

**KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AS AN ESSENTIAL  
CHARACTERISTIC OF THE VIRTUOUS LIFE**

*This article discusses and analyzes the concept of the knowledge of God ( ὁ θεός ) in the Book of Wisdom, chapter 2, verse 13 from the sociolinguistic and literary perspectives. The biblical author uses the phrase “knowledge of God” to express the religious belief of a righteous person. This expression yields also a behavioral meaning as a fundamental characteristic of the virtuous life of the just person. The Book of Wisdom or Sapientia Salomonis, written by a Jewish author in Egyptian Alexandria between 30 BC – 14 AD, reflects both biblical theological thought as well as a Hellenistic worldview. The author of the book teaches a younger Jewish generation in Alexandria about their own tradition by using the intellectual achievements of the Hellenistic culture. Using the expression ὁ θεός the biblical author, even if he refers to the ethical-practical dimension of the same philosophical discourse yet bases his speech on faith and not on gnoseology.*

**Keywords:** Book of Wisdom, Bible, knowledge of God, ignorance of God, righteous person, Hellenistic worldview, virtuous life

**Articulation of the issue.** In the Book of Wisdom, titled also as *Sapientia Salomonis*, the author teaches his readers about the virtuous and wicked life. In particular, he claims that the fundamental characteristics of the righteous person are “the knowledge of God” and a unique relation with God – “God’s sonship” (Wis 2:13). This paper will discuss the meaning of the expression “knowledge of God” in its historical context. The phrase is placed in the speech of the group called by the author as “wicked/ungodly people” (Wis 2:1-20) who condemn the lifestyle of the just person and show animosity towards two essential, according to the biblical author, characteristics of the righteous: “the possession of the knowledge of God” and his claim “to be a child of God” (Wis 2:13). This verse belongs to the first speech of the wicked in Wis 1:16-2:24 where they criticize and deride the just person [27, p. 394]. To study a passage from the Book of Wisdom also means to examine its contemporary context, namely Hellenistic Egypt at the end of the first millennium BC and the beginning of the first millennium AD. A majority of scholars agree that the *terminus post quem* of the book is the Roman conquest of Egypt by Augustus in 30 BC. The usage of the term δύς , “might, power” in Wis 6:3 – a technical word to indicate the beginning of the Roman dominion in Alexandria – also suggests this date. 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 BC as well as the allusion to *pax romana* in Wis 14:22 suggests dating the book within the period of *pax Augustea* [14, . 164; 33, . 21-22;]. Moreover, the resumption of the lexemes ἰσχύς , “religion, worship” in Wis 14:18a, 27a and ἰσχυρῶς , “to hold religious observances, observe religiously” in Wis 11:15b; 14:16b indicate religious practice. These terms were introduced by Herodotus to describe Egyptian piety and their usage was taken up in literature to denote the religious practice of the worship of Augustus. The introduction of the noun ἰσχυρία that indicates the object of worship in Wis 14:20b; 15,17b is datable to the era of Augustus, allowing also to date the year of 30 BC as *terminus post quem* of the composition [14, . 130-131, 156-157; 30, . 8]. As to the *terminus ad quem* the end of the Augustean empire is proposed. So most of the scholars date the book to 30 BC – 14 AD.

Therefore, **this paper aims** at the sociolinguistic and literary analysis of the expression “to possess the knowledge of God” in the Book of Wisdom 2:13a in its religious and cultural contexts. Even though the author in his thought is very much indebted to biblical teaching, the Hellenistic worldview is embedded in his writings as well. The **objective of this work** is to explore how the author, by describing the pivotal features of the life of the righteous in Wis 2:13, uses the philosophical thought of the time as means to teach about the faith to the younger generation of the Jewish diaspora in Alexandria. The Jewish youth born in

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diaspora were more interested in current philosophical trends than in the tradition of their ancestors. In order to attract them it was necessary for the religious leaders in the diaspora to show the connection between the philosophical thought and the biblical writings. 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” [23, p. 64].

