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CHAPTER I  
THE ENIGMA OF LADY WISDOM

Beyond the desert of criticism, we wish to be called again.

Paul Ricoeur

**Introduction**

Lady Wisdom (or Woman Wisdom) in Proverbs 1-9 is regarded as “the most extensive personification in the entire Bible.”<sup>1</sup> In terms of treatment (number of verses devoted to it), it is rivaled only by the personification of another female figure, Daughter Zion in Second Isaiah.<sup>2</sup> Although the Hebrew Scriptures give us a diverse picture of women in various roles, socio-economic status, and influence throughout the long history of Israel,<sup>3</sup> Lady Wisdom can be considered as “something of an anomaly in Israelite theology.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Roland E. Murphy, “Can the Book of Proverbs Be a Player in ‘Biblical Theology?’” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 31/1 (Spring 2001): 5.

<sup>2</sup> This is the extended use of the "Daughter of Zion" or an unnamed female figure throughout Second Isaiah but concentrated in chapters 49-66 to stand for Zion=Jerusalem=Israel. "In a series of dramatic poems, . . . the story of a woman's life [runs] from bereavement and barrenness in Isa 49 to the birth of a son in Isa 66." John F. A. Sawyer, "Daughter of Zion and Servant of the Lord in Isaiah: A Comparison," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 44 (1989): 89-107 (henceforth cited as *JSOT*).

<sup>3</sup> “In some texts the woman of Israel is portrayed as a class of property. In others she is depicted as possessing a measure of freedom, initiative, power, and respect . . .” (Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997], 14.) See also Carol Meyers’ discussion on the complexity of evaluating patriarchy from biblical texts in *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 24-46.

<sup>4</sup> Carole R. Fontaine, “Proverbs,” *Harper’s Bible Commentary*, ed. James L. Mays (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 501.

Truly an impressive figure, Lady Wisdom dominates the first nine chapters of the Book of Proverbs. She is pictured as a wisdom teacher and preacher calling out to anyone who would hear her and her promise of life (Prov 1:20-33; 8:1-12). Whether on the streets, in public places, or at the city gates, she entices people to follow her way. She is also an impressive homemaker, opening her home to those who are drawn by her message (Prov 9:1-6). Here she is contrasted with a foolish woman who also invites passers-by into her house, but with dire results (9:13-18). She is a lover, drawing men away from adulterous woman (Prov 2:12-22; 3:13-18; 4:5-9; 7:4-5). In Proverbs 8:22-31, she is present with God during creation, mediating between him and his creation. Yee describes her thus:

She was present when God created the world and is the sanctioned mediator between the divine and human (Prov 3:19-20; 8:22-31). By her, kings rule and sovereigns govern justly (8:15-16). Her counsel is better than silver or gold (3:14-16; 8:10). Fathers enjoin their young sons to pursue Wisdom as a lover pursues his beloved, and to cling to her once they have found her (4:5-9, 13; 7:4 . . . ). She becomes the tree of life for those who embrace her (Prov. 3:18).<sup>5</sup>

The achievement of the wisdom writers and editors of the book of Proverbs who left us the striking figure of Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9 is undoubtedly remarkable. Her ability to capture the imagination of subsequent generations is reflected in the way later biblical writers drew from and even extended her original meaning in Proverbs. Baruch and Ben Sirach equate wisdom with the Torah (Bar 4:1; Sir 24:23). Wisdom of Solomon sees wisdom as a spirit (Wis 1:6; 7:7) and even as "the emanation of the divine glory" (Wis 7:25-26).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Gale A. Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 135.

<sup>6</sup> Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs*, Word Biblical Commentary vol. 22 (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1998), 278.

