Is 5) with the image of Jesus the vine and his followers as the branches (Jn 15). Although to the modern reader the effect is poetic, it would have been a shocking, perhaps even offensive, image to contemporaries of John who were traditionally-minded Jews.

As well as the OT imagery of Israel as the vineyard of the Lord, John is also indebted to imagery of Wisdom as a life-giving tree or vine. Sophia's proclamation, "I bud forth delights like the vine" (Sir 24:17) becomes "I am the vine and my Father is the vinedresser" (Jn 15:1) and "I am the vine, you are the branches" (15:5). This sapiential-motif demonstrates very clearly both indebtedness to traditional wisdom imagery and the subtlety of John's own replacement theology.

In keeping with the gnostic tradition's interest in Genesis, the image of a tree of life is found in gnostic literature. At times the usage is similar to that found in Genesis (HypArch 88:27-30); other examples are vehement diatribes against the tree of life. In TriProt B the powers complain: "For our tree from which we sprouted bears fruit of ignorance, and also there is death in its leaves; darkness dwells in the shadow of its branches" (TriProtB 44:19-28; and ApocJn 21:30-35). This negative usage is found only in the Sethianized section; Protennoia is not

\[62\] Ibid., 672. See also Feuillet, Johannine Studies, 87-88.
associated with a tree of life in the aretological layer. Also, this gnostic usage of the tree of life image is the antithesis of the johannine description of the vine, indicative both of the disciples' potential union with Christ and their ability to bear fruit.

Wisdom Themes Not Discussed by MacRae

14. A wisdom characteristic common to the Hebrew, gnostic and johannine traditions is the use of the imagery of light. OT psalms describe the Lord as light (Ps 27, 56) so a logical corollary is that Sophia is a reflection of that divine light (Wis 7:26). In an ego-eimi proclamation Protennoia declares that she is the light that illuminates the Entirety (TriProt 47:28) in the same way that the johannine Jesus proclaims "I am the light of the world: (Jn 8:12; 9:5). The intention of imagery concerning light is to assert possession of a divine attribute.

In the Fourth Gospel, images of light reinforce John's presentation of Jesus as the perfection and accomplishment of the Mosaic Law. Wisdom is equated with the Law which is said to "make instruction shine forth like light" (Sir 24:27; also Sir 24:32 and Baruch 4:2). Thus for the johannine Jesus to describe himself in the same image as Judaism used for the Law63 would certainly be seen as a challenge to views of Judaism that were based on the Torah.

---

63 Brown, Gospel according to John, 344.
The healing of the man who was blind from birth (Jn 9:1-40) is typical of the johannine attitude toward sight and light. Jesus, the light of the world (9:5), opens the blind man's eyes not only to vision but also to faith. In this story, "light" connotes both physical and religious reality; it symbolizes the revelation or illumination of faith.

Use of light images in sapiential thought usually implies that an ethical choice in favour of enlightenment must be made by Wisdom's followers. Jewish disciples of Sophia are advised to turn and take her, to walk toward the shining of her light (Bar 4:2). Similarly, Prottennoia rejoices in those who recognize the light (TriProt 47:29) and promises that she will bring her children, offspring of the light, (37:19; 40:34; 42:14) in to the holy light (50:18). In the Fourth Gospel, light is contrasted with darkness in the prologue (Jn 1:4-5) and throughout the discourses of Jesus (3:19-21; 8:12; 9:4; 11:9-10; 12:35-6). These descriptions of light and darkness do not present an ontological dualism but an ethical one: enlightened choices and actions are praised while evil deeds, those done in darkness, are condemned.

In summary, the Hebrew, gnostic and johannine traditions all use images concerning light. Sophia is praised as a reflection of divine light, yet she has been surpassed: Prottennoia and the johannine Jesus are proclaimed
as light itself. Disciples need to be elucidated to recognize the divine qualities of the wisdom figures.

15. Another wisdom theme common to the Hebrew, gnostic and johannine traditions is that the wisdom figure is capable of bestowing eternal rewards. Nevertheless, the johannine Jesus does not bestow absolute rewards upon his disciples. Rather, according to the will of his Father, he presents possibilities; the actualization of these possibilities is contingent on the response of the believers. Jesus makes clear that eternal life for all disciples is the will of the Father (Jn 3:16, 36) and that all who believe in Jesus become children of God (1:12-13). The third option that Jesus offers to his followers is the possibility of the same unity with the Father that he himself enjoys. In prayer, Jesus asks that those who believe in him may all be one, as he is one with the Father and the Father with him (17:21).

