THE FEMININITY OF THE SON

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Abstract

Readers of the New Testament must be struck by the way in which Jesus referred to God as his 'Father'. At the same time he is referred to as 'Son of God'. History testifies to the development of these terms into a full Trinitarianism in which a pre-existent Son of God become incarnate in a stable at Bethlehem. Naturally the reference to 'Father' and 'Son' must be to some extent metaphorical, but what may be suggested is that referring to the pre-existent son as female is in fact a more powerful metaphor than the traditionally assumed view as male. Such a metaphor is indeed more consistent with the Biblical witness. This analogy provides a better understanding both of inter-Trinitarian relationships and of the relationship between God and humanity, and by no means least, it should remove the offense that often resides in a view of the Godhead as exclusively male.

1. The pre-existence of the 'Son'

It is surely indisputable that Jesus of Nazareth, born in a stable in Bethlehem, who became an itinerant teacher, finally dying a horrible death after a short ministry, was male. Although there have been suggestions to the contrary, he never expressed this sexuality in the full way, but there is little doubt that he could have done so if he had wished. However, of more interest to Christian theology than the possibility of Jesus being involved in the production of his own offspring, has been the question of his own origin. Indeed it was because of this that he ultimately died. Matthew's gospel (26:63) records the key question of the High Priest 'I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the son of God', and Jesus' response to the question settled the matter for the High Priest. A claim to be the Son of God was blasphemy and deserved death, no matter what the specific charges were to be brought before the procurator. The same was true at other times in Jesus' ministry; a perceived claim to be divine, to be the Son of God, prompted attempts at stoning, the punishment for blasphemy (Jn. 8:59, 10:31, cf. also Jn. 5:18).

Such direct ascription by the New Testament to Jesus' being Son of God goes along naturally with the idea that he did not start existence in the stable in Bethlehem, or even nine months before, but that Jesus, as the incarnate Son of God, had existence before those events. It is not necessary to cite all the references, both direct and indirect, used to support the idea of pre-existence, as this is done elsewhere (a full account is in MacDonald 1968:85f); although it must be noted that some of the evidence is disputed. Dunn (1989) believes that pre-existence is only presented in the latest New Testament documents especially in John (1989:57), so that a text such as Philippians 2:6f which is usually held to be a strong proof-text, need not necessarily indicate pre-existence, but rather reflects an 'Adam Christology' (1989:114f), or that Galatians 4:4 and Romans 8:3 could mean merely appointment and commissioning (1989:46) or that Hebrews sees an ideal rather than an actual pre-existence (1989:54), so giving a diversity of Christologies in the New Testament (1989:62). In particular, this would likely deny the knowledge of pre-existence to Jesus, referring it to later theological reflection (Dunn 1989:32), although it does not of course necessarily deny its reality. It must be noted that Dunn's ideas are not fully accepted; for example Hanson (1982:59f) strongly argues for

Paul's belief in pre-existence, and in particular Galatians 4:4 is reminiscent of pre-existent wisdom in Wisdom 9:10 (Marshall 1982:7).

Perhaps of particular interest are texts such as John 6:38 'I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me' or Romans 8:3 'sending his own son'. The sending must remind the reader of the Bible of the Old Testament prophet, who likewise claimed to be sent, but unlike the prophets, Jesus is recorded as claiming very specifically that he was with the Father even before the foundation of the world (Jn. 17:5, 24 etc).

2. Was the pre-existent second person a son?

Trinitarian theology thus sees a Son co-eternal with the Father (and the Holy Spirit), who then took flesh, becoming incarnate. The exact relationship between this Son and the Father was a matter for intense thought and controversy, culminating in the celebrated so-called Athanasian creed which probably reflects developed Augustinian theology. Such followed from the definition of the original Nicene creed, that Father and Son (and then the Holy Spirit) are *homoousios*. In all this discussion, the Biblical term 'Son' was simply applied to the second person of the Godhead, but of course generating tremendous problems because of the implications of the term. Indeed the problems in finding terms appropriate to the origin of the pre-existent Christ, such as 'begetting' show that the term 'Son' is here misleading and perhaps inappropriate. Ancient ideas such as the 'womb of the Father' (cited in Boff 1988:121, 170), despite the obvious presence of some characteristics of the other sex in every individual, are quite grotesque. In particular, as Arius quite correctly pointed out, the essence of a son is that he had an origin and therefore, exacerbated by the understanding of many cultures, the Son is viewed as less than the Father. Now the traditional solution to this is well known; just as a human father and son share the same essence of humanity but differ in relation, so Father and Son are equally divine, but differ in relation. References such as John 14:28 'The Father is greater than I' can be explained as due to this relational difference, as applicable to the Son as incarnate, or even by reference to the relationship between infinites, which are at the same time equal and different (Augustine: *de Trinitate* 8:9).