Commentators on the Gospels of Matthew and John do not hesitate to picture Jesus as a sage whose teachings contain wisdom influences.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Christ's role as pre-existent partner in creation (John 1:1-4; Col 1:15-18) is regarded as influenced by Proverbs 8. The personification of wisdom therefore has been significant for the whole wisdom movement in Israel and for helping shape and develop subsequent theological language and reflection in Judaism and Christianity, particularly Christological thought.<sup>8</sup>

### Review of Relevant Literature

Initial scholarly interest focused on explaining the genesis of Lady Wisdom. The questions asked were: Who is she? How did the idea for the figure originate among the sages? And perhaps more importantly, what is her function? Lady Wisdom has been identified as: (1) a goddess; (2) a hypostasis; (3) an Israelite woman; and (4) a literary device that trivializes the feminineness of the figure.<sup>9</sup>

Owing to significant verbal affinities of ancient Near Eastern texts with the way Lady Wisdom is depicted in Proverbs, several scholars saw in her the influence of ANE goddesses, e.g. the Canaanite wisdom goddess (Bernhard Lang), the Egyptian goddess Maat and the Canaanite Astarte/Asherah (Christa Kayatz), and the Hellenistic Isis (Michael Fox).<sup>10</sup> The Proverbs texts then were written as polemic against these goddesses. Hadley sees her as a

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<sup>7</sup> Celia M. Deutsch, *Lady Wisdom, Jesus, and the Sages: Metaphor and Social Context in Matthew's Gospel* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1996); Ben Witherington III, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> R. B. Y. Scott, "Wisdom in Creation: The 'Amon of Proverbs VIII 30," *Vetus Testamentum* 10 (1960): 213.

<sup>9</sup> Fontaine, "Proverbs," 501-3.

<sup>10</sup> Michael V. Fox, "Ideas of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116/4 (1997): 624.

“literary compensation for the eradication of the worship of these goddesses.”<sup>11</sup> Fontaine viewed her as meeting the “psychological need [of Israel] for female imagery of the divine without serious compromise of patriarchal monotheism.”<sup>12</sup>

Others (Schenke, Ringgren, Whybray, Pfeifer) see her as a hypostasis of God's wisdom.<sup>13</sup> Hypostasis is the “quasi-personification of certain attributes proper to God, occupying an intermediate position between personalities and abstract beings.”<sup>14</sup> Some examples are “The Spirit of the Lord” (Psa 43:10; Zech 4:6), “The Name” (Lev 24:11, 16; 1 Kgs 9:3), and “Shekinah” in later Jewish writings.<sup>15</sup> A hypostasis is an extension of an attribute of God that takes on a life of its own. As such, Proverbs 8 would show an early hypostatizing tendency which is later developed in Wisdom of Solomon.

Beginning in the 1970s, feminist Biblical scholarship began to see in Lady Wisdom a reflection of women's status in Israel. Claudia Camp's landmark study *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* treats her as both a literary construct as well as a barometer of social reality. As a literary construct, the figure functions to unify the diverse wisdom material in the whole Proverbs collection and in so doing, re-contextualize the individual proverbs into an intelligible framework.<sup>16</sup> As a social indicator, she reflects Israel's post-

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<sup>11</sup> Judith M. Hadley, “Wisdom and the Goddess,” in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton*, ed. John Day, Robert P. Gordon and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 235-36.

<sup>12</sup> Fontaine, “Proverbs,” 502.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, “Jesus, the Wisdom of God: A Biblical Basis for Non-Androcentric Christology,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 61 (1985): 272-73.

<sup>15</sup> John Milbank, “History of the One God,” *Heythrop Journal* 38/4 (Oct 1997): 376.