**Analysis.** So what was the conceptual context of the Book of Wisdom? First century BC Alexandria is distinguished by a significant development of its intellectual life; in fact, the philosophical schools take on particular importance in the city of the Ptolemies [13, . 484]. On the one hand, this phenomenon was possible because of the favorable attitude of the Egyptian rulers to cultural activities and, on the other hand, due to the Mithridatic Wars many philosophers being forced to escape from Athens found their refuge either in Alexandria or in Rome. As to the philosophical trends of this era, scholars point out skepticism as prevailing thought, as well as eclecticism. Another feature that characterizes the thought of the time is the discussion between skeptics and stoics about the possibility of achieving knowledge, and if for the former this possibility is seen as something absolutely impossible to achieve, for the latter it is placed at the basis of virtuous life [13, . 485-486]. This is the intellectual situation of Alexandria when the author of *Sapientia Salomonis* launches his religious message to young Jews.

Now it is important to study whether a public statement about the possession of the knowledge of God (  $\tilde{\omega}$   $\tilde{\omega}$  ) in Wis 2:13 reflects any philosophical influence not only on the linguistic level but also on the conceptual one. Two articles by R. Bultmann [6; 7] and the monograph by J. Dupont [11] will guide us in this endeavour wherein both authors examine the group of lexemes that belong to the same semantic field of knowledge in philosophical and religious literature. To begin with, Bultmann notes that the use of the terminology related to the knowledge of the divine is rare in the classical period. Moreover, he states that it is the debate with the sceptics and epicureans about the existence of the gods that led to the development of such terminology [6, pp. 120-121]. However, it is necessary to take into account also those passages of the classical philosophers in which both the existence of the gods and the ability of humans to reach the knowledge of the divine are discussed. Plato in *Timaeus* states: “now as for the maker and father of the universe, to find him out is hard, and to speak of him, when one has found him, before all mankind impossible” [24, *Tim.* 28c]. In *Theaetetus* the philosopher highlights another aspect about the knowledge of the divine, namely the importance for the wise man to understand the nature of the divinity and to try to imitate it during his life as far as possible [25, *Theaet.* 176c; 6, p. 116]. Even Epicurus wonders about the existence of the gods by criticizing harshly what is commonly understood about the divinity: “For gods there are, since the knowledge of them is by clear vision. But they are not such as the many believe them to be: for indeed they do not consistently represent them as they believe them to be” [12, *Ep. ad Men.* 123-124]. In his *De Natura Deorum* Cicero, referring to the epicurean concept of the prolepsis, says that a human being possesses a natural faculty of reaching the knowledge of gods once their existence is recognized [9, *Nat. Deor.* I, 44; 26, p. 224]. Moreover, speaking of human nature, he refers to the stoic concept of human ability to obtain the knowledge of gods by observing the sky: «First she (*scil.* nature) has raised them (*scil.* humans) from the ground to stand tall and upright, so that they might be able to behold the sky and so gain the knowledge of the gods» [9, *Nat. Deor.*, II, 140]. As Dupont pointed out, the general idea of knowledge (including that of God) implies ethical teaching so much that it is considered in the “Hellenistic lists” as a presupposition of all the other virtues or, at least, a building block of the virtuous life [11, pp. 384-393]. The expression that briefly summarizes the moral teaching of the Stoa, according to Dupont, is that of Seneca: *Deum colit qui novit* [11, p. 384; cf. 29, *Ep.* XCV, 47]. By observing the sky, a man derives the knowledge of gods and religious devotion derives from this knowledge: “But what shall I say of human reason? Has it not even entered the heavens? Man alone of all animals has observed the courses of the stars, their risings and settings. By man the day, the month, the year, is determined. He foresees the eclipses of the sun and moon, and foretells them to futurity, marking their greatness, duration, and precise time. From the contemplation of these things the mind extracts the knowledge of the Gods—a knowledge which produces piety, with which is connected justice, and all the other virtues; from which arises a life of felicity, inferior to that of the Gods in no single particular, except in immortality” [9, *Nat. Deor.*, II, 153]. Philosophy plays a fundamental role in allowing humans to access the notion of the gods and, consequently, to lead a virtuous life. In his