A large part of the need for such conceptual gymnastics lies in the term 'Son'. Now this is must be a metaphor, just as the term 'Father' is likewise a metaphor, but the use of these is due to a belief that the human relationship is in some way a reflection of the relationship between the first two persons of the Trinity. Now this is obviously not fully ideal, and indeed other images have been proposed to illustrate the relationship, such as the various suggestions as to *Vestigia Trinitatis* in the created world, reasoning that a Triune God would create in such a way as to reflect his essential nature (Barth 1975:333f). The problem is that the picture of the 'Son' is thoroughly Biblical, and any non-Biblical analogy is hardly likely to be satisfactory for the understanding of the Trinity, especially since the formulation of the Trinity is basically an attempt to reconcile the Biblical data into a selfconsistent whole. Other Biblical possibilities do in fact exist, notably the idea of the *logos*, as enshrined in the prologue to John's gospel, or of *sophia*, wisdom. Nevertheless it is generally felt that these are only ever intended to be illustrative of the basic idea, that the first two persons of the Trinity may be best referred to as 'Father and Son'.

But a son has an origin. Now if the point of origin is not to be put into an inconceivable 'before the foundation of the world' as Arius thought, or dissolved, with Origen, into a timeless eternal generation, the most natural point of origin is the birth at Bethlehem. Classical orthodoxy stresses that Jesus Christ is he whom the Word become in incarnation (Dunn 1989:xxxi); thus it is reasonable to suggest that the Son originated then. Early Fathers, such as Tertullian, often state that God's word only became the Son at that point (Mackey 1983:128).

Sonship does not imply pre-existence (Dunn 1989:35), but refers to a role which had been entered (Dunn 1989:36). This would immediately explain why the synoptics appear to relate Jesus' sonship only to his birth (Marshall 1982:14).

Jesus' sonship can then be seen in terms of designation or appointment (Acts 2:36, Rom 1:3), as 'son' does not then refer to his eternal nature. Indeed the early Christians probably did not understand 'Son' in terms of his nature (Cullmann 1963:270). Hengel (1976:42) suggests that they would see Christ as Son from an Old Testament rather than a pagan background. Here there is no implication of pre-existence, but the key idea is of being chosen or appointed. David as the ideal king could be termed 'Son of God', but is in no sense thought of as pre-existent. The term always has reference to choice for service, or commissioning (Cullmann 1963:273, Dunn 1989:18). This is then the most natural interpretation of Psalm 2:7, where at his coronation, the king, ideally David, was designated son of God. The text excludes any physical idea of begetting (Hengel 1976:23) but rather, by the word 'today', refers to recognition or designation. Likewise Israel is referred to as 'son' (eg. Hos. 11:1) and commonly in Rabbinic writings (Hengel 1976:42). Thus originally the term 'Son of God' did not mean pre-existence, but rather adoption; it only acquired this meaning in Gentile Christianity (Pannenberg 1968:117).

Likewise the first person only became Father. Even with references to Adam and Israel as sons of God, Fatherhood is not eternal. Although this has been seen as a reason for the eternity of the Son in that God does not change, this is perhaps too great a movement towards Greek impassability. Clearly the relationships of God do change, whether to the world in creation or to people and things in it, so that becoming a father is likewise no essential change in God.

Now the incarnate Christ is obviously male. This is not simply historical, but is even significant theologically, as in Ephesians 5:21f (Scott 1992:83). However this maleness need not apply to the pre-incarnate Christ, who if called 'Son', need only be referred to as such by virtue of what he would become. Biblical Christology must distinguish between the divine and human in Christ; even if the divine is pre-existent, the human in no way shares that attribute (Baillie 1956:150). Moltmann (1981:65) points out that it is very necessary to distinguish between the sonship of Jesus in relation to the Father and that in relation to the world. Thus Galatians 4:4 'God sent forth his Son' is perhaps significantly immediately qualified by 'born of woman', which then stresses his humanness, implying that Jesus was only son when human. It must also be noted that Galatians 4:4-6 has a chiastic structure which stresses the nature of the salvation Jesus accomplished; he was born under law to redeem those under the law, and born as a Son in order to give adoption to believers (cf. Dunn 1989:41). He need not then be eternal.