<sup>16</sup> Claudia V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, Bible and Literature Series no. 11 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985), 186-208.

exilic cultural situation, a time when the vacuum of the monarchy and the imperatives of rebuilding the community in Judah led to a more visible role and status for women. Camp even sees her as a surrogate for kingship in the postexilic period.<sup>17</sup> In the words of Anthony Ceresko, Camp sees Lady Wisdom as

a symbolic legitimation for the enhanced status of women in the postexilic period. With the end of the monarchy, the home emerged as a central focus for the identity and life of the Jewish community. Women's central role in the creation and maintenance of that home became a metaphor for God's role as Divine Parent creating and maintaining the dwelling place of the human community—the inhabited world.<sup>18</sup>

Camp examined the literary roles of women in the Hebrew Bible and the social roles of real women such as wife and mother, lover, harlot and adulteress, the wise woman, and authenticator of written tradition. She looked into the imagery, attitudes, and values associated with women in Israel and how they connect with the imagery, actions, and aims of personified wisdom. Camp, while admitting some influence of goddesses, saw the imagery of Prov 1-9 as an abstraction from the social roles of Israelite women and the biblical accounts about them.<sup>19</sup> Although Camp does sound fair warning about equating social reality with literary characterization, at one point saying "one cannot make the error of equating 'women's roles' with 'female images,'"<sup>20</sup> still she weighs down in favor of the human over the divine or mythological aspects of Lady Wisdom.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 256-82.

<sup>18</sup> Anthony R. Ceresko, O.S.F.S., *Introduction to Old Testament Wisdom: A Spirituality for Liberation* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2000), 59.

<sup>19</sup> Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, 285.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>21</sup> For example, Camp explains Prov 8 on the human level and refutes those who see something more happening here, such as the beginnings of hypostatic though (Ibid., 34-36).



Camp goes on to relate Lady Wisdom to metaphor, personification, and symbol as well as to draw links from, on one hand, what is said about personified wisdom in Prov 1-9 to, on the other hand, individual proverbs in the collection of Prov 10-31. However, in her discussion of Lady Wisdom, she begins with female roles and then compares them with the portrayal of personified wisdom in Prov 1-9 instead of the other way around. She also relies on a broad reading and does not do a close reading nor look into specific texts, metaphors or images. Her study is more sociological than exegetical, and perhaps reveals more about women's status and roles in Israel than about the figure of personified wisdom itself.<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, Gale A. Yee's sociological reading situates Proverbs 1-9 in the socio-economic realities of post-exilic Judah, a period which gave rise to a social class known as the *golah*. *Golah* refers to Jews taken into exile (Ezra 10:8).<sup>23</sup> Descendants of Judah's nobility, priestly families and wealthy land-owners forcibly taken into Babylon, they have since returned to Judah as immigrants.<sup>24</sup> The description of the two symbolic women in Prov 1-9, namely Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly, reflect the tensions between the *golah* and the non-*golah* within the community.

Lady Wisdom, whose description is that of an upper-class woman, embodies the *golah* woman, the "correct" or "acceptable" woman to marry. She is a "financially sought-

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<sup>22</sup> Camp acknowledges:

"It is not my intention to establish lines of literary dependence from other female figures to personified wisdom. . . . I propose instead to use the biblical literature as a source both for the roles of and socially explicit attitudes toward women and, more importantly, for the underlying meanings and values associated with women in Israel that exhibit some connection with the imagery, actions and aims attributed to personified Wisdom in Prov 1-9" (Ibid., 75).

<sup>23</sup> Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 223, 140-41.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 223.

after *insider* woman as contrasted with a financially attractive *outsider* woman,"<sup>25</sup> *insider* referring to one of the *golah* families and *outsider* to the local population not deported to Babylon.<sup>26</sup> Yee though does not seek to theorize the process by which such an *insider* woman transposes to the personification of Lady Wisdom.

Feminist readings of Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly<sup>27</sup> have succeeded in shedding light on the mostly invisible life of women in biblical times, yet there is a danger in interpreting as literal what is essentially metaphorical language. Ceresko warns us that it may unwittingly reinforce restrictive images for women.