The sapiential tradition presents an expectation that the wisdom figures grant eternal rewards although the actual rewards vary. Sophia promises that those who accept her become friends of God (Wis 7:27) while Protennoia's gifts are expressed in gnostic imagery not at all clear to the uninitiated (TriProt 36:9, 15, 17; 42:10, 14). The johannine Jesus' rewards are clearer and yet more of a challenge for his followers.

16. As imagery concerning light is used to express a disciple's new understanding or elucidation, a similar
theological intention is present in imagery concerning voice and call which metaphorically describes the calling to knowledge and/or a recognition by the initiate of the true "word". However deceiving appearances may be, the voice, word or call of the revealer will be recognized and the true disciple will know and heed the master's voice.

In the Hebrew tradition, Sophia is said to "call" or summon her followers who are exhorted to "hear" (Prov 8:1-10). Behind this sapiential teaching is the OT concept of dabar as the active word of God, efficacious both in creation (Gen 1) and in carrying out the divine will (Is 43). Sophia is clearly identified with the efficacious word of God at creation in Sirach (23:3); similarly, the author of the Fourth Gospel identifies Jesus as the Word of God (Jn 1:1).

The motif of hearing and recognizing the divine word in the words or voice of the revealer is developed in both TriProt and the Fourth Gospel. The johannine Jesus joins hearing and believing: "... he who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life" (Jn 5:24). That Jesus is not talking about the ordinary human ability to hear is made clear: "... the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (5:25); "The hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth..." (5:28,29a). When Mary Magdalene encounters the risen Jesus in the garden, she does not recognize him by his
appearance; however, when he speaks to her, she knows him
(Jn 20:14-16).

The emphasis on recognition by means of voice is
reiterated in the image of Jesus as the model shepherd.
Sheep follow the one whose voice they recognize (10:3,4,27);
they will not follow strangers because they do not know the
voice of strangers (10:5). This imagery could be
particularly challenging to Jews familiar with the
admonitions of Is 42, warnings against spiritual deafness
(Is 42:18-20).

The affinity of this johannine imagery to vocabulary in
TriProt is interesting. The Coptic words sme and hrou mean
both sound or voice and are used interchangeably. In
TriProt they are used frequently: sme is used four times in
the aretalogical material and seven times in the Sethian
material; hrou is used fourteen times in the aetalogical
material and nine times in the Sethian additions. The
question arises whether the words are precisely synonymous
or whether in TriProt one of the words came to be used in a
more philosophical, or pseudo-philosophical, sense of a
gnostic call. Certainly Janssens' translation of one
passage, "It is I who make the call resound..." (TriProt

\footnote{W. E. Crum, A Coptic Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon, 1939,
reprint 1972) 334b, 704b. The word sme is translated
"sound" by Turner and "voice" by Layton; the word hrou, is
translated "voice" by Turner and "sound" by Layton.
Unfortunately both words are translated "voix" by Janssens
unless they are juxtaposed.}

\footnote{Rudolph, Gnosis, 119.}
42:14) is capable of interpretation as a gnostic call. Steven Skiles points out that the "call" question is likely to remain unresolved as long as the only extant text of TriProt is in Coptic. It is assumed that the original text of TriProt was in Greek; since, however, the original text is not available for analysis, there is no way to judge the accuracy of the Coptic translator nor the semantic content of sme and hroou.

Protennoia, like Sophia and the johannine Jesus, uses a number of sound or voice images to describe herself: "I am called the unchangeable voice" (42:7) and "It is I who am the mother of the sound" (42:9). Again, like Jesus the model shepherd, Protennoia's self-descriptions relating to images of sound are joined with the concept of recognition: "I project a voice of the sound into the ears of those who recognize me" (45:10; also 36:9-15, 22-23; 42:12, 14-16).