*Tusculanae Disputationes* Cicero affirms: “But as to philosophy, that is the parent of all the arts: what can we call that but, as Plato says, a gift, or, as I express it, an invention, of the Gods? This it was which first taught us the worship of the Gods; and then led us on to justice, which arises from the human race being formed into society; and after that it imbued us with modesty and elevation of soul” [8, *Tusc.* I, 26, 64]. In this regard, Dupont notes that philosophy must lead to the knowledge of gods which is followed by virtuous life. In fact, the practice of virtue is based on the imitation of the gods, whose knowledge ends up being an essential presupposition [11, p. 386]. The knowledge of the divine is a fundamental characteristic of the wise person; in fact, by virtue of this knowledge, he lives virtuously since he feels pushed to imitate the gods [8, *Tusc.* V,70]. Hence, from this brief *excursus* one may note how some significant philosophers teach in what way one gets to know the divine: by rationally observing the cosmos, and, as a result, this acquisition becomes the fundamental basis for living according to virtue.

At this point it is important to examine in what way the affirmation of the righteous person in Wis 2:13a to possess the knowledge of God is comparable with the analogous expressions of the Greek philosophy. The close literary context of the verse allows us to grasp its religious connotation; in fact, the author, in declaring his absolute *pistis* towards God, does not refer to any type of gnoseological statement on which to base his ethics. By declaring that he possess  $\omega$   $\tilde{\omega}$ , he demonstrates his own steadfast faith as a presupposition and not as a specific analytical attitude of philosophy. However, the author himself in Wis 13:1-9 does not entirely deny a human ability to come to the knowledge of God based on rational research of the universe: indeed by observing the creation analogically, its beauty and its greatness, a human being can reach the knowledge of the Master (Wis 13:5). In other words, as Gilbert points out, in this passage “the biblical author implicitly recognizes the value of the ‘pagan’ methodology to prove the existence of God, but at the same time he asserts that the nature of this God, they did not manage to get to know” [14, p. 38]. For this reason, the author criticizes the results of those philosophical investigations which in observing and admiring the charm of the universe (Wis 13:3-4) ended up venerating the creation, considering it divine. This makes them like those who have not found God and do not know him (Wis 13:1, 9), as well as those who practice zoolatry (Wis 12:27) or idolatry in general (Wis 14:22). To sum up, the statements about the ignorance of God are placed in the religious-cultural context of the time in which the behavior of the ‘pagans’ is well exemplified by the author in Wis 14:12-21, 23-28: because of their ignorance their life is marked by “manslaughter, theft, and dissimulation, corruption, unfaithfulness, tumults, perjury”. In other words, in the same vein with the philosophers the biblical author teaches that the knowledge of God / the ignorance of God define the lifestyle of people.

Now let us return to the polemic between the just and his oppressors in Wis 2 and discern the identity of the wicked. Notably, in their speech they do not present themselves either as atheists nor do they deny the existence of God [20, p. 243]. Actually, in Wis 2:18 they ask for the words of the righteous to be verified by the Lord. Most of the scholars agree with Weisengoff that identifies the wicked as apostate Jews in Alexandria, without however excluding ‘pagans’; in any case, they cannot be epicureans, Sadducees, or followers of Qohelet. In fact, the controversy does not focus on one or more philosophical currents, but focuses entirely on the Law that regulates the life of the Jews. In addition, the author, in making the wicked speak of their life project, shows both a profound knowledge of the Bible (Wis 2:1b, 2c, 4a-b) and that of the philosophical thought and lifestyle of the time (Wis 2:2a, 6-9). Therefore, the biblical author by describing the wicked reproduces the situation of the Jewish community of Alexandria rather than that of Palestine [32, p. 40-65]. Furthermore, the righteous will rebuke the wicked for their immoral deeds that contradict the Torah and  $\omega$  (Wis 2:12). In this passage, the term  $\omega$  means the education according to the biblical principles that includes a special series of laws how to take care of the vulnerable people (orphans, widows, poor and foreigners). The wicked by their maltreatment of the defenseless persons show complete neglect of the Law (Wis 2:10; see also Exod 22,21-22.24; Deut 15,11; 24,13-15.17-19; 28,50; Is 1,17; 10,2; Jer 7,6; 22,3.16; Ps<sup>LXX</sup> 71,2-4 [17, p. 49]. They themselves in the eschatological context (Wis 5:7c) will say that they have not “recognized the way of the Lord”; this lack, in fact, is demonstrated by their way of acting (Wis 2:6-12, 17-20; 5:6-7). Their sin lies in the falsification of the truths and in the failure to observe the Law. Just as the lack of knowledge characterizes the life of the wicked, so in the same vein the knowledge of God defines the conduct of the just, including his attitude toward other persons [17, p. 42-43; 20, 243-244; 30, 187-188]. As far as the identity of the just person is concerned it should be indicated that in Wis 2:13,(16),18 by the term “son / child” is described the righteous in a collective dimension presenting the true Jews, those who are faithful to the tradition of their fathers. This conclusion