We must be careful, however, not to appropriate uncritically this personification of wisdom as a woman. The Strange Woman of the Prologue (see 2:16-19; 5:1-6; 7:6-27; 9:13-18), who represents folly and deadly error, serves as a contrast figure to highlight the Wisdom Woman's virtues and qualities by her wickedness. The two images are obviously stereotypes, male projections of opposing aspects of the human condition onto female figures. The Wisdom Woman represents all that is good, desirable, and profitable to men. The Strange Woman embodies everything that is harmful to men. The danger lies in allowing these images, invented by men, to perpetuate the inhuman stereotypes of women as Madonna or whore. The one represents a source of the good, and the other a source of the evil of which men are beneficiaries or victims.<sup>28</sup>

Others downplay the feminine aspect or de-gender the figure of Lady Wisdom, explaining it merely as a feature of languages such as Hebrew which marks nouns with grammatical gender. Views that simply ignore the feminine aspect can be included in this category. Gerhard von Rad viewed personified wisdom as the order within creation itself,

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 140-41.

<sup>27</sup> Note the turn of scholarly interest on Lady Folly and the strange woman: Claudia V. Camp, *Wise, Strange and Holy: The Strange Woman and the Making of the Bible*, JSOT Supplement Series no. 302 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Gail Corrington Streete, *The Strange Woman: Power and Sex in the Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997); and Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, passim.

<sup>28</sup> Ceresko, *Introduction to Old Testament Wisdom*, 59.

“an order in things and in events” which God has placed in the cosmos and “makes itself known” and which humans are to seek out.<sup>29</sup>

Fox sees the personification of Lady Wisdom as a "rhetorical strategy"<sup>30</sup> to make wisdom teaching attractive to the male students of the wisdom schools. Similar to the persona of the "father" in Proverbs 1-9, the "pedagogical rhetoric aims at guiding desire: fostering the right ones, suppressing the wrong."<sup>31</sup> The wisdom that can withstand various seductions and temptations is not primarily intellectual fortitude, but purity of heart: ". . . the greatest challenge for moral character comes down to desiring the right things, and how can [one] teach desire?"<sup>32</sup> The persona of Lady Wisdom performs that function.

There are those, however, who look beyond the human level in Lady Wisdom. For Kathleen O'Connor, Lady Wisdom transcends narrow female stereotypes. “More than a typical potential marriage partner, she becomes a developed character in her own right, *hokmah, sophia*, inviting everyone into full human existence. She is the bridge between God and humans, and between humans and the created world.”<sup>33</sup> Roland E. Murphy and Samuel A. Terrien see her as a surrogate for Yahweh himself, representing the divine presence in the world, making the same offer of life and death that the Lord gave through Moses in Deut 30:15.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1972), 170-76.

<sup>30</sup> Fox, “Ideas of Wisdom,” 630.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 621.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 620.

<sup>33</sup> Kathleen M. O'Connor, *The Wisdom Literature* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1988), 63.

<sup>34</sup> Murphy, *Proverbs*, 280; Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 352, 355.

The search for the origin, identity and function of Lady Wisdom has indeed led scholars on many diverse paths.

### **Revisiting the Metaphor**

Joe Mulrooney in his article “Lady Wisdom: The Power and Attraction of a Biblical Metaphor”<sup>35</sup> offers a different tack. He proposes that perhaps a more fruitful study would be to examine the use of the figure of Lady Wisdom as a metaphor.

More important than pursuing such questions of origins is to take seriously the fact that, in the literary contexts where we find this figure, we are dealing with a great poetic metaphor, which is powerful and attractive. . . .

Before asking about what she says in detail we ought to stop and reflect on the place of metaphor in language and particularly on that form of metaphor which we call personification. A metaphor is not simply a visual aid. . . . [T]ake away the metaphor and we lose the force, the power and attraction of the vision that is being offered.<sup>36</sup>

Leo G. Perdue describes the task of biblical theology as explaining the way biblical writers utilized metaphors to talk about Israel's faith.