In summary, the sapiential theme of recognition of the voice of the revealer is expressed clearly in Sophia's call to her followers. This wisdom motif is used, in turn, by the authors of TriProt A and of the Fourth Gospel to exhort their disciples. A further evolution takes place in gnostic thought where recognition is the necessary basis for salvation. It is clear that this is a substantial evolution from the OT prophetic tradition where the faithful were


67 In a private conversation.
simply asked to obey the word of the Lord as delivered by
the prophets.

**Summation**

To conclude, I will add the johannine Jesus to the
summary of the comparison of Sophia and Protennoia, Chart 3,
pages 118-19. Of the thirteen themes elucidated by MacRae,
the Fourth Gospel exhibits parallels with all of them. The
sapiential motifs with a positive co-relation are 1)
personal being, 2) intimate union with God, 3) pre-
existence, 4) use of spatial imagery, 5) imagery concerning
status and authority, 6) identification with a Holy Spirit,
7) activity in creation, 8) soteriological role, 9) descent
to the material world and 10) subsequent reascent, 11) use
of familial imagery, and 12) identification with life. Both
Sophia and the johannine Jesus are 13) identified with a
tree of life; Protennoia, however, is not. As well, 14)
imagery of light and 15) bestowal of rewards are wisdom
characteristics used to describe Sophia, Protennoia and the
johannine Jesus. In addition, I find that there is similar
usage of the motif of 16) recognition of the voice of the
reveler. Chart 4, page 159, summarizes the comparison of
the three wisdom figures and indicates the striking
parallels among all the wisdom motifs studied. Of the
sixteen sapiential motifs and the three wisdom figures,
there is a positive co-relation among forty-seven of the
forty-eight possible points of comparison. There is only
one exception; Protrenoia is not identified with a tree of life.

It is noteworthy that John does not always use wisdom imagery in the same way as the authors of TriProt and of other sapiential writings. I suggest that johannine usage of wisdom imagery presents a spectrum that ranges from neutral to polemic. Among the most neutral imagery is that which might generally be used to describe any divine/sapiential manifestation. These include personal being, intimate union with the divine, identification with light and/or with a spirit, imagery of authority and bestowal of rewards. The Jewish wisdom writers, John and the author of TriProt A, seem to use this imagery in the same way in describing the three wisdom figures.

The motif of pre-existence illustrates a transition from the above relatively neutral motifs to ones that are more concretely theologized to express John's particular interests. Pre-existence, a divine attribute, not only expresses John's understanding of Jesus as one not bound by human limitations but also serves to counter primacy claims by John the Baptist sectarians and ascent traditions concerning Moses and Elijah.

Along the spectrum from neutrality to polemic, I note three wisdom motifs that John and the author of TriProt use to emphasize the fundamental and definitive importance of Jesus and Protrenoia. These themes of incarnation and revelation are descent to material creation, reascent or
return to a celestial home, and the soteriological role of
the three wisdom figures who are simultaneously revealer and
revelation. I suggest that in these three motifs,
Protennoia and the johannine Jesus significantly go beyond
OT Wisdom.

A final group of motifs seems to be a vehicle to foster
John's theological and social interests; the primary purpose
of these motifs is to strengthen the johannine community and
to act as polemic against the claims of other sectarian
groups. Spatial imagery and imagery of authority, for
example, is used to insist on the exclusivity of Jesus.
Also in this class are motifs which foster discipleship and
the ability of followers of the wisdom figure to see the
light, to recognize the voice and call of the revealer, to
create and advance family-type bonds. This imagery is used
to counter claims concerning other religious leaders and/or
groups and is indicative of a polemical situation. John
goes beyond OT Wisdom as he fights other groups both within
the Christian community (e.g. John the Baptist sectarians)
and within the larger Jewish community (e.g. ascent claims
concerning Moses and Elijah). There is, however, no
evidence that John felt compelled to defend his community
from gnostic thinkers nor that he was aware of Protennoia.

It has been accepted for some time that Sophia and the
johannine Jesus share a number of sapiential motifs. It

68 Brown, Gospel according to John, cxxii-cxxv; Feuillet,
Johannine Studies, 80-91; Elizabeth Johnson, "Jesus, The
is now clear that TriProt A also demonstrates striking parallels with the wisdom tradition. The authors of TriProt A and of the Fourth Gospel both chose to use wisdom terminology, symbolism and theological concepts; however, the imagery is sometimes used in different ways. In the conclusion of this comparative analysis I will attempt to probe some of the implications of these facts.

---

Chart 4

A comparison of the wisdom figures Sophia, Protennoia as described in *TriProt A*, and the johannine Jesus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wisdom motif:</th>
<th>Sophia</th>
<th>Protennoia</th>
<th>Jesus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal being</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divine union</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-existence</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatial imagery</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority imagery</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit identification</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity in creation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soteriological role</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descent</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reascent</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familial imagery</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification with life</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tree of life</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light imagery</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewards bestowed</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice recognition</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONCLUSION

My comparative analysis of Sophia and Protennoia presents evidence that these two figures are much more closely related than has previously been recognized. In addition, the johannine Jesus exhibits many characteristics in common with Protennoia, characteristics that are derived from wisdom speculation. From this evidence I believe that a number of conclusions can be drawn concerning both TriProt, the common ancestor of TriProt A and the Fourth Gospel.

