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## THE CONCEPT OF DIVINE SONSHIP (παῖδα κυρίου): A LINGUISTIC STUDY OF WISDOM 2:13b

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This article discusses the concept of divine sonship (παῖδα κυρίου) in the Book of Wisdom, chapter 2, verse 13b from the linguistic, literary, and theological perspectives. In this verse, the Bible author uses the phrase "a child/son of God" to express the unique relationship a righteous person has with God and demonstrate the consciousness of belonging to the Lord by the Jewish populace in diaspora. The aim of this paper is to explore how the author, by describing the pivotal feature of the life of the righteous in Wis 2:13b, uses the Greek terminology of his time as a means to teach about the faith. Lexical-syntactical, historical-cultural, and theological analyses are used to interpret the concept of the divine sonship in the Book of Wisdom. The patrimony of the Old Testament is taken into consideration as well. The Book of Wisdom written by a Jewish author in Egyptian Alexandria between 30 BCE – 14 CE reflects biblical theological thought, yet Pseudo-Solomon uses the terminology relevant to a Hellenistic milieu where he lives. The author teaches a younger Jewish generation in diaspora about their own religious tradition. The Jewish youth born in diaspora was more interested in contemporary philosophical/cultural trends than in the tradition of the ancestors. To attract them, the religious mentors present the topic using the conceptual terminology of the time. The concept of the divine sonship articulates the idea of a privileged status of the Jews and at the same time a responsibility that this status requires. This privileged status is traced back to the Exodus story when Israel was chosen as God's people. As the book was written in diaspora, it also reflects the challenges the Jewish community was facing at that time. It was vital for the older generation to teach the younger generation about their ancestors and their beliefs. At the same time, the Hellenistic settings required Pseudo-Solomon to write in language that the audience spoke and to use the terminology that would yield meaning. The father-son image helps to identify the close relationship between the God and his people, mutual responsibility, and affection.

**Key words:** Book of Wisdom, Bible, righteous person, Hellenistic milieu, virtuous life, terminology.

## КОНЦЕПЦІЯ БОЖОГО СИНІВСТВА (παῖδα κυρίου): ЛІНГВІСТИЧНИЙ АНАЛІЗ МУД 2:13б

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У статті проаналізовано концепцію Божого синівства (*παῖδα κυρίου*) у Книзі Мудрості (2:13б). З'ясовано, що для окреслення особливих стосунків між вибраним народом та Богом біблійний автор використовує вираз «Господня дитина» і цим наголошується на привілейованому статусі адресатів книги. Продемонстровано, що книга Мудрості або *Sapientia Salomonis* написана єврейським автором в Олександрії єгипетській між 30 р. до н. е. і 14 р. н. е. і відтворює як біблійну богословську традицію, так й вплив елленістичного середовища на формування ідей біблійним автором. Адресатами цього твору є молоде покоління євреїв у діаспорі, яким автор бажає унаочнити необхідність та важливість дотримуватися давніх законів їх пращурів. Виразом «дитина Божа» автор описує привілейований статус євреїв і відповідальність, яку цей статус передбачає.

**Ключові слова:** Книга Мудрості, Біблія, праведник, елліністичне середовище, праведність, богословська термінологія.

**Introduction.** The Book of Wisdom or *Sapientia Salomonis* is a literary example of Jewish and Hellenistic encounter. The aim of the book is to present various theological concepts to the young Jewish generation in Alexandria, Egypt. It was written in Greek and the author uses conceptual terminology of the Hellenistic milieu to articulate his ideas. The author of the book also shows a good knowledge of Hellenistic philosophy (Glicksman 13). It is ascribed to Solomon, the third king of ancient Israel. However, his authorship is doubtful due to the late date of the book. Most scholars use the term “Pseudo-Solomon” to indicate the author. The *terminus post quem* of this book is the Roman conquest of Egypt by Augustus in 30 BCE. The linguistic features of the book point to this date. Firstly, the usage of the term κράτησις, “might, power” in Wis 6:3 as a technical word indicates the beginning of the Roman dominion in Alexandria. Secondly, the reference to the cult of the rulers who live far away in Wis 14:16-20, *i. e.* Roman rulers, also attests to the period after 30 BCE. Thirdly, the allusion to *pax romana* in Wis 14:22 suggests dating the book within the period of *pax Augustea* (Gilbert, *La critique* 164; Winston 21-22). Fourthly, the usage of the lexemes θρησκεία – “religion, worship” in Wis 14:18a, 27a and θρησκειύω – “to hold religious observances, observe religiously” in Wis 11:15b; 14:16b likewise points to this period as these two terms were introduced by Herodotus to describe Egyptian piety and in literature they were used to denote the religious practice of the worship of Augustus. Finally, the introduction of the noun σέβασμα in Wis 14:20b; 15:17b that indicates the object of worship allows also to date the book to the era of Augustus (Gilbert, *La critique* 130-131, 156-157; Scarpat 8). To sum up, majority of the scholars suggest to date the book to 30 BCE – 14 CE.

