

“Deity, Gender of: New Testament”

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Although it is true that people in the ancient world thought about categories of female and male, and the nature of sexual difference, interest in using gender as an analytical category is modern. Following the publication of Simone De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) in the 60’s, particularly in Europe and north America, gender came to be understood as malleable, unstable, and an effect of culture: one is not born but rather made into a girl or boy. Feminist analysis of gender next explored the effects of cultures of oppression on the development of male and female roles and ways that both sexes might be freed from the restrictions of gender norms. Applying the analytical category of gender to antiquity, scholars developed new research topics such as the construction of sexual difference and sexuality and ideals of masculinity. It is arguable that Greek philosophy from Plato and Aristotle begins with the idea of a male rational principle reflecting cosmic social order that, in turn, identifies an inferior female principle as materiality, body and emotions. Even if the account in the Hebrew Bible of the creation of humanity in the divine image includes both male and female (Gen 1:26), the privileging of masculine images for God in biblical and Christian tradition scarcely balances the notion that all language about God is metaphorical and analogical.

New Testament Language: *Proskuneo, Proskynesis*

The verb *proskuneo*, to prostrate before someone (usually male) or something more powerful, transcendent or holy; to do obeisance in the presence of a deified ruler, connotes respect, honor, worship and submission. Slaves and inferiors venerate and obey (their) masters (Gen 33:6; Matt 18:26). In Persian culture it is normative before divinized rulers like Cyrus (c.580-530 BCE) as Xenophon (*Cyropaedia* 5.3.18) describes in his 4th

C BCE biography of Cyrus the Great. In the Hebrew Bible Abraham venerates guests (Gen 18:2) and angels (Gen 19:1). To Joseph as Pharaoh's delegate in Egypt his brothers "came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground" (Gen 42:6). Angels, Jews including Jesus, Samaritans, Jewish proselytes and Jesus followers (later Christians) all worship God (Heb 1:6; Exod 34:14; John 4:20; Luke 4:8; Acts 8:27; Rev 7:11). Israel also worships other gods or idols (Num 25:2; Jud 2:12) and is warned away from them by prophets, judges and also God (Deut 4:19; 5:9).

The term *theos*, god, for the object of veneration, is predicated of Hellenistic rulers and Roman emperors. Roman emperors however did not use *theos* of themselves when communicating in Greek to subjects. Assimilating emperor to god, whether to Zeus, Helios or Dionysus, or empress to Hera, Aphrodite and Demeter is not about incarnation but as a predicate of divine power. Gods often appeared in human form (*theos epiphanes*) and immortality (*athanatos*) could be predicated of the emperor's benefaction and reign. Imperial cults are to express *eusebeia* (piety) towards the emperor/empress and to the gods.

Consider Alexander the Great and *proskynesis*. After Alexander defeated the Persian king Darius and became the king of Asia, he seems to have wanted to create personal power based on collaboration between trusted Macedonians/Greeks and Persians. In 331 Egyptian priests welcome Alexander as son of Zeus in temples in Egypt at Siwa and Bahariya. In 328, he proposes the introduction of *proskynēsis* as a demonstration of his status as king through an essential part of Persian court ceremonial. Historians of Alexander point out that certain Greeks and Macedonians refused to comply. After the death of Alexander in the ensuing struggles of the successors (*Diadochoi*), Diodorus

Siculus reports that Eumenes in 318BCE set up Alexander's throne in a royal tent, together with the diadem and other tokens of royalty to secure his status and facilitate transition to a new order by enjoining "common obeisance to Alexander as to a god" (18.60.4-61.2).

What of Jesus? It is too simplistic to say of Jesus in Matthew's gospel (BDAG 882b) that he "is rendered homage as messianic king and helper" since those first to venerate him as a child in Matthew's gospel are outsiders, namely Magi from the east (Matt 2:2; 2:11). Others, especially outsiders-- a leper, a centurion and a Canaanite woman --venerate Matthew's Jesus as a person of power (8:2; 9:18; 15:25; 20:20) while Jesus advocates worship of God (Matthew 4:10). Only once do disciples collectively recognize Jesus' power and venerate him as Son of God (NRSV Matt 14:33 "worshiped him"). With the case of Alexander in mind, we can imagine that for Greek readers, Jesus was on one occasion given divine honors by followers as a human Son of God. After resurrection, the same male and female disciples venerate Jesus although some doubt (Matt 28:9,17 cf. Luke 24:52). 1st century veneration of Jesus is a contested issue. Meanings of *proskynesis* exist in different contexts. It is not helpful to read 4th Century Christianity and confessional notions back into first century texts.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus is designated "Son of God" at baptism. Read through Roman lens, adoption involved a person's designation as successor to the emperor, which in the first century (when dynastic adoption was particularly frequent) would have meant highest honor. Thus references to Jesus' designation by God as "Son of God," "Christ," and "Lord", in Rom 1:3-4; Acts 2:36; Phil 2:9-11, and in Mark 1:11 indicate assigning to Jesus great honor associated with imperial adoption.