3. The incarnation as a marriage

It may well then be suggested that the pre-incarnate 'son' could be pictured as 'daughter' or, perhaps even better, as 'wife' or 'consort'. Immediately, this sees the incarnation in terms very familiar to humanity, not as an incomprehensible union of a divine Christ and human Jesus, but as a marriage between the human male and divine female. The oneness of the person is clear, reflecting the Biblical view of marriage in which the two 'become one flesh' (Gen. 2:24), which Jesus and others use as the basis of their understanding of the nature of Christian marriage. Indeed the Chalcedonian definition, that the divine and human are 'without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way abolished because of the union, but rather the characteristic property of each nature being preserved' (cited in Stevenson 1966:337) makes very good sense in marriage terms. Moreover, in its move from an exclusively male Christ, this understanding should be a

move from a Christology of power, which has been suggested led to a measure of corruption in the Church, a seeking of worldly power, even military might, especially in the concept of 'Christendom' (Gunton 1983:198). Incidentally, this reflects one problem with the modern preference for a Christology 'from below', which naturally sees Christ only as male as the historical Jesus was male. A Christology 'from above' need not be so restricted.

A marriage analogy of the incarnation can only be considered to be Nestorian if there is a weak view of the unity in marriage. If however the Biblical view of the two becoming one, so uniting in will and purpose is maintained, the couple may be considered to be a real unity, while of course individual differences are maintained. It must in any case be asked again how far the condemnation of Nestorius was really from theological rather than for political reasons (Lane 1982:259). It may be noted that Leo's Tome (cited in Stevenson 1966:315-24) also states that while the two natures in Christ retain their sphere of action, the properties of each are available to both (Ward 1963:240). The parallel to a marriage is again obvious, where possessions become common, even of the very bodies (1 Cor. 7:4), the *communicatio idiomatum*, as stressed in Cyrilline Christology (Wand 1963:221). The marriage analogy should also not be seen as giving a problem as regards Jesus' full humanity. Whereas it might be objected that as a 'couple' he is not human, his state is really analogous to that of Christians, who have new life by the union with Christ. In a sense it is only non-Christians, without this, who are less than human.

Thus particularly if the story of the virgin birth is taken into account, it was in the conception and birth of Jesus that the divine female and the male humanity became united in his person (Pannenberg 1968:143). However, the work of Jesus could be said to have commenced at his baptism, where he was designated Son of God by the heavenly voice (cf. Pannenberg 1968:137). This does not mean, as has been suggested, that Jesus became the Son of God at this point. What is however noteworthy is that at his baptism the Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove. This naturally enabled the ministry of Christ in the empowering that the ministry of the spirit provides. Here, the Spirit empowers by means of the union that he enacts between the servant of God and God himself. In the case of Jesus, the Spirit then fully integrates the divine and the human, so for the first time he could be fully referred to as 'Son of God'.

At the resurrection, the Spirit again unites the person of Christ (Rom. 8:11). It is noteworthy that Paul refers to the resurrection as designating Jesus as Son of God (Rom. 1:3). Dunn then sees this as the start of Jesus' sonship; he however notes the 'in power' of Romans 1:3 (1989:34), which identifies the resurrection as his exaltation, an 'enhancement of a sonship already enjoyed' (Dunn 1989:35).

In the infilling of the Spirit, Jesus can then in a full sense be seen as the image of God (Col. 1:15). The Father Son and Holy Spirit in the Trinity correspond to the divine, human and spiritual bond in Christ himself. Thus the Son 'reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature' (Heb. 1:3). Of course, the image of God is seen to reside in humanity as a whole (Gen. 1:26, 5:1). Various suggestions have been made as to what this image consists of, seeing it in such human characteristics as spirituality or rationality, or in the authority of humanity over the created order. Barth (1958:195) however observes that the plain sense of Genesis 1:26 and 5:1 requires that the image of God resides in the division of humanity into male and female; the very nature of humanity reflects plurality in the Godhead. Thus the best analogy for the Trinity is the human couple (Moltmann 1981:199). Despite Boff (1988:106), reference to sexual difference does aid the analogical understanding of the Trinity. Incidentally it is notable that Augustine (*de Trinitate* 12:5) rejected the Father-Mother-Child paradigm; children do not bond a couple, but love does, as in the Trinity.

4. The Godhead as a marriage

The parallel is even clearer if the Second Person corresponds to the human female. The unity in the Godhead is then like the closest bond in human relationships, so the nature of God is more clearly monotheistic than in the traditional understanding of father and son, as a human couple can readily be considered a unit, as they often are in human understanding. Thus the relation in people reflects that in God, but with the difference that in God the Persons are so close that they can validly be referred to in the singular (Jewett, cited in Grant 1989:93). As Jesus said, 'I and the Father are one', which is naturally understood in terms of a marriage. It is notable that Paul specifically parallels the relationship of husband and wife to God and Christ (1 Cor. 11:3). Here three 'marriages' are paralleled; between Christ and God, a wife and husband, and a man and Christ. Ephesians 5:22f also puts Christ in the role of a husband; these last two are of course post-incarnate. In all these cases there is the understanding of unity giving one body.