The goal of the Book of Wisdom, as Pardue states, is to show that the Jews have “a rich and noble history and may expect immortality, if they remain loyal and are righteous” (Pardue 323). In diaspora it was vital to find arguments for a younger generation to remain faithful to the Jewish tradition. This paper examines the meaning of the expression “a son/child of God” in the Book of Wisdom considering a wider biblical background and Greek terminology. We find this phrase in the public speech of the “ungodly” in Wis 2:1-20 who

condemn the lifestyle of the righteous and show animosity towards two essential, according to Pseudo-Solomon, characteristics of the righteous: “the possession of the knowledge of God” and the claim “to be a child of God” (Reese 394). As Bellia observes, the question of identity of the ungodly is a complicated one but this group may include both the Jews who left their religion, gentiles who worship other gods, members of different religious and philosophical groups – Sadduces, followers of Ecclesiastes, Epicureans (Weisengoff 40; Bellia 99-103). As to the identity of the righteous mostlikely they are the Jews who adhere to the Law and live according to the Jewish tradition. In fact, in this book the author juxtaposes two identities: the Jews versus the Others, God of Israel versus gods of Gentiles. The Jews are represented by the just person who undergoes oppression by those who have power. Nevertheless, the persecuted have hope for a brighter future: at the end they will acquire immortality by being faithful to the Law (Timmer 80). Their hope is rooted in the conviction that God as a father will come to help his people because they are his children. The past events when God intervened in the history serve as a proof.

**Aim of the study.** The goal of this paper is to explore how the author, by describing the pivotal feature of the life of the righteous in Wis 2:13b, uses the Greek terminology of his time as means to teach about the faith. The Jewish youth born in diaspora was more interested in contemporary philosophical/cultural trends than in the tradition of their ancestors. To attract them it was necessary for the religious mentors to present the topic using the conceptual terminology of the time. As Momigliano observes about the apologetic Jewish literature of that time: “A Hellenized Jew, willing or unwilling, in defending the spiritual patrimony of his people, had to accept the value of the civilization that he had lived in. As much as ‘paganism’ might have seemed to him to be immoral in religious practices and customs, the Greek culture could never be simply rejected, because, dialectically, it forced discussion and disproof” (Momigliano 64).

**Methodology and object of the study.** The Greek phrase *παῖδα κυρίου* – “a son/child of God” in the Book of Wisdom 2:13b is the object of the study. Lexical-syntactical, historical-cultural, and theological analyses will be used to interpret the concept of divine sonship in the Old Testament.

**Results and discussion.** The text of Wisdom 2:13b reads: “And calls himself a child of the Lord” – *παῖδα κυρίου ἑαυτὸν ὀνομάζει*. The word **ὀνομάζει** in the Book of Wisdom appears only twice – in Wis 2:13b and in Wis 14:8b. In its first instance the verb is used in the active form to express an action completed by the subject and focused on the subject, as the use of the reflexive pronoun shows *ἑαυτὸν* – the righteous calls himself. In the second passage, the verb is used in the passive form in order to underline an action completed by subjects with regard to the selected object – *τὸ δὲ φθαρτὸν θεὸς ὀνομάσθη* – “the corruptible thing was named a god”. Yet, in both cases a sarcastic attitude is expressed by the verb: in the first case, it is about the incapacity of the wicked to comprehend what the righteous declares about his relations with God; in the