Old Testament theology must begin with the metaphors which are present in narrative and poetic texts. The theologian should not be content to describe elements of faith, but must explain how narrative and poetry actualize faith and understanding . . . . The task is not simply confessional recital but rather explanation of process. . . . Conceived in this fashion, a system is not imposed on the text, but rather grows out of the paradigmatic features inherent in the ancient traditions.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Joe Mulrooney, “Lady Wisdom: The Power and Attraction of a Biblical Metaphor,” *The Month* (Sept/Oct 1992): 341-45.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 343-44.

<sup>37</sup> Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt: Metaphorical Theology in the Book of Job*, JSOT Supplement Series no. 112 (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1991), 28.

### Statement of the Problem

How does the figure of Lady Wisdom function as a metaphor? How did it function for Israel to maintain continuity with tradition while at the same time, re-interpreting that tradition to create new ways of thinking, speaking and acting for Israel? What in the metaphor is dynamic and liberating that it has inspired tradition and been appropriated in different ways?

More importantly, how does the figure of Lady Wisdom function for us today? How can it be utilized to shed light on conventional ways of thinking about God and human gender in order to recast them in more liberating ways? In looking at the “life” of a metaphor, appreciating the process by which it transforms and accumulates meaning, this study aims to explore ways we can appropriate the metaphor today in the twenty-first century.

### Significance of the Problem

We are deaf to hearing the Scriptures today. The Word has lost its power to surprise and grip us. For Paul Ricoeur, "the root of the problem lies in a general loss of sensitivity to symbolic language in modern Western civilization."<sup>38</sup> We are deaf to hearing the Scriptures as metaphorical language. When we literalize metaphorical language, Sallie McFague warns, this leads either to idolatry or irrelevance—idolatry because it leads us to "absolutize one tradition of images for God" and irrelevance because "the experiences of many people will not be included within the canonized tradition."<sup>39</sup> The persistence by many in the Christian tradition of reading the Scriptures in a literalist, fundamentalist fashion is a direct result of a

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<sup>38</sup> Lewis S. Mudge, "Paul Ricoeur on Biblical Interpretation," in Paul Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 4.

<sup>39</sup> Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 3.

failure to appreciate the nature of religious language and “respect the variety of forms in which God has packaged revelation.”<sup>40</sup> This results in our inability to hear the Scriptures in its own voice.

Language is a social product, embodying the conventions and ideologies agreed upon and adopted by the community using a particular language. At the same time, language constructs meaning, shaping and maintaining the consciousness of the users of that language. Rightly or wrongly, it is a tool for ideology.

The role played by language in shaping social consciousness vis-à-vis the persistence of patriarchalism in contemporary society is one area where application can be made of such a study. Language is both a product as well as a means of shaping the social consciousness to perpetuate as well as to liberate from patriarchy.

Murphy affirms this imperative in the study of Lady Wisdom when he wrote:

. . . The use of a female metaphor, Woman Wisdom, in such close association with YHWH . . . still calls for exploration—despite all the efforts that have been made. I am unwilling to accept the idea that this figure is irremediably patriarchal in its use and therefore theologically irrelevant as far as women are concerned. . . . Moreover, the image of Woman Wisdom is not to be reduced to being an object of sexual pursuit.<sup>41</sup>

Pointing out the need to “set some criteria for the symbolism of Woman Wisdom and Woman Folly,”<sup>42</sup> Murphy likened it to the task of “redeeming” other metaphors in the Bible, such as the figure of God the Warrior or the biblical language of divine revenge and violence. He described these as “limitations” of biblical language which many today find oppressive

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<sup>40</sup> By this, Craig C. Broyles (“Interpreting the Old Testament: Principles and Steps,” in *Interpreting the Old Testament: A Guide for Exegesis*, ed. Craig C. Broyles [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001], 14) refers to the literary genres and stylistic devices that the biblical authors used that make a “simplistic, prophetic model of inspiration . . . not work for the whole Old Testament.”