God as Father (Aramaic: *Abba*)

Jesus has only one father in Matthew's Gospel: the heavenly Father, object of the disciples' prayer in the Lord's Prayer. Disciples are siblings, that is, children of the heavenly Father. Furthermore, this affiliation is exclusive: Jesus admonishes his followers: "Call no one father on earth, for you have one Father, the one in heaven" (23:9). Throughout the Gospel Matthew also shows Jesus responding to the challenge of incorporating non-Jewish believers into Matthew's Jewish community. While there were provisions for converting to Judaism, at heart being Jewish was about being descended from the ancestral fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The "house of Israel" is not a metaphor; Israel was the other name of Jacob, and the house of Israel means the descendants of Jacob. The extent to which family controls participation in the Jewish community becomes apparent when one looks at inheritance law: strictly speaking, there was no possibility of making a will under Jewish Law, because Torah determined succession absolutely. The observant Jew could not will his estate to someone outside the family, nor could he or she inherit from someone who was not a Jew. This made converting to Judaism problematic for very practical reasons, since the convert became ineligible to inherit from anyone. Because inclusion in the Jewish community is so much a family matter, part of Matthew's task is to reframe family so that descent from Jacob or from Abraham is not required for full participation in the Matthean Jewish community. Matthew reserves the authority of "the fathers" to "the Father in heaven" alone. Only in the Gospel of Matthew does Jesus command his disciples, "Call no man father." Since God is the only Father Jesus recognizes, an absolute and uncompromising rejection of the

role or authority of the human, biological father distinguishes the composition of this family.

In spite of the fact that scholars since 1988 have made it clear that Abba isn't "Daddy," preachers and theologians continue to assert that Jesus' address to God (e.g. in Gethsemane) reflects a unique relationship, central to Jesus' teaching and distinct from Judaism. But is "Abba" isn't a unique way to address God.

In Mark's account of Gethsemane Jesus prays to be delivered from arrest, torture, and the crucifixion. "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want" (Mark 14:36). Only Mark's gospel preserves Jesus' address to God as "Abba" and only in Gethsemane. No other gospel indicates that Jesus prays to God in this way. And Mark's gospel has no version of the Lord's Prayer.

We can agree that only Mark conveys Jesus' use of Aramaic. When Jesus uses Aramaic, the words are translated into Greek presumably for the sake of Mark's listeners who were not familiar with Aramaic. The fact that Mark *translates* Jesus' Aramaic speech is worth noting. Is it likely that Jesus uttered a bilingual prayer in Gethsemane using both Aramaic and Greek in the opening petition? Probably not. But Mark renders the scene by keeping the strangeness of the Aramaic while translating the foreign words into Greek. So Mark moves hearers from the unknown language of Aramaic to the more universally known one, Greek by rendering "Abba" as "Father!"

Jesus' petitionary language is the same as that of other Jews of his time e.g. Sirach 23:1,4; Wisdom 14:3. In 4Q372 1:16, the "Joseph prayer," Joseph calls God "my Father" and pleads that God would save him from the hands of the Gentiles. So to argue

that no contemporary Jewish prayer contains this form of address for God is to ignore the evidence. Jesus is a devout Jew whose prayer language fits with his time and place.

Further, to argue that Jesus' use of "Abba" is unique is simply not true. On two occasions in his letters, Romans 8:15 and Gal 4:6, Paul describes "Abba, Father!" as the cry of believers calling on a relationship to God they can now claim as their own. Paul's letters predate the gospels. The cry "Abba, Father!" recorded by Paul expresses the ecstatic speech of those newly adopted into the faith from a Gentile background in Asia Minor or elsewhere. It is better to say that Jesus' address of God as "Abba" is distinctive rather than unique.