second, the author in his polemics against idolatry evinces how the people consider something divine that in reality is corruptible. Concerning the occurrences of the lexeme in the *Septuagint* (an ancient translation of the Hebrew Bible made in Alexandria in III-II BCE) one may note that it is used to express actions such as – “to name”, “to call”, “to mention”, and to translate various Hebrew words. For example, the verb ὀνομάζω is used with its classical meaning “to name”, “to call” to translate קרא: “the Ammonites call them Zamzummims” in Deut 2:20; cf. 1 Chr 12:32; 2 Chr 31:19; Isa 62:2. In some passages reproduces זכר with a religious notion “to remember the name of the Lord” in Amos 6:10; to “appoint” קבן is third Hebrew term which in Greek is translated with ὀνομάζειν: “one will call you by a new name which the Lord will name” in Isa 62:2 (cf. also 1 Chr 12:32, 2 Chr 31:19). Remarkably in all these cases an agent and a recipient are different subjects (Hatch and Redpath 999-1000). The classical usage of the term is “to name, to call by a name” and provides an interaction between a subject and an object (LSJ 1232-1233; BAGD 573-574). In our case the subject and the object coincide, and this expresses, on the one hand, that the wicked do not comprehend the relations between the righteous and God, and, on the other hand, the righteous’ affirmation sounds like an absolute assertion. In fact, in Wis 2:16d the impious use another term that expresses their non-comprehension of righteous relations with God: “he boasts that God is his father – ἀλαζονεύεται πατέρα Θεόν”.

In classical Greek, the lexeme παῖς yields a polyvalent meaning. The dictionaries generally propose two semantic spheres for this word: it describes either relations among persons on the level of descent/age – “son”, “child”, or on the level of subordination/condition – “slave”, “servant” (LSJ 1289; BAGD 604-605). This ambiguity of the term is presented also in the *Septuagint* where it is used either to indicate “son/child/lad” – הַנְּעָר in Gen 21:12,17-20; בְּנֵי in Prov 4:1; 20:7, or “servant” – עֶבֶד in Gen 9:25; 24:34; Exod 20:10; Lev 25:44; Josh 9:9; 1 Sam 18:22; 2 Sam 8:7 (Hatch, and Redpath 1049-1051).

As to the meaning of this word in Wis 2:13b the majority of scholars suggest that context determines it and it belongs to the first semantic field – “son”, “child” (Jeremias, and Zimmerli 678; Osty 26; Winston 182; Sisti 121; Mazinghi 105; McGlynn 70). It is in Wis 2:16d where one reads how the righteous feels strongly “to have God as father” – πατέρα Θεόν; in Wis 2:18a where the impious express their will to prove if the righteous is υἱὸς Θεοῦ – “the son of God”; in Wis 5:5a where the wicked at the final judgment marvel at the fact that the just person is ἐν υἱοῖς Θεοῦ – “among the sons of God”. Further proof of this interpretation one may find in other passages of the Book of Wisdom where as in Wis 2 the terms παῖς and υἱός are used as synonyms to indicate divine sonship. The same alternation παῖς and υἱός appears respectively in Wis 9:4; 12:7,20 and in Wis 9:7; 12:19,21. Likewise, the author uses the same word in the family context when he speaks about relations among people as a designation of intrapersonal relations (cf. Wis 8:19; 12:25; 18:9,10). The ancient translations also bear witness to this meaning: so *Vulgata* renders *filius*, *Peshitta*

has  $\text{ὁ}$ . Therefore, on the basis of the textual evidence, it appears that the author by using the term  $\text{παῖς}$  wishes to intend the idea of the righteous person's sonship in relation to God, and for this reason uses the possessive genitive  $\text{κυρίου}$  – “of the Lord”.