The sexual duality of the divine is of course common in paganism, such as in the Old Testament with the Baalim and Astaroth (see Scott 1992:38f). This is one reason why this picture of God was rejected, as Israel vehemently rejected the polytheism and idolatry associated with it. Ruether (1983:56) however asserts that Yahweh actually simply replaced Baal, leaving the consort in place. If God is truly to be seen in this way, it is not surprising that other religions, which must reflect at least a measure of truth, see God in those terms. However, attributing sexuality to divinity may be due also to a simply reading back from human nature, an anthropomorphism, and also lends itself, very attractively as was the case in Canaan, to the practice of cultic prostitution. Here Scott (1992:48) interestingly suggests that the gender of *sophia* was of significance in countering the sexual attraction of other goddesses.

Nevertheless, if the opposite is indeed the case, so that humanity reflects the nature of God rather than vice versa, this does see God as an essential duality. This is an idea adopted by the American Shakers (Mercadante 1990, cf Ruether 1983:133); Christian Science also has a Father-Mother God (Hampson 1990:157). Unlike the Shakers however, who equated the female in God with the Holy Spirit, it is possible to see the pre-existent Christ as feminine, with of course the possibility of the third element as the bond between them. In the case of God this bond would be even stronger than between the human married couple, but still analogous to it. It is significant that Biblical terminology uses the term 'know' in the full relational sense, implying sexual relationships, as Jesus commonly used the word in relation to the Father (eg. Mk. 11:27, frequently in John). There is naturally no need to press the analogy into seeing sexual relations; indeed Jesus specifically excluded these from the angels (Matt. 22:30). As in their case, procreation is both unnecessary and inappropriate for God. What matters is that the relationship is total and complete. It may be pointed out here that in the human sense, son and father do not know each other in anything like the same degree as husband and wife, even intellectually without the sexual overtones. A text such as 1 John 2:23 'No one who denies the Son has the Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father also' makes more sense in terms of a married couple than in terms of a human father and son.

Such closeness means that the two are really one, an ideal rarely attained in human marriages or in pagan worship, which then requires separate worship for each divine partner, something unnecessary in Judaism and Christianity (Dunn 1989:170 notes that in contrast to other religions, Israel had no priests to Wisdom, although he sees this point as a denial of any personification rather than an affirmation of oneness).

Such a stress on oneness defends the monotheism of Christianity, which was highly important in the New Testament and later era (Dunn 1989:xxx, who notes that it was only at Nicea that the dominant *logos* Christology, which naturally emphasizes oneness, yielded to

references to 'Son', with all the implications of such a shift (1989:xxxi)). The suggestion of Moltmann (1981:185) as a contribution to the resolution of the ancient filioque dispute, that the Spirit proceeds from 'the Father-of-the-Son' only makes sense in terms of the closeness of relationship of the persons, which is more naturally pictured in terms of a marriage. It is perhaps also significant that wisdom is referred to as God's delight (Prov. 8:30), a term very appropriate to a wife.

The marriage analogy also perhaps contributes towards answering the question of why God created, and then saved, as procreation is the natural purpose and result of a human marriage. The desire of the divine couple is particularly, as in a human marriage, to produce offspring, children of God (Rom. 8:15, Gal. 4:5), in its own image. Moltmann (1981:106) suggests that the inter-Trinitarian bond of love naturally seeks further expression in this way; he sees God as having two aspects, a male and female (1981:109), but does not go as far as seeing the two 'sexes' in God. The giving of life is then a function of the Spirit insofar as the Spirit gives unity within the Godhead, and by means of this unity enables further life.

Thus the primal couple was indeed made in God's image, in response to the plural 'let us' of Genesis 1:26. This parallels Eve, the human female, with the pre-existent Christ. Here the name 'Eve' is likely to be related to the Hebrew for 'living' (RSV mgn.) 'because she was the mother of all living' (Gen. 3:20). What is indisputable is that God is the ultimate source of life, which in the case of human beings is transmitted through the woman, and also that the nature of God is to give life, as seen in the frequent oath 'as the Lord lives'. Indeed, life is only seen as possible by relationship to God, and specifically, in the New Testament, eternal life is by union with Christ. The parallel is clear; human, animal life is by a relation to Eve, while spiritual, eternal life is by a relation to God, specifically Christ. Ringgren (1980:337) comments that '*life* is synonymous with *God is with you.*' It is thus significant that in the Wisdom of Solomon, *sophia* has the power to grant eternal life (Scott 1992:99).

