



A SCIENCE & RELIGION COMMENTARY

PROVERBS 8:22-31

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22 The Lord created me [Wisdom] at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. **23** Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. **24** When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. **25** Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth— **26** when he had not yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil. **27** When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, **28** when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, **29** when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, **30** then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, **31** rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.

Genius is a lonely pursuit, or at least so we think. When we think of genius, we tend to think of an individual working in an isolated frenzy of creativity. Georg Frederich Handel locks himself in a room for three weeks and churns out his masterpiece oratorio *The Messiah*. Turns out it wasn't exactly original genius – most of the *Messiah* was cobbled together from previous things Handel had written, but still genius. Or Albert Einstein, toiling as an obscure postal clerk in a Swiss town, publishes three physics papers in the year 1905 that revolutionize our understanding of the physical world. That's genius. Or Vincent Van Gogh, painting in isolation in Arles while descending into the dark night of mental illness. That is the way of genius.

But for every instance of solitary creativity, there are dozens that are the result of collaborations, where genius is provoked and shaped by interaction with another. For instance, would Calvin be half the genius that he is without his sidekick Hobbes? Would Francis Crick have discovered the double helix structure of DNA without James Watson?

But it raises the question, when it comes to God's genius in the world, is God the solitary creator? Or the inspired collaborator? Our tendency is to think of God creating in splendid isolation.

Proverbs 8 raises up a different picture: God as collaborator extraordinaire. God's creative sidekick is none other than Wisdom, that beautiful siren of all things good. Proverbs 8 is an ode to Wisdom, like much of the rest of Proverbs. Wisdom is accessible. She stands on the street corner and cries out to all who pass. She pervades all things – there is no place that you cannot find her or her mark. And, as Proverbs 8:22-31 says, she was God's constant companion in the creating and shaping of this world -- before all things, when the heavens were marked out, when the depths were encircled, when the seas were limned and edged, when the mountains were measured and fitted. Wisdom toils with God in splendid collaboration.

We could spend a great deal of time marking Wisdom's contributions to the world. To the physical reality of hydrogen bonding in molecules of water, the only common example of a solid that is less dense than its liquid form, and which permits life to

survive in bitter cold as lakes and oceans freeze from the top down rather than the bottom up. Or the mystery that is the human brain. So little gray matter, such a mystifying thing is thought. Or cosmic mysteries that generate awe and wonder.

Much has been made of the controversy over intelligent design. Proverbs 8 needed go there. But it does point to the fact that this world is intelligible and structured, not random. Careful and persistent exercise of human wisdom allows us to discern the intelligibility of the physical world, a reality with which very few philosophers or scientists would quibble.