### **Old Testament concept of divine sonship and fatherhood**

Before we analyze this phrase in the Book of Wisdom, it is important to demonstrate the biblical lexical patrimony on the divine sonship and divine fatherhood. The expression “son of God” has reference to the collective dimension to denote the sonship of Israel as people of God (Ringgren 16-19; Bergman, Ringgren, and Haag 153-157; McCarthy 144-147; Jeremias 17-19). Usually one finds such expressions in the stories connected to the Exodus in which God chooses Israel as his first-born son. For instance, in Exod 4:22-23 one reads: “And you shall say to Pharaoh: Thus says the Lord: Israel is my first-born son ( $\text{υἱὸς πρωτότοκος}$ ). I said to you: Send my people away that they may serve me, if you do not send them away now I will kill your son first-born”. In this affirmation the notion of the reciprocal relations between God and his people is placed in prominence. Indeed, if God protects Israel, this latter must in turn venerate him and fall in line with his plan. Remarkably such privilege requires from the people absolute fidelity to the Lord, the observance of his precepts and righteous conduct. Hence in Deut 14:1, before listing some precepts, the author to legitimate this conduct recalls the filial relations that bind Israel to God:  $\text{ΥΙΟΙ ἔστε Κυρίου τοῦ Θεοῦ ὑμῶν}$  – “You are sons of the Lord, your God” (cf. Mal 1:6; 2:10). Furthermore, the manner with which the Lord treats the people either in demonstrating his own mercy or in punishing is that of a parent about own sons. In Ps<sup>LXX</sup> 102:13 the supplicant prays: “As a father has compassion for his sons, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him” (cf. Deut 1:31; 8:5; Prov 3:12; Isa 66:13; Mal 3:17). This same people in difficult moments feel able to appeal to God as to their own father: “and now o Lord you are our father ( $\text{πατήρ ἡμῶν σὺ}$ ); we are the clay, all of us the work of your hands. Be not very angry with us, and do not remember our sins forever, but now look for we are all your people” (Isa 64:8-9; cf. Isa 63:16; Jer 3:4). It is necessary to note that the relation father-son is not limited only to the collective dimension, but is even rarely presented for individuals (cf. Ps<sup>LXX</sup> 88:27; Sir 23:1,4; 51:10; for the privileged relations of the king as a representative of the people see 2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 17:13; 28:6-7). On the other hand, people's infidelity “breaks” these privileged relations. In Deut 32:20 the Lord says: “I will turn away my face from them and will show what will happen to them in the last days, for it is a perverse generation, sons ( $\text{υἱοί}$ ) in whom there is no faith» (cf. Deut 32:4,19-20). The Israelites will be called “false sons” because of their neglect in observing the Law: “For the people are rebellious, false sons who would not hear the law of God ( $\text{υἱοὶ ψευδεῖς}$ )” in Isa 30:9. It is important to stress the connection between the knowledge of God and the status of sons of God for these both determine each other. In Isa 1:2-3 one reads: “Hear, o heaven, and listen, o earth: for the Lord has spoken, I have begotten the sons ( $\text{υἱοὺς ἐγέννησα}$ ) and brought them up, but they have rebelled

against me. The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel does not know me, and the people do not understand me". Hence, one may note in these texts how the status of the divine sonship finds its realization at the election of the people which can be manifested either in particular historical moments or in the continuous care that God demonstrates towards Israel. Even more, the consciousness of having God as father and of being his sons determines the life of the Israelites.

### **Wisdom of Solomon on divine sonship**

Returning to the Book of Wisdom, we should point out that there are three synonyms by which the author describes the divine sonship of Israel: υἱός in Wis 2:18; 5:5; 9:7; 12:19,21; 16:10,26; 18:4,13; παῖς in Wis 2:13; 9:4; 12:7,20; 19:6; τέκνα in Wis 16:21. It is also necessary to highlight that these terms in the first part of the book are explicitly referred to the Lord or God; in the second and third such an appeal is provided by the genitive of the second person singular. With exceptions in Wis 12:7; 18:13 where there are explicit appeals to God – Θεοῦ; in Wis 16:21 even though there is no specification, it is clear from the context that the author talks about the privileged relation with God which is demonstrated by the paternal attitude of God towards the Israelites. In Wis 2:13,(16),18 the term "son" is used to describe the righteous in a collective dimension: to indicate the Jews who remain faithful to the tradition of their fathers. This conclusion derives from linguistic and literal indications: alternation of singular and plural to designate pious persons (Wis 2:12-20; 3:10,13-15; 4:7-14; 5:1-5 and Wis 2:22; 3:1-9; 4:15; 5:15-16), in other words, applying synecdoche; the use of the term δίκαιος to designate the chosen people or pious persons in the history in the third part of the book (cf. Wis 10:6,20; 11:14; 12:19 in singular; 16:17; 18:20) (Adinolfi 206-210; Sisti 134-137). However, as Gilbert points out, because it is difficult to specify a historical context to which the text refers, one may assume that the author speaks about "a righteous *per excellence*" ("Il giusto" 53).

