Athenagoras’s use of ἀπόρροια to describe the Holy Spirit is one of the earliest occurrences in Christian literature of a term that became very important in later Trinitarian controversies. In his *Legatio pro Christianis* (10.4), after having discussed the activity of the Logos in creation, Athenagoras turns to the Spirit:

συνάδει δὲ τῷ λόγῳ καὶ τὸ προφητικὸν πνεῦμα· κύριος γάρ, φησίν, ἔκτισέν με ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ. καίτοι καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ ἐνεργοῦν τοῖς ἐκφωνούσι προφητικῶς ἅγιον πνεῦμα ἀπόρροιαν εἶναι φαμεν τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀπορρέον καὶ ἐπαναφερόμενον ὡς ἀκτίνα ἡλίου.

Proverbs 8:22, here quoted by Athenagoras, in the LXX speaks of Wisdom. The passage occurs frequently in early Christian literature, where it is sometimes applied to the Logos (e.g., Justin, *Dial.* 61.1–2) and sometimes to Wisdom as an entity distinguished from the Logos (e.g., Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.20.3). In the second century a systematic shift began to take place to identify Wisdom with the Logos, and Prov 8:22 in *Leg.* 10.4 is usually taken to refer to the Logos.

The description of the Spirit as ἀπόρροια seems to have been inspired by Wis 7:25 which says of Wisdom, the creative agent, ἀτμὶς γάρ ἐστιν τῆς

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1 Although the original essay referred to Athenagoras’s *Supplicatio pro Christianis*, recent scholarship has adopted the standard title of *Legatio pro Christianis*, which this edition of the essay will employ; despite the change in name, the references to the work remain the same. The edition used for this essay is William R. Schoedel, *Athenagoras: Legatio and* De resurrectione (OECT; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

2 Cf. also *Leg.* 24.2, ἀπόρροια ὡς φῶς ἀπὸ πυρὸς τὸ πνεῦμα.


τοῦ θεοῦ δυνάμεως καὶ ἀπόρροια τῆς τοῦ παντοκράτορος δόξης εἰλικρινής. Instead of ἀτμίς, the text underlying the Armenian and Ethiopic versions of the book of Wisdom read ἀκτίς,⁶ and this textual tradition may lie behind Athenagoras’s use of the passage. That Athenagoras would refer the Wisdom of Prov 8:22 to the Logos and the Wisdom of Wis 7:25 to the Spirit could lead to the charge that such a bifurcation reflects a weakness in exegesis.⁷

It is less than certain, however, that Athenagoras does here refer Prov 8:22 to the Logos. Συνῄδει δὲ τῷ λόγῳ is usually understood as stating that Prov 8:22 “agrees with the previous account,” and is thus applied to the Logos. The translation of τῷ λόγῳ as “account” or “opinion” must be questioned. What immediately precedes is a discussion of the Logos, and it is natural to take τῷ λόγῳ as referring to the Logos. Athenagoras is saying that the prophetic Spirit corresponds to the Logos in its creative activity, and quotes Prov 8:22 in support of the Spirit’s work in creation. K.F. Bauer, in rejecting the application of Prov 8:22 to the Logos, has also claimed that such an application rests on a misunderstanding of the precise meaning of συνῄδειν, which describes the correspondence or agreement between corresponding objects, and not between an object and an opinion about it.⁸ Furthermore, the force of καίτοι would be neglected if Prov 8:22 were applied to the Logos.

That Athenagoras does not use Prov 8:22 of the Logos does not mean that he never describes the Logos as Wisdom. In Leg. 24.1–2, where he again calls the Spirit ἀπόρροια, he calls the Son the Wisdom of the Father. In describing both the Logos and the Spirit as Wisdom, Athenagoras reflects the unsettled use of the Wisdom tradition in the second century. It also shows that his doctrines of the Logos and the Spirit are not worked out on the basis of this tradition. The latter is applied to the Logos or the Spirit as it suits him. The application of Prov 8:22 to the Spirit does strengthen the supposition that ἀπόρροια comes from the Wisdom tradition. Wisdom, to which the predicate πνεῦμα is applied in Wis 1:6,⁹ provides the language

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⁷ Thus, for example, Robert M. Grant, The Early Christian Doctrine of God (Richard Lectures 1965–1966; Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1966), 92.

⁸ Karl Friedrich Bauer, Die Lehre des Athenagoras von Gottes Einheit und Dreieinigkeit (Bamberg: Handels-Druckerei, 1902), 35 n. 7.

⁹ See Max Heinze, Die Lehre vom Logos in der griechischen Philosophie (Oldenburg: F. Schmidt, 1872), 193ff.