First, scholars must recognize and take into account the stratigraphy of TriProt; otherwise they face the danger of drawing conclusions based on redactional expansions of the writing. It is obvious, for example, that Craig Evans does not recognize the importance of the aretalogical kernel of the writing. He states that both TriProt and the Prologue have resignified certain elements of the shared sapiential traditions; the result is, according to Evans, incarnational theology in the fourth Gospel and a Gnostic cosmology in TriProt. It is accurate that gnostic cosmology is found in TriProt, but this occurs at the Sethian level. The aretalogical material clearly presents

-------------------
2 Ibid., 399.
an incarnational theology, too, one focused on Prottenoia. As my comparative analysis has shown, Prottenoia is closely related to personified Wisdom; Prottenoia, like the johannine Jesus, is another example of revelation "incarnate."

My second conclusion deals with the Sethianized parts of TriProt. To insist on the importance of the aretalogical layer of TriProt is not at all to deny the validity of attention to and analysis of the Sethian material. This layer provides a witness of Sethian cosmology as well as the gnostic cultic practice concerning baptism. The Sethian redaction of the writing indicates the development of wisdom speculation into full-blown gnosticism and also attests to the way wisdom speculation becomes concretized in baptismal liturgy. Such evidence would tend to confirm the judgment that gnosticism is a religious understanding worthy of study in its own right. It is not merely the expression of a second century heretical movement within Christianity.

An example of the importance and ultimate value of respecting the distinction between aretalogical and Sethian material in TriProt is provided by P.-H. Poirier's analysis of the theme of descensus ad inferos.\(^3\) He concludes that the form of the descent vocabulary used in TriProt resembles other Christian gnostic writings of the second century:\(^4\)

---


4 Ibid., 204.
thus TriProt may not be as old as the Berlin group suggested. Poirier's citations, without exception, are taken from Sethian material; nevertheless, all his introductory and concluding comments refer to TriProt as a whole.

Poirier's article was written without the benefit of Turner's compositional analysis, although Poirier does state that there are difficulties presented by the unknown compositional history of TriProt. I believe that a revised examination of the theme of descensus beginning with Protennoia's descent in the aretalogical material and using Poirier's excellent analysis of the theme in the Sethianized material would indicate a trajectory within gnosticism itself toward increasingly elaborate mythical speculation.

In addition, TriProt elucidates a redactional process within gnosticism. Poirier, for example, questions whether the material that he analyzes belongs to the original text or whether it should be ascribed to a secondary christianization. It is now clear that this either/or choice is an oversimplification and that gnostic redactors were as active as Christians ones.

My third conclusion returns to the aretalogical kernel of the writing. If, as Brown asserts, the sapiential character of the Fourth Gospel is no longer seriously

---

5 Poirier, "Descensus ad Inferos," 204; this article, published in 1983, precedes the 1986 publication of Turner's analysis of the redactional history of TriProt.
questioned, it is now time to also accept the sapiential character of the aretalological layer of TriProt. This is not to posit a literary relationship in either direction; rather both TriProt A and the Fourth Gospel are witnesses to a wisdom trajectory.

MacRae seems to highlight the gnostic roots at the expense of sapiential ones in his comments concerning the patterns of christology and soteriology in the Fourth Gospel:

The gospel portrays Christ as a pre-existent, in some sense divine, figure who descends from the world of the Father into the created world for the purpose of offering salvation to humanity by revealing the Father....one must recognize the fact that it resembles nothing in the ancient world so much as the Gnostic revealer myth.6

This emphasis on gnostic rather than wisdom thinking is made even though MacRae himself points out that "the root problem in identifying the background of the Fourth Gospel is the fact that the Jewish wisdom tradition can be used to account for much of what some interpreters regard as Gnostic."7 While I do not at all deny the striking parallels between the gnostic revealer/redeemer and the johannine Jesus, I believe that MacRae should point out the importance of the Wisdom matrix of this revealer/redeemer pattern. Each one of the characteristics of the johannine Jesus in the above


7 Ibid., 95.
quote applies equally to Sophia. The characteristics are derived from sapiential sources; therefore, they cannot be ascribed solely to gnostic thought.