<sup>41</sup> Murphy, *Proverbs*, 286.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

and lacking compassion and thus require creative engagement and re-working.<sup>43</sup>

This is the area this thesis seeks to explore. “The goal is not merely exegetical-critical but properly hermeneutical.”<sup>44</sup> The study aims not simply to discover what the text says about personified wisdom for Israel in order to “apply” the results to current concerns but to discover the truth claims in the text as they are addressed to the people of God and to communicate it in the language, concepts, and images of today.<sup>45</sup>

### **Methodology**

This study aims to draw out the significance of the metaphors of personified wisdom for both a reading for the *sitz-im-leben* of Israel as well as the contemporary situation. The approach adopted is Ricoeurian metaphorical hermeneutics, which is discussed extensively in chapter two. The exposition of the metaphors of personified wisdom in chapter three is undertaken through a historical and literary study of the pertinent texts.

In chapter four, focus shifts to an analysis of the theological concepts and processes generated by the metaphors that proved transformative for the worldview of Israel. Then using gender as an analytic category, inherent contradictions and oppositions are identified that can render the metaphors and texts potentially liberating for contemporary women, ending with a post-critical appropriation of the metaphors.<sup>46</sup> The summary of findings and recommendations are given in chapter five.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 2<sup>d</sup> ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1999), 180.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Schneiders models this in her exegesis of John 4. (Ibid., 180-99.)

### Scope and Limitations of the Study

In its theoretical framework for metaphors, this study limits itself to Ricoeur's metaphorical theory. For the historical reading, diachronic and synchronic methods are used. For the contemporary reading, feminist hermeneutic is utilized. The study of the personification of Wisdom shall be limited to the book of Proverbs; portrayals of personified Wisdom in later writings will be identified but not included in the scope of study.

### Definition of Key Terms

*Metaphor.* A mode of symbolic language that connects the semantic field of two words, two ideas, and their contexts and connotations in such a way as to create new meaning. Metaphor is "that figure of speech whereby we speak about one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another."<sup>47</sup>

*Personification.* "[A] literary device whereby we treat as a person that which is recognized to be not a person."<sup>48</sup> It is the "representation of a thing or abstraction as a personality or as endowed with personal attributes."<sup>49</sup> Examples are the serpent and Balaam's ass speaking (Gen 3; Num 22), the heavens rejoicing and trees singing for joy (Psa 96:11-12); and the floods clapping their hands (Psa 98:8).<sup>50</sup>

*Historical Criticism.* A diachronic approach that aims to access the meaning of biblical texts by investigating the historical background and sources and influences behind

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<sup>47</sup> Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985/1987), 15.

<sup>48</sup> G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 80.

<sup>49</sup> *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged* (1976 ed.), s. v. "personification," 1687.

<sup>50</sup> J. C. L. Gibson, *Language and Imagery in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 16.



them. It understands that the texts have undergone different stages of writing and editing to address succeeding generations of the faith community.<sup>51</sup>

*Literary Criticism.* A synchronic approach to studying biblical texts that focuses on the text's artful use of language such as word repetitions, poetic parallelism, play of words, imagery, genre and compositional structure to convey its meaning. While aware that texts have a history, "its object is not the formation of the text with its various levels through time, but an appreciation of the text as it stands, at one time,"<sup>52</sup> with a view to understanding "how the text 'works,' that is, how it engages the reader in the production of meaning."<sup>53</sup>

*Feminist Biblical Interpretation.* An approach to Scripture belonging to ideology criticism that aims to "[raise] to visibility the hidden feminine element in biblical texts" in order to show the transforming potential of the text for gender relationships.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission of the Catholic Church, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," accessed June 30, 2007, available at [http://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC\\_Interp.htm](http://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC_Interp.htm); Internet.

<sup>52</sup> Roland E. Murphy, "Introduction to the Pentateuch," in *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (New Jersey, Prentice-Hall: 1990/1968), 6.

<sup>53</sup> Schneiders, *Revelatory Text*, 125.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 180-86.