Son of (M)man/Human One

Some years ago, Geza Vermes indicated that when Jesus uses the term "son of man" self-referentially, it is a way of speaking about human identity. The titular usage employing capital letters, "the Son of Man," occurring in the NRSV, seems to refer to a specific figure, perhaps the one in Daniel 7:13. In both cases, the Greek word "*anthropos*" can be rendered inclusively as "the son of Humanity" or, with the Common English Bible, as "the Human One."

Logos

The Greek term "Logos" in John 1:1 is invariably rendered "Word" but, as we see from William Tyndale's rendition of John 1 in his 1526 New Testament, not invariably masculine.

Tyndale renders Logos in John 1:3 thus, "All things were made by it, and without it was made nothing that made was...In it was lyfe..." If the pronoun *autos* replaces and derives meaning from the antecedent noun, the appearance of *autou* in v.3 refers to Logos and since Logos is personified and inanimate, the translation of *autos* is "it." This is what Tyndale does. Now this rendition continues in the Geneva Bible of 1560 and the Bishop's Bible of 1568. Compare these three translations with the KJV 1611 Authorized Version which consistently renders Logos and the consequent pronoun *autos* as 3p.s "he"-- "All things were made by him..." So the translators of the KJV are proposing that Logos (the antecedent for *autos*) is equivalent to Jesus. But is this a fair rendition of John 1? I think not. If John had seen Logos as Jesus, John would have used Jesus instead of Logos. But John didn't do this. So Tyndale, and after him the Bishops Bible and the Geneva Bible attest a rendition of John 1 in English that better represents the Greek.

The rendition of Tyndale continues into v.14: "And that word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw the glory of it, as the glory of the only begotten son of the father, which word was full of grace and verite..." and is similarly rendered by the Bishops Bible and the Geneva Bible. But this is not the case with the KJV or the NRSV whose legacy passes into the RSV and the NRSV.

Sophia (Wisdom)

Scribes of the wisdom tradition in the Second Temple period composed the wisdom Psalms (Psalms 1 and 119, thanking God for the Torah; Psalm 19 praising God the Creator), the laments and arguments of Job, the hymns of Ben Sirach to creation and the

Torah and the poems about Wisdom inserted into the collections of Proverbs (such as 8:22-31) and the (Greek) Wisdom of Solomon.

Changes to the scribal profession occur in the Hellenistic period. Ben Sirach continues the traditional notions of conservative wisdom offering study in a school. When Greek became the common language, Greek ideas of the individual emerged in Qohelet (Ecclesiastes) and the Wisdom of Solomon. But Qohelet (Ecclesiastes) uses skeptical wisdom to argue against the justice of God and the developing idea of an afterlife. Other wisdom traditions include the idea afterlife (for the righteous faithful, according to the Wisdom of Solomon) and the idea that hidden wisdom is mediated through revelation.

In the poem of Sirach 24, Wisdom's role in creation and Israel's history is described. Whereas Job 28 described a search for Wisdom to which only God knows the way, Wisdom herself speaks here describing her origins: "I came forth from the mouth of the Most High and covered the earth like a mist." Hellenistic Goddesses like Isis spoke of themselves in this way. Wisdom traverses the earth seeking a resting place among all the nations. At the Creator's command, Wisdom takes up residence in Jerusalem, "taking root in an honored people" where she flourishes like "a cedar in Lebanon." Giving forth perfume and incense as part of temple worship, she next invites all who desire "to eat your fill of my fruits." Sirach then identifies Wisdom as Torah, "the law that Moses commanded us."

Sirach proposes that Wisdom is the creation and gift of Yahweh to humans. Torah cannot be attained by human effort. The idea that Wisdom as Torah descends from God presents an accessible Wisdom to a post-exilic audience in response to the destruction of

Jerusalem and the Temple. Now Wisdom is present in creation, dwelling with humans as Torah, and accessible to all through teaching that takes root and in teaching that is poured out like overflowing water. Sirach may have been the first to show Wisdom as Torah residing on earth. Gender analysis asserts that Wisdom is a creation of male authorship but the longevity of Wisdom traditions in the East and West invites reassessment.

Traditions of embodied wisdom continue in the New Testament. Jesus speaks as Wisdom herself in Matthew's gospel and in the Gospel of Thomas inviting all to "learn of me for I am meek and humble of heart" (11:28-30 cf. Gos Thomas #90).

Matthew's Jesus teaches higher righteousness through fulfillment of the Law. However Jesus' teaching reflects the shift of traditional wisdom teachings from the family to the individual incorporating a new context of the afterlife. Jesus' traditional teaching on marriage prohibits divorce except on grounds of adultery. In the same passage, Jesus also commends a distinct group of disciples who make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom. Now, married and single persons are included as Jesus' disciples. This would have been unimaginable in Proverbs.