derives from linguistic and literal indications: alternation of singular and plural to indicate 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, application of synecdoche; the use of the term  $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\eta\lambda\omicron\iota\iota\varsigma$  to designate the chosen people or pious persons in the history in the third part of the book; see also Wis 10:6,20; 11:14; 12:19; 16:17; 18:20 [1, 206-210].

To conclude, the diatribe relating to “knowledge – ignorance” finds its exemplification in the way of living either virtuously or wickedly. The same idea runs through the Greek-Hellenistic philosophy: the knowledge of the divine defines the virtuous life and the ignorance defines the evil life. The author, therefore, using the expression  $\tilde{\omega}\tilde{\nu}$  even if it refers to the ethical-practical dimension of the same Greek diatribe yet bases his speech on faith and not on gnoseology.

#### EXEGESIS OF WIS 2:13a

*He professes to possess the knowledge of God*

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The verse opens with a *hapax* in the Book of Wisdom. This term, in fact, is used very rarely in the *LXX* (13 times) and in all instances is put in the middle or passive: Esth 4:7; 1 Macc 11:28; 2 Macc 2:18; 4:8,27,45; 3 Macc 1:4; 2:10; Prov 13:12; Wis 2:13; Sir 20:23; PsS 7:10; 17:5. As far as the translations are concerned, in three instances the same Greek word reproduces different Hebrew verbs: in Esth 4:7  $\acute{\epsilon}\ \acute{\epsilon}$  is used to translate  $\text{אָמַר}$ , “speak”; in Sir 20:23 to translate  $\text{אָמַר}$ , “cause to trust, make secure”; in Prov 13:12  $\acute{\epsilon}\ \acute{\epsilon}$  is added by the translator in order to make the meaning of the Hebrew text comprehensible [19, 503]. In all these passages, with the exception of Wis 2:13, the meaning of the term is “to promise”. In the same way, the Vulgate translates this verb as *promittit*, “promises”; *Peshitta*, on the contrary, has  $\text{אָמַר}$  (from the verb *SBR* which in pael stem means “to announce, declare, speak publicly”) “announces, declares”. The lexicons and the dictionaries give various meanings to this word in the middle voice: “to announce, profess”, “to promise”, “to denounce”, “to require” (3, pp. 280-281; 21, 602). In Greek literature one finds this verb in the middle with the meaning “to proclaim, profess” and from the context one notes that it is a statement placed ahead the others. It should be also noticed that Philo of Alexandria uses the same word either with the meaning “to profess, announce” or “to promise”: *Heres.* 124: “The sacred tribe of Levites profess ( $\acute{\epsilon}\ \acute{\epsilon}$ ) this (*scil.* obligations)”; *Migr.* 37: “This tree, in fact, promises ( $\acute{\epsilon}\ \acute{\epsilon}$ ) not only nourishment, but also immortality”; *Virt.* 54: “it is declared ( $\acute{\epsilon}\ \acute{\epsilon}$ ) either for the service of God, or for the care of the people”; *Spec.* II 30: “when a woman lives according to virtue with a noble spirit, the same spirit promises ( $\acute{\epsilon}\ \acute{\epsilon}$ ) to take care of her by pouring out the highest thoughts in her like a man”. With regard to the New Testament books one may note that the meaning “to promise” prevails (for example, Mark 14:11; Acts 7:5; Rom 4:21; Gal 3:19; Heb 6:13; Jas 1:12); there are only two passages where the identical term occurs with the meaning “to profess” followed by the object of declaration: 1 Tim 2:10,  $\acute{\epsilon}\ \acute{\epsilon}$  “piety”; 1 Tim 6:21,  $\acute{\epsilon}\ \acute{\epsilon}$  “faith”. For this reason, when we return to the use of  $\acute{\epsilon}\ \acute{\epsilon}$ , the meaning “to proclaim, profess” should be preferable to “to promise”. The immediate context determines such a choice, for here the point is on the righteous man’s conviction and not on the general promises. In Wis 2:12-13 he reproaches the impious and immediately after that there follows his exposition of what he proclaims; furthermore, the wicked in Wis 2:17-20 place in relief the contents of the just person’s faith and express their desire to prove if “his words are true”. Therefore, we may say that here we find ourselves confronted by a hero who expresses his faith frankly and openly.