The constant recurrence of such terms underlines in a special way that Israel belongs to the Lord. There are also three passages where God's paternity towards the chosen people is recalled, namely in Wis 2:16; 11:10; 14:3. So now we have to take into consideration the contexts wherein these expressions are situated to understand their function. In the third part of the Book of Wisdom (chapters 10 – 19) Pseudo-Solomon frequently uses the phrase "son of God" to describe Israel. In Wis 18, in vv. 4,13, the author by summarizing the last two plagues – that of darkness (cf. Exod 10:21-23) and that of the death of the Egyptian first-borns (cf. Exod 11:4-6; 12:29-30), offers two important "definitions" with regard to the *status* of Israel as God's sons. We are dealing with the universal dimension of the divine sonship, which can be individualized as follows. First of all, in completing the tenth plague (by which some are saved and the others are punished) we find the recognition of the Egyptians that this people are the sons of God: "at the destruction of the first-born they acknowledged (πρωτοτόκων) that the people was God's son (Θεοῦ υἱὸν)" (Wis

18:13b; cf. Wis 18:8). Even though in the Book of Exodus there is no such confession by the Egyptians, there are nevertheless other indications that allow us to suppose such an affirmation: the announcement about the death of the first-borns in Exod 4:22-23 and the decision to send the Hebrews away in Exod 12:29-33. As Vílchez notes, “not with the words, but by the facts Egyptians acknowledge that this people is the son of God” (Vílchez Líndez 518). Further, the role of Israel as a son of God who has a mandate to give the Law to the world is stressed in the presentation of the light-darkness pair: “For those deserved to be deprived of light and imprisoned by darkness, who had kept your sons (τοὺς υἱούς σου) restricted through whom the imperishable light of the law (τὸ ἄφθαρτον νόμου φῶς) was to be given to the world” (Wis 18:4). The Law intended in a wider sense as divine revelation and not only the list of norms subordination to which determines the role of the people of Israel (Mazzinghi 222-223).

Regarding Wis 12 and Wis 16 one may note another dimension of this statement. In these chapters the expression bears a family-paideutic character, which is determined by the paternal relations between the Lord and “his son”. In fact, in Wis 16 Pseudo-Solomon, while considering the destiny of the Egyptians and of the Israelites recalls the benefits given by the Lord to the people of Israel during their dwelling in the wilderness. He interprets them as a manifestation of the special attitude towards “his son”. So, recalling the story about the serpent of bronze the author writes: “but not even the teeth of poisonous serpents overcame your sons (υἱούς σου), for your mercy passed by and healed them” (Wis 16:10). The same idea is presented in Wis 16:21 with regard to the manna sent as food in the desert. The author, in fact, addresses the Lord saying: “So your sustenance manifested your sweetness toward your children (τέκνα); and the bread, serving to the desire of the one who took it, was transformed into what one wished”. In all these events Pseudo-Solomon finds occasions to teach the people for they are sons of God: “so that your sons (οἱ υἱοί σου), whom you love, o Lord, might learn that it is not the various kinds of fruits that nourish man, but it is your word” (Wis 16:26). The richness of the language that the author uses should be noted when he describes the tender paternal attitude of God towards the Israelites. In Wis 12 we find ourselves again in the didactic context: the mercy of God to sinners must be an occasion for the people to learn how to act every day. As the first step they are invited to follow the Lord when he demonstrates his benevolence towards sinners: “through these deeds you taught your people that the righteous must be kind” (Wis 12:19ab; cf. 12:20,22b). The use of the term φιλόανθρωπον (philanthropic) to refer to the righteous person underlines the importance of the imitation of God’s mercy and moderation towards sinners (Gilbert “Inclurazione”, 20-21). As the second step, Israel, even being sinful, has to learn to put trust in the mercy of the Lord: “you gave your sons (τοὺς υἱούς σου) good ground for hope that you allow repentance for sins” (Wis 12:19bc; cf. 12:18,21,22c). The punishment is understood as one made by the father: “the latter you tested, admonishing them