MacRae poses two questions which TriProt A helps to answer. First, he asks whether the Fourth Gospel is an independent - a uniquely Christian - development from the wisdom tradition.\(^8\) It is clear that the striking parallels in sapiential terminology, symbolism and theological concepts among the three wisdom figures, Sophia, Protennoia and the johannine Jesus, indicate that the Fourth Gospel cannot be considered a development independent of the wisdom tradition.

Secondly, MacRae questions whether the Fourth gospel is part of a larger movement of speculation in which gnosticism also reinterprets wisdom.\(^9\) TriProt A clearly indicates that this question must be answered affirmatively. If gnosticism does reinterpret wisdom, as TriProt A witnesses, then the question becomes how this takes place. Again, TriProt is elucidating.

One possibility to be considered is that both TriProt A and the Fourth Gospel are simply products of a common Christian milieu. However this solution seems highly unlikely because the few Christian references in TriProt are superficial; they are not at all integral to the aetiological

\(^8\) Ibid., 95.
\(^9\) Ibid., 95-6.
layer of TriProt and appear more often as simple addenda to the Sethianized material.

A second explanation of the phenomenon of the two writings, products of wisdom thinking, is that both writings simply had a common ancestor in Hellenistic Judaism. The concept has been exhaustively studied by G. Robinson in comparative analyses of the hymn underlying the Johannine prologue and TriProt. She asserts that merely to propose a shared ancestor is inadequate.10 As a Sethian writing, TriProt integrated the Wisdom speculation of its environment and then, in turn, became the matrix for the Logos hymn of the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel.11 She concludes that "thus the Prologue derives from a Wisdom tradition that has already passed through this gnostic filter."12 Rather than accepting a common ancestor, G. Robinson asserts that "one should postulate an identical gnostic world of thought for Trim. Prot. and the Logos hymn lying behind the Prologue of John."13

The assertion that an already gnosticized wisdom tradition provided the matrix for the hymn that became the


12 Ibid., 23.

13 G. Robinson, "Trimorphic Protennoia (NHC XIII,1)," 6.
johannine prologue pushes back the gnosticization of the wisdom tradition even further. This conclusion must, unfortunately, remain hypothetical since none of the gnostic or gnosticized literature in question can be reliably dated. For this reason I prefer to leave the question of the johannine prologue and to base my comparative analysis on the Fourth Gospel as a whole, and on the sapiential character of the johannine Jesus.

Robinson's study treats TriProt as a unit, even though she herself admits that the compositional history of the writing is problematic. I believe that isolation of the aretalogical layer of TriProt means that the writing can no longer be treated as an integral unit. My comparison of the three wisdom figures, Sophia, Protennoia and the johannine Jesus draws primarily on TriProt A. With this methodology, I believe that a return to the concept of a common ancestor of the two writings may prove more fruitful.

TriProt A and the Fourth Gospel illustrate two lines of development from wisdom speculation. The johannine trajectory understands Jesus as the replacement and fulfillment of Sophia; the gnostic line of development has an analogous understanding of Protennoia. In both cases the basis is wisdom speculation. It is, however, not the mainstream understanding of Wisdom found in Proverbs, the Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach. Rather, it is the divergent strands of wisdom thought, such as those found in the non-canonical writings of Enoch and Baruch, that were used by
sectarian groups within Judaism and that were particularly congenial to the gnostic and Christian authors. The theme of Sophia's reascent provides an example: rather than the standard Jewish identification of Sophia with the Torah (Sir 24:8-12), the apocalyptic literature describes Sophia's reascent to heaven with her chosen followers (1 Enoch 42:1-2). From this sectarian thinking developed Protennoia's return to the celestial world (TriProt 50:18) and the johannine theology of the lifting up of Jesus in his return to the Father.

The increasing sectarianizing of Wisdom and its expression in TriProt and the Fourth Gospel leads to the conclusion that there was a sectarian tendency in the wisdom tradition itself. This movement toward elitism was congenial to gnostic thinking and was exploited by gnostic and Christian authors to express their own appropriation of Wisdom. It is the sectarian Sophia, rather than the canonical Jewish Sophia, who became the common ancestor of TriProt A and the Fourth Gospel.