$\acute{\epsilon}$

Initially, it is necessary to point out a vast range of the meanings of the word  $\acute{\epsilon}$ , for example, “to have”, “to possess”, “to occupy”, “to dwell in”, “to take care of”, “to hold”, “to have the possibility” [3, pp. 331-334; 21, pp. 749-751]. As Hanse observes, by it two kinds of relation are expressed: “the first spatial and the second legal, denoting possession. In the first case, we have the sense ‘to have in, on, around, with or over one’, and in the second ‘to own, to enjoy, to have at one’s disposal’” [18, pp. 816-817]. As per the occurrences of the same word in the *LXX*, the multiplicity of meanings is particularly evident when this term is used to translate different Hebrew expressions and in order to make them comprehensible to the Greek ear. For instance, an adjective  $\text{אָמַר}$ , “pregnant” is translated by the phrase  $\acute{\epsilon}\ \acute{\epsilon}$ , lit. “I have in womb” in Gen 38:25; the verb  $\text{אָמַר}$  “trusts” is translated  $\acute{\epsilon}\ \acute{\epsilon}$ , “has hope” in Jer 17:5;  $\text{אָמַר}$  “without wisdom” is rendered in Greek as  $\acute{\epsilon}\ \acute{\epsilon}$  in Job 4:21; feminine participle of the verb  $\text{אָמַר}$  “to be sick” is translated  $\acute{\epsilon}\ \acute{\epsilon}$ , “having ill” in

Ezek 34:4 [22, 586-589]. Besides the lack of uniformity of the translators of the *Septuaginta*, these examples illustrate also how the same word can be located in manifold semantic fields.

In our case, the verb bears an abstract term “knowledge” that corresponds to its use in Classical and Hellenistic Greek; nevertheless these expressions are not lacking in the *Septuaginta* as the indicated texts illustrate. The examples with the expression “to possess knowledge” should be confronted: in Wis 1:7: ὧν ἔχει γνῶσιν, “he possesses knowledge of the voice” (Lord’s spirit); Esth 4:17: ἐὺ γνώσῃς, “you, O Lord, possess knowledge of all”; 2 Macc 6:30: ὧν ἱεὺς ἁγίου γνώσῃς, “to the Lord who possesses holy knowledge”; Hos 4:6: ὡς οὐκ ἔχουσιν γνώσιν, “my people are like as if they have no knowledge, because you have rejected knowledge” (for the other abstract terms in construction with ἔχει see Gen 41:38; Jdt 8:15; 2 Macc 9:20). In general, we are dealing with the phrases by which a person’s inner powers, their intellectual, spiritual, moral capacity are expressed; in sum, that something that qualifies human beings, that something that every person has inside himself or herself. Therefore, the author uses a typical phraseology of the Greek language and thereby communicates that something which the just person enjoys as his own possession. Moreover, this “possession” is not “physical” in nature, but rather it is manifested and made explicit in the *exemplum vitae* of the righteous person.