5. Salvation as marriage

The parallel between regeneration and human birth which Jesus uses in his conversation with Nicodemus is also deepened. A Christian is reborn (Jn. 3:5), a natural parallel to the birth of a human from the water of the womb which results from a human marriage. This salvation must be paralleled with the incarnation, the marriage in the Son. Thus Hengel (1976:8) points out that Paul uses the word 'Son' in a soteriological context; in other contexts he prefers the term 'Lord'. Here salvation follows from the union between Christ and the Christian enacted by the Spirit (Pannenberg 1968:176), which results in the giving of new life. A Christian is such by the indwelling Christ (Gal. 2:20) and so reflects her; this is of course not the humanity of Christ, but the divine, feminine nature. In any case the divine life in the Christian can also be seen as female (*zoe* as feminine), identifying the human nature of both sexes as essentially masculine (Greek *anthropos*). Those who are saved reflect the nature of Christ as uniting divine and human, and indeed the very nature of the Godhead. Interestingly, in the book of Proverbs, the usual situation is that 'one stands or falls in the eyes of God and community based on one's relationship to various women', notably wisdom (Camp, in Scott 1992:23). This book has a pronounced feminine aspect, which even provides its unity; the *sophia* poems are balanced by the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31.

Such an understanding enriches the idea of salvation and emphasizes its cost. Whereas the incarnation was for the purposes of salvation and was costly to God, it is much more so when seen in term of the separation of husband and wife. Likewise the sufferings of Christ on the cross involve also a sense of a wife being forsaken by a husband, with all the associated trauma

(Matt. 27:46 cf. Ps. 22:1). Such a separation finally ends with the completion of salvation when God is fully reunited (1 Cor. 15:28).

This means that what is saved is the community, for otherwise there is the strange situation of a saved woman not reflecting a marriage, as both human and divine life would then be female. The community, on the other hand, as the primal Adam, may be viewed as male, but as including both sexes. Although Adam was eventually a male, this must be understood in terms of the whole humanity, both male and female, as the Genesis story sees the primeval couple as originating in Adam. Thus Adam is 'the man', embracing male and female as her source, similarly to the way in which the New Testament refers to the Father alone as *ho theos* (Forte 1989:92), as embracing also the second person as source.

Individuals are saved in community, as an Israelite was 'saved' by belonging to the covenant people. Such immediately gives a unity to the redeemed humanity through the relationship to Christ. He is the new Adam, as Paul expounds in Romans 5, the fount of the new humanity. It is in this sense that Jesus referred to himself as 'Son of Man', which almost certainly goes back to Daniel 7:13 where the Son of Man is identified with the 'saints of the most High'. As incarnate, Jesus was the fulfilment of what Israel should have been, a perfect humanity. Here 'Son' does not mean that the pre-existent Christ was male, but either as Adam, embracing both sexes, or as anticipating the perfection of humanity in the incarnation, as this was of course in the male sex. Significantly, the Nicene creed says that the Son became man (*anthropos, homo*) not a man (*aner, vir*), so embracing all humanity (Johnson 1993:153). Redeemed humanity, male and female, is then a close reflection of the Son, the new Adam, who is also male and female. It is significant here that the writer of 1 Timothy 2:13 (which some do believe to be Paul) stresses the participation of both Adam and Eve in the Fall, an event important for Paul's theology. Jesus was confronted with the same basic choice as the primeval couple, but with the opposite result.

An immediate result of this picture is that there is no hint here that Christ as male can only save men but not women. He fully embraces both sexes (cf. Scott 1992:172). Sexual equality is not produced by noting some features like compassion in God the Father and in Jesus as feminine (as Boff 1988:170, 182), as all people in any case have characteristics of both sexes; the point is that one is dominant. Neither need it be suggested, with Hampson (1990:54), that we are baptized into a sexless Christ rather than into a male Jesus; this ignores the Acts evidence (eg. 8:16). On the contrary, Christ embraces both male and female in a full way, since he does not just include the feminine in his humanity (as Boff 1988:183), but fundamentally in his divinity. While the full inclusive humanity of Jesus had to be manifested in one sex, in this case the male, this was balanced by the feminine divine life. This provides an interesting twist to the ancient reason for a full incarnation: 'what is not assumed is not saved' [the argument of Gregory of Nazianzus to Apollinarius (Hampson 1990:55)]. Such an understanding gives a better identification with humanity, which in general lives in a close relationship between the sexes.

6. An overcoming of subordination

Perhaps the main advantage of the marriage picture is that it immediately resolves the fundamental drawback of *logos* Christologies, that the *logos* is implicitly subordinate (Pannenberg 1968:164). A sense of equality results from seeing the relationship of the first two persons as better pictured by husband and wife rather than by father and son. Even where there is an understanding of essential equality between people, so also between men and women, due to the equality of their salvation (Gal. 3:28), a better sense of this comes from the marriage analogy. Here the reference to the equality between God and the pre-incarnate Christ (Phil.

2:6) is particularly relevant. Incidentally, that the Christ was in the 'form' of God surely does not need to mean sexual identity, but rather full deity (as in Colossians 1:19, 2:9).