Jesus Sophia traditions continue into early Christian and Byzantine history. According to Tertullian and Epiphanius, church "fathers" who wrote in the third and fourth centuries respectively, in the Montanist churches of Asia, Phrygia, and North Africa, spiritual gifts such as prophecies and visions abound. Founded by Montanus, with the female prophets Maximilla and Prisca, even Epiphanius' hostile reports attest charismatic speech. Maximilla, for example, reports a vision of the resurrected Christ. "In the form of a woman, clothed in a shining robe, Christ came to me and put wisdom in me and revealed to me that this place is sacred and that it is here that Jerusalem will

descend from heaven” (Epiphanius Panarion 49.1). Maximilla connects the appearance of Christ in a female form with wisdom granted to a woman.

From the 6th Century onwards, Byzantine icons and frescoes feature prominently in places of worship as intersections between the faithful and holy figures both in private devotion and public worship. Heirs to the Roman tradition of portrait painting and illustrated biblical and liturgical manuscripts, the range of images appears to be circumscribed. For example, in many examples of Jesus Christ Pantocrator icons, Jesus displays Matt 11:28, a passage connected with Wisdom, discussed earlier. But a different image of Jesus Sophia exists in the 14C. frescos of the church of S. Stefano in Soletto in Southern Italy (Salento). [Insert image] Byzantine hegemony in Southern Italy (880-1071) establishes the context of both Greek inscriptions and artistic expression of the Salento fresco artists into the subsequent Norman period. But Byzantine art historians ignore southern Italy, perhaps because the frescoes and art of Salento are on the edges of the Byzantine world. Maybe we could say instead that the fresco inscribed, “Sophia the Logos of God” in the east wall of the church is not an anomaly but “a Byzantine regional type with unusual iconographic features.”

Paraclete (Greek: *parakletos*)

When Jesus speaks of the Spirit *pneuma* as a masculine *parakletos* in John 14, 15 and 16, Jesus is speaking metaphorically. The first two appearances of the term *parakletos* occur after Jesus has directed the disciples to follow his commandments (14:15, 23) in order to attain eternal life. The *parakletos* functions in the context of judgment because that one will speak before God the judge on humankind’s behalf as one of more elevated status

than a legal patron (Latin: *advocatus*). In 14:1-7, it is the Spirit of truth who will teach and remind everyone of what Jesus said (14:26), will be a witness for Jesus and the disciples (15:26-7), and will convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (16:8-11). This is similar to Paul's statement in Romans 8:26, that "the Spirit itself intercedes in our unutterable groans."

John 16:7-8 Jesus declares, "I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the *parakletos* will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him (Greek: *auton*) to you. The subject is spoken of as a masculine personal pronoun "he" in agreement with the masculine *parakletos* but what the gospel writer wrote simply accords with the requirements of Greek grammar by matching the gender of the pronoun with the gender of the word or subject it has reference to. The text continues, "And He, when He (Greek "when that one") comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment..." Similarly, all the masculine pronouns in John 16: 13-14 are correct but correspond to the grammatically masculine *parakletos* that does not address the question whether the Spirit of truth is personified.

Conclusion

If John's Logos Christology, for example, is analyzed from a gender perspective, perhaps as dialogue with the Word, the gospel exhibits both emancipatory and constricting engagements between Jesus and individuals. Mary, as one whom Jesus loved, hosted the second-to-last supper, playing the role of Jesus, kneeling, wiping, and pouring out substance of inestimable value. Community leader, Mary is the host, the one who knows what is to come, the one who anticipates Jesus' example of foot washing and symbolically washes him. On the other hand, Jesus disaffiliates from his mother (2:4),

husbands from wives (4:17-18) and affiliates a new son to his mother from the cross (19:25-6). This mixed evidence is not unlike the problem of Anti-Judaism in the fourth gospel that reaches to the core of the message and is intrinsically oppressive rather than revelatory. One cannot excise anti-Jewish elements to save the healthy core of the message. A hermeneutical solution might be that scriptures themselves are not the only place or the end of divine revelation. The author of John was a fallible human being. Yet the gospel cannot be reduced to its anti-Jewish elements. It projects an alternative world of all-inclusive love and life that transcends its anti-Judaism and this world of the text rather than the world of the author is a witness to divine revelation.

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