### ὧν ἔχει

The same expression occurs one more time in Wisdom 14:22a where the author criticizes pagan religions identified as: ὁ ἀνομῶς ἔχει γνώσιν “to err about the knowledge of God”. In other words, the same phrase is used to describe the *modus vivendi* of the righteous man, following upon his knowledge of God, in contrast to that of the ‘pagans’ characterized by the absence of the same knowledge. In the Book of Wisdom, however, there are passages where the author uses forms of the same root or synonyms to put across the identical affirmation, the judgment or value concerning the knowledge of God. Here are some examples: ἐλθέτω γινώσκω, “to come to know, recognize” in Wis 5:7; 13:1; ἰδέτω γινώσκω, “to perceive, understand” in Wis 11:13; ἰδέτω γινώσκω, “understand” in Wis 3:9; ἴδετω γινώσκω, “to look at, behold” in the Book of Wisdom signifies “to recognize” cf. Wis 6:12; ἴδετω γινώσκω, “to know” in Wis 7:17; 13:1; 15:2,3; ἐλθέτω γινώσκω, “to know, understand” in Wis 9:9 [4, pp. 22-26].

**Excursus in the Old Testament.** It may be helpful to provide an *excursus* to the world of the Hebrew Bible in order to illustrate the meaning, connotation and dimension of the Hebrew term “to know” [1; 4; 10; 22]. Even if the term is used firstly to indicate the result of cognitive-intellectual activity, yet its usage is not limited to the sphere of speculative knowledge. The polyvalence of the word, in fact, is strictly connected to the concept of the central role of the heart in the intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual life of a person, for example, Exod 7:23; Lev 19:17; Deut 8:5; 1 Sam 9:20, 25:31; Ps(s) 104:15 [11, p. 37]. Hence “to know / to possess knowledge” can have various meanings: the knowledge based on video-audio perception: “there was no one that saw, and no one that knew” in 1 Sam 26:12; “when they heard ..., that saw, and they knew” in Neh 6:16; knowledge as a result of forces: “I and my heart went round about to know, and to search, and to seek wisdom” in Qoh 7:25; knowledge as capacity to be skilled in something “a man skilled in hunting” in Gen 25:27; “he did not know how to read” in Isa 29:12; knowledge as a sphere of interest: “he had no concern about anything but the food” in Gen 39:6; “know well (*i.e.*, take care of) the condition of your flocks” in Prov 27:23; the sexual dimension: “and Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived” in Gen 4:1 [4, pp. 461-468].

As to the theological meaning of the expression, one may find the corresponding expressions regarding the Israelite religion in the context of the Lord’s intervention in the history of the chosen people. It is suffice to recall some episodes of the Exodus where God saves the people from the oppression of the Egyptians. In Exod 6:7 God says: “I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know ( ὧν ἔχει ) that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians” (see also Exod 7:5,17; 8:6,18; Exod 10:2; 29:46; Deut 4:34-35). During the war against the Philistines when David defeats Goliath we find a further demonstration of God’s sovereignty above Israel. Before the defeat, in fact, David says to Goliath: “This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down ... and all the earth will know ( ὧν ἔχει ) that there is a God in Israel” (1 Sam 17:46). It should be noted that in the Bible when the author speaks about the relation of Israel towards other gods it states that the chosen people do not know them. “Let us go and serve other gods, which neither you ( ὧν ἔχει ) nor your fathers have known” (Deut 13:7). The relations of the other and idolatrous nations with the God of Israel are classified in contrast to the knowledge of the Hebrews. The psalmist in supplicating the Lord says: “Pour out your anger on the nations that do not