I believe that the stratigraphy of TriProt illustrates the development of the gnosticization of Wisdom. The aretological layer of TriProt describes a higher Sophia, a revealer/redeemer with a universal appeal, while the Sethian material introduces lower Sophia, a sectarian figure used to explain the Sethian understanding of world origins and history. Finally the Christian veneer seems designed to
appeal to Sethian Christian gnostics. This increasingly narrow focus is possible because the original Wisdom speculation had, in some environments at least, become increasingly sectarian. Protoennoia is not derived directly from the Sophia of Proverbs with her universal appeal; the intermediate step of a gnosticized ancestor is necessary.

It is noteworthy that TriProt A contains no polemic material against other gnostic groups nor against Christians. This fact argues for either the relative antiquity of the writing or perhaps its isolation from contact with the mainstream of emerging orthodoxy. The second century C.E. was one particularly marked by controversy and persecution among various sectarian groups, both gnostic and Christian. TriProt A does not react to any controversy or persecution and thus may precede this time of social and religious upheaval. While present evidence does not permit a definitive conclusion, TriProt A may attest a relatively early stage of sectarian wisdom speculation.

While G. Robinson holds that the hymn underlying the Johannine prologue passed through the gnostic filter of TriProt, I would suggest that the gnosticizing tendency can be found in the wisdom tradition itself. The common wisdom ancestor of TriProt A and the Gospel of John is not merely a shared one; it is also a proto-gnostic one. Recent

scholarship of the Fourth Gospel tends to focus on the "dialogue partners" of the johannine community. I believe that future examination of the johannine Jesus will recognize a wisdom trajectory which stops short of outright gnosticism. John's presentation of Jesus derives from a gnosticizing wisdom tradition which John then re-interprets to express his understanding of the universal significance of Jesus Christ.

It must now be accepted that "sapiential" and "gnostic" are not as far apart as past scholarship thought. TriProt A attests to the fact that some gnostic thought is thoroughly sapiential. Boundaries between Jewish wisdom speculation, gnosticism and "orthodox" Christianity are more fluid than is often recognized. TriProt A presents such a pervasive gnostic reinterpretation of wisdom thought that MacRae's question concerning whether the sapiential tradition had become gnosticized must be answered affirmatively. Logically the question "how gnostic had wisdom speculation become?" must now become "how sapiential was gnosticism?"

BIBLIOGRAPHY


_____.* The Community of the Beloved Disciple: the Life.


Dodd, C. H. *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel.*


_____.


Lindars, Barnabas. "Traditions behind the Fourth Gospel,"
L'évangile de Jean: Sources, Rédaction, Théologie. Ed.
M. de Jonge. Gembloux: Duculot. Leuven: University

Oliphants, 1972.

Lipscomb, W. L. and J. A. Sanders. "Wisdom at Qumrán,"
Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in
Honor of Samuel Terrien. Eds. J. Gammie, W.
Brueggemann, W. L. Humphreys, J. Ward. New York: Union

Loader, W. R. G. "The Central Structure of Johannine
216.

Mack, Burton. Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic. Chicago and

Pp.46-60.

MacRae, George. "The Jewish Background of the Gnostic

-----.. "The Ego-Proclamation in Gnostic Sources." The


Interpretation of John. Issues in Religion and Theology

Ménard, Jacques E. "Le Descensus ad Inferos." Ex Orbe
Religionum Studia Geo Widengren Oblata. Studies in the
History of Religion Supplements to Numen 22. Leiden:

------. "La Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi." Nag Hammadi

------. "Normative Self-Definition in Gnosticism." Jewish
and Christian Self-Definition. Vol. 1. The Shaping of
Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries. Ed. E.

------, en collab. "Une découverte fondamentale: la
Bibliothèque gnostique de Nag Hammadi." Histoire et
Archéologie. 70 (février, 1983).

------. De la gnose au manichéisme. Paris: Cariscript,
1986.

------. review of Gesine Schenke's Die Driegezaltige
Protennoia Nag Hammadi Codex XIII (Berlin: Akademie-
Pp.716-718.


------. "The Figure of Seth in Gnostic Literature." *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale.* New


to Gilles Quispel on the occasion of his 65th birthday.
VITA AUCTORIS

Rosemary Fortier Halford was born in 1945 at Windsor, Ontario. Her undergraduate studies at the University of Windsor were in French and Spanish (B. A., 1966) and in Religious Studies, (Honours B. A., 1987; Board of Governors Award). Her interest in gnosticism was fostered by studies at the University of Strasbourg in 1982-83 and 1987-88. During 1990 she hopes to complete the requirements for a Master of Arts degree in Religious Studies at the University of Windsor.