In this case, although God is the head of Christ, a man of his wife, and Christ of the Church (1 Cor. 11:3), it might be suggested that the word 'head' with its connotation of subordination, can perhaps better here be rendered 'source' (Smith 1993:119). The Genesis story of the rib comes to mind. Thus women are in no sense inferior to men; what may be observed is that much of the New Testament reference to the obedience and subjection of the wife to the husband is then for the purpose of the family, the granting of life. The comment of M. Barth (1974:610) is apposite; women are not subordinate to all men, but only to their husbands. Likewise the subjection and obedience of the Son to the Father is in the context of incarnation (Phil. 2:7), so for the giving of eternal life. It must also be pointed out that the ideal obedience of a wife to a husband is seen in terms of concurrence rather than in dominance; if the incarnate Christ is then seen in similar terms the old problem of two wills in one person is also resolved.

While respecting the equality between the persons, whether in God or in a human marriage, this picture does preserve the relationship of dependence. A wife is usually dependent upon her husband, at least was in the cultural situation of the New Testament, and in the Trinity the second person does receive from the first. Indeed this aspect is better pictured in marriage; whereas a wife's experience is of a continued relationship with her husband, a son becomes independent with maturity. Not only does the 'son' picture suffer from its temporality as implying birth, but it does not preserve the correct relationship.

Incidentally, sexual equality is more seriously lost if the Holy Spirit is regarded as feminine, as has been suggested (eg. Ruether 1983:59). Interestingly this imbalance is the opposite problem to that which occurs when the Son is masculine (Ruether 1983:60)! The problem is resolved if the Spirit is the bond in the Augustinian sense although with the danger, which Augustine rejects (Forte 1989:139) of the Spirit losing personality. He referred to the Spirit as the *vinculum amoris*, the bond of love. Here *amor* is an appropriate term for love between a couple, so is a better choice than *caritas*, which might have been expected.

7. Biblical allusions to a feminine second person

Thus the understanding of the pre-existent Christ as female is theologically attractive, and may in fact be seen as most consistent with a number of Biblical allusions. The strange reference to drinking from the supernatural rock which was Christ in the Exodus journey (1 Cor. 10:4) is consistent with that of the nursing mother, as are those to Christ's gift of living water (Jn. 4:14). 'It was also a Hebrew thought that the man who has assimilated the Divine Wisdom becomes himself, as it were, a fountain from which streams of the water of life proceed (Isa. 58.11)' (Bernard, in Scott 1992:189). Likewise the blatant sexuality of the Song of Songs makes more sense than to see the bride as Israel or as the church. Ruether (1983:140) insists that the primary application of the song is to love between divinities.

A well-known New Testament picture is also understandable in this way. John 1:18 refers to the Son 'in the bosom of the Father'. Now this does not have to be understood with sexual overtones, as for example when Lazarus went to Abraham's bosom (Lk. 16:22), or when the beloved disciple was reclining on Jesus' bosom (Jn. 13:23), as the basic meaning is of a close relationship; nevertheless a frequent use, certainly of the Old Testament term, is of the relationship between a husband and wife (cf. Scott 1992:113).

Sexual imagery is also found in the prophets, notably in Jeremiah, who complains that he was 'deceived', better 'seduced' (Thompson 1980:459) (Jer. 20:7). In this case it was the pre-existent Christ who was the inspiration for the prophets, who indeed claim that 'the Word of

the Lord' came to them, a term used in John's prologue as applying to the pre-existent Christ. It is also interesting that some visions of Christ are in female form, especially, and perhaps not surprisingly, in Montanism (Ruether 1983:131). This is an idea that has occurred in the Church from time to time, such as by Julian of Norwich (McLauchline 1990:119, Weisner 1990:132). Augustine wrote 'for just as a mother, suckling her infant ... so our Lord, in order to convert His wisdom into milk for our benefit, came to us clothed in flesh' ('On the Psalms' Vol. 2 cited in Smith 1993:138).

Sophia

Much early Christian theology indeed identified the pre-existent Christ with wisdom, hardly surprisingly when the parallels between Christ and Old Testament and intertestamental references to wisdom are seen (Balchin 1982:208). Paul, John and the author to the Hebrews all apply wisdom terminology to Christ (Balchin 1982:216-7). Matthew also has a full wisdom Christology, of which a striking example is Matthew's attribution to Jesus of words that Luke gives to wisdom (Matt. 23:34 = Lk. 11:49). New Testament affirmations about Christ are often paralleled by statements in the Old Testament about wisdom (eg. Ps. 104:24 = Col 1:16) and even more so by intertestamental writings (eg. Dunn 1989:201). The one through whom God created the world is identified with the Son in such texts as 1 Corinthians 8:6, Colossians 1:16, with the *logos* in John 1:3, and also identified with wisdom in Proverbs 3:19. Thus Hengel (1976:72), referring to Colossians 2:3, significantly very close to the high Christological statement of Colossians 2:9 'in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily', says that 'all the functions of wisdom were transferred to Jesus'. The major passages which undergird a doctrine of pre-existence all relate to wisdom ideas (Dunn 1989:164). 'God's wisdom entered a woman's womb' (Origen, cited by Johnson 1993:99).