as a father” Wis 11:10a. Therefore, the author, recalling the relations between the Lord and Israel as a father and a son, shows God’s salvific role in the history of the people. The memory about the past must determine Israel’s conduct in their daily life.

In the second part of *Sapientia Salomonis* (chapters 7–9) the expression about the divine sonship is applied to the king as one of “God’s sons”: “give me the wisdom that sits at your throne, and do not reject me from among your children (ἐκ παίδων σου)”. The idea is to show that the ruler is included among God’s sons (Wis 9:4) and at the same time he is the one who has the mandate to rule and judge “sons of God” in Wis 9:7. Therefore, it seems that the author does not intend to underline a particular relationship between God and a king, just to qualify him as member of the community of the sons.

### **Theological meaning of divine sonship in Wis 2:13b**

Now we arrive at the affirmation that regards the divine sonship of the righteous (Wis 2:13b) to find its meaning. In the first speech of the impious – Wis 2:1b-20 – we find the threefold recalling of the filial relation between the just person and God. It should be noted how the similar declarations in each occurrence are paired with different statements: thus v. 13b to the knowledge of God in v. 13a; v. 16d to the last things of the righteous of v. 16c; v. 18a<sup>a</sup> to the help of God for his believers in v. 18a<sup>b</sup>. Such a structure helps to grasp the theological meaning of these expressions. In the first passage – v.13b – it is clear that the affirmation has an absolute meaning as does the preceding stich (v. 13a): it is about the presentation of the sonship *status* in general which, on the one hand, is based on the knowledge of God that the righteous person possesses; on the other hand, it is found in an interchanging position to v. 13a (cf. Wis 15:1-3; Isa 1:2-3; Jer 4:22). That is, the knowledge of God guarantees the status of the Lord’s son and vice versa: the divine sonship presupposes the possession of the knowledge of God. In the second occurrence in v. 16d, as Larcher notes, the reference to the divine fatherhood can be collocated to the paideutic dimension of the relations. In particular because of its link with v. 16c where “the blessed end of the righteous” is mentioned (250). Pseudo-Solomon, in fact, is aware of the sufferings that the just undergoes and interprets these afflictions as a challenge from the Lord. Indicating, however, that they will be blessed in the eschatological perspective – after their death. “Chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed, because God tested them and found them worthy of him” (Wis 3:5; cf. 3:7-9,13-14; 4:10,14-15; 5:5). In the third occurrence of sonship – v. 18 – the author emphasizes the salvific role of God for the just, the role that the impious did not comprehend. In this section the adversaries state sarcastically their conviction that God intervenes to defend and protect his own sons. The affirmation itself is correct; however, applied in the immediate context it shows the erroneous position of the wicked, who neglect such a protection after death. Therefore, the author in applying terminology of divine sonship/fatherhood expresses the consciousness of belonging to the Lord, the



knowledge how to follow God's teaching and to trust in God's protection no matter how difficult it could be.

**Conclusion.** The concept of divine sonship  $\pi\alpha\tilde{\iota}\delta\alpha$   $\kappa\upsilon\rho\iota\upsilon\omicron\upsilon$  in the Book of Wisdom serves as an illustrative tool for the author to describe the status of the Jews. This privileged status is traced back to the Exodus story when Israel was chosen as God's people. The book was written in diaspora and reflects the challenges the Jewish community was facing at that time. It was vital for the older generation to teach the younger generation about their ancestors and their beliefs. At the same time the Hellenistic settings required Pseudo-Solomon to write in language that the audience spoke and to use the terminology that would yield meaning. The father-son image helps to demonstrate the close relationship between the God and his people, mutual responsibility and affection.

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