know you ( ὁ μὴ ὠνομάσει ), and on the kingdoms that do not call upon your name!” (Ps<sup>LXX</sup> 78:6; see also Exod 5:2; Jer 10:25; Dan 11:38). Some prophetic texts can provide help in finding out the practical explication of the moral dimension of such expressions. In these texts, in fact, the lack of the “knowledge of God” finds expression in the criminal actions of the people full of injustice. In the Book of Hosea 4:1-2 one reads: “Hear the word of the Lord, o children of Israel, for the Lord has a grievance against the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and **no knowledge of God** in the land; there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed”. Another example of the same way of expression that bears moral dimension one may find in prophet Jeremiah 9:2-5: “They bend their tongue like a bow; falsehood and not truth has grown strong in the land; for they proceed from evil to evil, and **they do not know me**... Heaping oppression upon oppression, and deceit upon deceit, they refuse **to know me**”. To know God also means to know his ways, in other words, his plans toward humans who have to conform their proper behaviour to God’s purposes. Isa 58:2 portrays how people not living according to Lord’s will still pretend to know him. Indeed God does not require empty observation of the cultic norms, but requests from Israel to take care of those in need. “They seek me daily and delight **to know my ways**, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the judgment of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments; they delight to draw near to God” (see Jer 5:4-5; Ps<sup>LXX</sup> 94:10). On the basis of this short *excursus* one may note that the expression ὠνομάσει and its cognates indicate, on the one hand, the religion of Israel based on the covenantal agreement, and, on the other hand, the ethics of Israel that is based on the observance of God’s commands and is demonstrated by the relations among the individuals of the same community [2, p. 123; 22, pp. 26-27].

With regard to the Book of Wisdom, it is important to put forward passages where the theme of knowledge appears and to grasp the meaning of these affirmations. The study of these expressions will be based, in particular, on the monograph of G. Ziener [34] and on the study of M. Gilbert [15] in which these scholars analyze the theme of the knowledge of God in the Book of Wisdom. The scheme of the itinerary will follow a descending focalization in which the knowledge of God is understood as a common possession of the people of Israel (Wis 10-19), as a quality of the one who is a leader of the people (Wis 7-9), and as an expression of the life of an individual person (Wis 1-6). The need to concentrate upon the personality of the just person as example of the one who possesses the knowledge of God and lives according to it determines such a choice.

In the third part of the Book *Sapientia Salomonis* (Wis 10-19), one may note how the author, recalling past events and confronting Egyptians and Israelites, points up the “mistake” of the former and the “correctness” of the latter; in fact, the people of Egypt in contrast to Israel do not recognize the sovereignty of the Lord [5, p. 109]. The author also, as was mentioned above, in this part of the book criticizes any types of idolatry as ignorance of the true God. In his attacks against the Egyptians one may note how the sage, describing the plagues that took place in Egypt, interprets them as punishment brought about by the ignorance of God; in particular, their zoolatry determines that some castigations were “executed” by means of animals (Wis 11:15), God’s creatures (Wis 11:17-20). Another passage that helps us better comprehend this situation is Wis 12:27. The author recalling the castigations by means of animals underlines the “tragic” situation of the zoolatrous: “For when in their suffering they became incensed at those creatures that they had thought to be gods, and seeing that they were used to punish them, they recognized (ἐπέγνωσαν) as the true God the one whom they had before refused to know (ἠέγνωσαν). Therefore, the utmost condemnation came upon them”. The other aspect of the plagues is its educational objective: by means of the plagues the idolatrous came to comprehend that these destructions serve to save the others (Wis 11:13b). This is a strong recalling of the Exodus moments that regard the announcements about the salvation of the Jews and the recognition of God by the Egyptians (Exod 7:5,17; 10:2; 14:4) [15, p. 200-201]. In Wis 11:13b one finds the expression ἠέγνωσαν, “they perceived it was the Lord’s doing” that, as we have already noted, belongs to the proper terminology of knowledge. As Scarpat notes it is used in connection with religious or moral judgment; for example, in Prov 17:10: “A threat breaks down the heart of a wise man; but a fool, though scourged, understands not”; see also Prov 24:14; Job 23:5; Isa 33:11 [31, p. 407]. By recalling the episodes after each plague and particularly the crossing of the Red Sea, the author points to the recognition of the Egyptians of the salvific role of the Lord towards Israel [15, p. 201]. In Wis 16 the author returns again to the theme of the idolatry of the Egyptians and compares prodigious acts in the history of both nations: punishment for

some and salvation for others. He underlines the ignorance of God, even more he states the fact that they – ἄγνοοι, “ungodly” – refused to know God (ἀγνοοῦσι τὸν θεόν; Wis 16; 16ab; cf. Wis 12:27c).

