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From the Fifth Century Onwards (Latin Writers)

Female Power and its Propaganda

(Edited by MATTIA CHIRIATTI)

Theologizing Performance in the Byzantine Tradition

(Edited by DAMASKINOS OLKINUORA)

*Nachleben*



PEETERS

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# Wisdom in St Augustine and Meister Eckhart

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## ABSTRACT

Analysing the notion of wisdom in Saint Augustine and in Meister Eckhart can serve as an example to discover their profound relationship, and, at the same time, to show the Eckhartian originality. As can be seen from the analysis of his *Commentary on the Book of Wisdom of Solomon*, Eckhart takes up and deepens Augustine's words in relation to wisdom. First, Wisdom in Augustine and Eckhart refers to God (*sapientia increata*), His nature, or a divine property frequently related to Truth, and it is specially attributed to the Son (1Cor. 1:24). Second, for both authors, human wisdom (*sapientia participata*) always comes from God and is a participation of His Wisdom, an illumination and a grace. Virtues lead to purifying the soul, the image of God, for contemplation (Eckhart and Augustine). Unlike Augustine, Eckhart considers that it is already possible to know of God and reach the *visio beatifica*, as a birth of God in us and as a participation in the Trinitarian life; but it is, in fact, an unknowing, an ignorance, and happens beyond the human faculties, in the ground of the soul (*Homily 101*). As we shall see, Eckhart bases his peculiar thought on Augustine, but doing so he, in fact, goes beyond him, saying that humans are able to enjoy eternal bliss in the present life, for they are then away from this world in the present now of eternity.

Before approaching wisdom in Augustine and Meister Eckhart, it is necessary, first, to consider that both participate in the two traditions of wisdom: philosophical and biblical.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the Greeks moved from a practical wisdom, attributed to artisans as 'excellence of art', to the search for philosophical knowledge. And Cicero will offer in Latin a definition of wisdom that summarizes ancient philosophical thought, which Augustine will adopt: 'Wisdom is the science of divine and human things and their causes'.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, there is a whole sapiential current in the Old Testament, which is especially concentrated in the 'sapiential' books: *Job*, *Proverbs*, *Kohelet*, and some *Psalms*, in the Hebrew Bible, and also *Jesus Sirach* or *Ecclesiasticus* and the *Wisdom of Solomon*, transmitted by the Septuagint and the Vulgate – on both

<sup>1</sup> See Maurice Gilbert, 'Sagesse (des hommes et de Dieu), Ancien Testament', *DSp* 14 (1990), 72-81; Jean-Noël Aletti, 'Nouveau Testament', *DSp* 14 (1990), 92-6; Aimé Solignac, 'Sagesse antique et sagesse chrétienne', *DSp* 14 (1990), 96-114.

<sup>2</sup> Cicero, *De officiis* II 2, 5.