The word 'wisdom' is of course feminine in both Hebrew and Greek, not that this proves anything, but is significant (Johnson 1993:87). Thus Philo refers to it as 'daughter of God and first born mother of the Universe' (*Quaest Gen 4:97*, cited in Hengel 1976:50). Interestingly, elsewhere, in the Alexandrian Wisdom of Solomon, it is not described as the daughter of God, but as his 'cohabitant'; other descriptions reappear as Christological statements in the New Testament (Hengel 1976:50). For Philo, God is the husband of wisdom (Dunn 1989:173). Interestingly he equates the rock of the wilderness with wisdom, so feminine (Dunn 1989:184) (cf. the identification with Christ in 1 Cor. 10:3).

Dunn (1989:39) actually notes the parallel between God's sending of wisdom (Wisd. 9:10) and Galatians 4:4, although then says that the identification is unlikely because wisdom is feminine! This is similar to Philo's problem; he says that although feminine, which for him must be subordinate, *sophia* has the qualities of a man (Hanson 1982:60). While on the one hand he says that wisdom is feminine so less than God, on the other he feels that the gender of the word should be ignored (*Fuga* 50-2, cited in Engelsman 1994:104). Perhaps to solve his problem, he tends to elevate *sophia* to heaven while her son, *logos*, takes her place and role on earth (Engelsman 1994:100). Scott (1992:85) however remarks that 'Paul should have seen no problem in the identification of a male character with a traditionally female one' (also Hanson 1982:60). Incidentally, identifying the pre-existent Christ with wisdom clarifies one of the most 'puzzling' (von Rad 1972:163) aspects of the Old Testament portrayal of wisdom, that it does not draw attention to God, as might be expected, but to herself. Wisdom does not reveal God's truth, but *is* that truth (Balchin 1982:218). There is a clear divine status.

For Philo, and for the Rabbis, wisdom is comparable to the plan or instrument with which God created the world (Hengel 1976:50). Scott (1992:50) notes the divinity of *sophia*, at the same level of God himself in the book of Proverbs. She is 'the creative and saving involvement

of Yahweh in the world' (Scott 1992:56). She is God's agent in creation (Prov. 3:19), a verse particularly significant in the light of 1 Cor 8:6. 'In Wisdom of Solomon, *Sophia* is effectively God in feminine form, equivalent to the more common Jewish expression of God in the masculine form, Yahweh' (Scott 1992:77). (Perhaps the only problem is it then identifies the rationality in God and so in humanity with the female!)

Of course, for the Jews, wisdom was identified with Torah, a move which Scott (1992:54, 78) suggests may be from a desire both to curtail her into the confines of a book and to mask her sexuality. However, it is significant that this was seen as sent from God (Hengel 1976:50); early Christianity then saw Jesus himself as the new Law (Hengel 1976:73). It is in keeping with this that Paul wrote about Christ 'whom God made our wisdom' (1 Cor. 1:30).

Thus the identification of Jesus with wisdom is natural (Bruce 1968:17). That this did not carry over more explicitly into the New Testament is no doubt due to the Hellenistic preference for the term *logos*, and its use in the Old Testament in connection with the prophets. John then spoke of God's immanent involvement in human affairs in male terminology rather than the more natural female imagery of *sophia* (Scott 1992:90). In fact Scott (1992) argues extensively that the *logos* Christology of the fourth gospel is of an incarnation of *sophia*. He sees extensive parallels, especially in the prologue, but also throughout the gospel, between Jesus and the Old Testament concept. Interestingly for today's situation, he sees an emphasis on women disciples in John replacing traditional male figures, so justifying female leadership in the modern church (Scott 1992:238), as Jesus is the incarnation of the female.