Concerning the presentation of Israel, there is one example in Wis 15:1-3 (note also synonyms of ὁ θεός). In this passage the author describes the necessity to recognize God either in his government of the world or in his relation with the people (Wis 15:1). This knowledge, indeed, determines also behaviour “we shall not sin knowing (ὅτι οἴσθητε) that we belong to you” (Wis 15:2b). The reason for such a connection is as follows: “For to know you (ἐπιγινώσκοντες) is complete righteousness, and to recognize (ὁμολογῆσαι) your power is the root of immortality” (Wis 15:3) [34, p. 24]. The author by using the phrase ὁμολογῆσαι τὴν δύναμιν, “recognize your power” illustrates recognition of the royal power of God upon Israel. Therefore, the author, by contrasting the history of two nations, points out two important moments: 1) people should recognize the only true God, the Lord of Israel, the sovereign of the world, 2) people should be aware that God can intervene in history in order to defend his chosen people. Even more this recognition is exemplified in the profession of faith declared by the people of Israel.

In the second part of *Sapientia Salomonis* (Wis 7-9), the author presents an example of the wise king who knows that it is vital for him as the representative of the people to possess Wisdom. The crowning moment of this section is found in Solomon’s prayer to God for the gift of Wisdom (Wis 9). It should be noted that in this chapter – precisely in vv. 9-11,13,17 – there are expressions that refer to the knowledge of God. Lady Wisdom is described as the one who dwells with God and the one who besides the knowledge of works and creation (v. 9ab) also knows (v. 9c) what is pleasing to him. The same theme is found in Wis 8:4a: μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ σοφία – “for she is mystery of God’s knowledge”. As Gilbert notes, this knowledge of Wisdom is twofold: “elle (*scil.* Lady Wisdom) connaît les oeuvres de Dieu et elle sait ce qui lui plaît, c’est-à-dire (cf. Ba 4:1-4) ce qui est conforme aux préceptes de sa Loi” [15, p. 198]. To be taken in consideration is the fact that the expression “what is pleasing to you” in v. 9c is made specific in the following stich: “what is right according to your commandments” (v. 9d). Lady Wisdom is considered as a treasure that helps humans to enter into friendly relations with God through the gifts of education; see Wis 7:14. By her means a person reaches the knowledge of God’s will – vv. 13a, 17a; that is why a wise king prays to obtain Wisdom in order to know what is pleasing to God (v. 10d). The king’s desire to obtain Wisdom is tightly connected to his mission; actually this is a *conditio sine qua non* to rule rightly. Solomon says: “Then my works will be pleasing, and I shall judge your people justly and shall be worthy of the throne of my father” (Wis 9:12). In this presentation, therefore, the practical aspect of the knowledge as a gift from God and source of just behaviour of the king towards his people is underlined.

**Conclusions.** The context of Wis 2:13 suggests that the author uses the phrase “knowledge of God” in its religious and behavioural dimensions. The wicked themselves recognize it: “because his manner of life is unlike that of others, and his ways are strange” (Wis 2:15). They will test the sage in order to know how gentle and patient he is (Wis 2:19bc). Any behaviour depends on the personal concept of the meaning of life, in our case on the religious position. So, what does the knowledge of the just person consist of? On the one hand, his knowledge of Torah and education (Wis 2:12) determines his conduct. On the other hand, he is aware and proud of his privileged relation with God (Wis 2:13b; Wis 2:16d, 18a). In Wis 2:16cd, 18b, 20b one reads about his trust in divine providence and God’s care of righteous people, even if they are suffering and are persecuted. They are those whom the world considers “unfortunate” and does not recognize that they are “in the hand of God” (Wis 3:1a). If they live with virtue without sin, they will find their merited recompense from God. Thus a sterile woman is μισθωμένη by means of her conduct (Wis 3:13), in the same way as the righteous eunuch (Wis 3:14); even premature death is considered as God’s watching over his saints (Wis 4:7-17). In fact, the author says: “but the righteous live forever, and their reward is with the Lord; the Most High takes care of them” (Wis 5:15). Therefore, the ὁμολογῆσαι τὴν δύναμιν that the just possesses and which was given to him as gift of Wisdom 9 has its place in the daily life that consists in being faithful to the Law, in subjecting himself/herself to the will of the Lord and in hoping in the rewards promised to the faithful.

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