No doubt largely due to John, the early Church adopted *logos* rather than *sophia* terminology. The two terms were essentially interchangeable in the first century (Scott 1992:91), probably due to their equation in Wisdom 9:1 (Johnson 1985:286). They have almost exactly the same function (Pannenberg 1968:152-60). Later, Justin and Tertullian still treat them as interchangeable, while other fathers make some distinction (Dunn 1989:214). Perhaps also influential here is the fact that the reference to wisdom in Proverbs 8:22 refers to it as God's creation, albeit 'at the beginning of his work' so seems to go against its pre-existence. This was a thought taken up by Arius in his attempt to show that the Son was a created being; it is noteworthy here that identification of the Son with wisdom did come naturally to him. However Hengel (1976:70) points out that in fact it is impossible to conceive of God without his wisdom, and it must be observed that the word for 'create' in Proverbs 8:22 is not *bara* as in Genesis 1 but *qana*. Here Philo and Wisdom prefer to use concepts such as 'bringing forth' rather than 'creating'. Scott (1992:95) points out that the 'only begotten' of John 1:18 does parallel the *qana* of Proverbs. It is not without significance here that by means of the Genesis story of the rib, the woman is at the same time brought forth from the man and existed from his very beginning. It is also relevant that some references to *sophia* in Proverbs (eg. 8:27, 9:1) show her clearly existing before any material creation. Scott (1992:98) suggests that John is following the tradition of Wisdom 9:1 where there is no reference to the creation of *sophia*; indeed that *sophia*, as in John, is the agent of creation. So even though Athanasius did have to discuss Proverbs 8:22 at length to refute Arius, he could still use wisdom texts for this, as did the Cappadocians (Johnson 1985:290); thereafter however, he rarely referred to wisdom (Engelsman 1994:147). Much later, Augustine had no reticence in referring to Jesus as the incarnation of wisdom (Johnson 1993:99).

In this case it was also she who inspired the prophets, indeed that when they experienced the 'word of the Lord', this could be seen as the 'word of wisdom', bringing the two rival concepts in the New Testament environment together. Indeed wisdom has to be expressed in words if it is to be at all valuable and communicated. It is perhaps for this reason that the prophetic picture is of the word rather than wisdom, the active rather than the passive origin. It

is tempting to relate this to Philo's distinction between two types of *logos* (Dunn 1989:223), so that wisdom could be equated with the aspect that results in the other; *logos endiathetòs* as wisdom was expressed as *logos prophorikos*. Certainly the New Testament use of *logos* carries the nuance of expression (Dunn 1989:234), rather than the ability to express which is rather wisdom.

8. An aid to worship

Indeed the traditional Christian belief is to see God as only acting in the world by the second person (eg. 1 Cor. 8:6), thus maintaining the unity of the Trinity (Forte 1989:76, 151). This was an ancient understanding, such as by Justin, who saw the angel of the Lord in this way (Dunn 1989:150). In this regard it is noteworthy that the grace of God which is such a characteristic Christian virtue, and so much a characteristic of Christ, is essentially a female virtue; Scott (1992:108) notes its almost exclusive Old Testament association with women.

This is not to equate *YHWH* with the pre-existent Christ. Even where the actual agent is the feminine *sophia*, actions can be attributed to *YHWH*, and be in the masculine, reflecting the unanimity of speech expected from a married couple. The masculinity of *YHWH* is actually significantly reflected in a number of instances where Israel, and later the Church, is portrayed in terms of a wife. In the Old Testament the book of Hosea and Ezekiel 16 are prime examples. What is interesting is the way in which Christian theology then sees Israel as fulfilled in Christ, and the Church as the new Israel (Gal. 6:16), an identification strengthened by the oscillation between the corporate Israel and the Servant in the so-called 'servant songs' and also with the Son of Man (cf. Dunn 1989:75), both figures identified as the Christ in the New Testament.

Nevertheless it is then perhaps no accident that *kurios*, the Septuagint translation of *YHWH*, became the preferred title for Jesus in the early Church, particularly by Paul (Hengel 1976:7), who generally uses it in preference to 'son'. It is perhaps more appropriately applied to the second person of the Godhead, who acts and to whom the world primarily relates, then to the first, a distinction made in 1 Corinthians 8:6. It is noteworthy that Jesus accepted the title 'Lord' (Matt. 22:43, Mk. 12:37, Lk. 20:40) an identification carried on by the Acts church as a term of worship.

In addition to the theological advantages, this marriage analogy should also serve to heighten Christian devotion to Christ, in perhaps a similar way to the Catholic veneration of Mary. Paul may be accused of being a misogynist, but he does refer to the woman as the 'glory' of man (1 Cor. 11:7). It is not surprising then that Christ is portrayed as the glory of God (Heb. 1:3), and that John can write that as Christians 'we have beheld his glory' (Jn. 1:14), a clear allusion to the *Shekinah*, the 'manifestation of God in female imagery' (Johnson 1993:84). So often the Old Testament refers to the revelation of God in terms of his glory (Moltmann 1981:68), and when Jesus appeared transfigured to the select group of disciples on the mount of Transfiguration, they saw his glory and worshipped him (Lk. 9:32). Perhaps a fuller understanding of Christ as the glory of the Father (2 Cor. 4:6) can well elicit the same response in us.

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