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SOPHIA AND THE JOHANNINE JESUS

MARTIN SCOTT





**JOURNAL FOR THE STUDY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT
SUPPLEMENTAL SERIES**

71

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JSOT Press
Sheffield

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Martin Scott

Journal for the Study of the New Testament
Supplement Series 71



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Published by JSOT Press
JSOT Press is an imprint of
Sheffield Academic Press Ltd
The University of Sheffield
343 Fulwood Road
Sheffield S10 3BP
England

Typeset by Sheffield Academic Press

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Scott, Martin

Sophia and the Johannine Jesus.—(JSNT
Supplement Series, ISSN 0143-5108; No. 71)

I. Title II. Series

220.6

EISBN 9781850753490

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion and publication of a book is never without a history. I would be remiss to begin without acknowledging some of those who have been 'co-workers' in its appearance and to whom special thanks are due.

The initial seed of the ideas behind this work was sown during several years of theological study at the Baptist Theological Seminary, Rüschtlikon, Switzerland. To the faculty, and to the students of my generation there, I offer thanks for the stimulation and inspiration to research and to write. Since it has grown out of a PhD thesis accepted by the University of Durham in 1990, however, this book owes its greatest debt to Professor James D.G. Dunn, whose scrupulous attention was applied to it from start to finish. I am indebted to him for so willingly sharing his profound gifts of scholarship; but more than this, his friendship, encouragement, generosity and, at one particularly difficult point, his pastoral sensitivity went far beyond the call of duty. It remains a privilege to have had the opportunity of working with this Christian scholar and gentleman.

The book has taken shape during the course of both pastoral ministry and tutoring responsibilities. The task was considerably eased by the help and support of the staff at Northern Baptist College, Manchester, and in particular the Principal, Rev. Dr Brian Haymes. His continued interest in my work, his generous provision of accommodation and study space, and his pastoral awareness of the pressures involved were of immeasurable value in the final analysis. I am also grateful to our college secretary, Rhoda Smith, and to David Flavell and Rev. Roger Thomas for many practical helps in producing this book.

The book was accepted into the JSNT Supplement Series before his retirement by David Hill, whose kindness and helpful suggestions I would wish to acknowledge. The production editor, Webb Mealy, has

also offered much encouraging advice throughout the process of producing the final manuscript.

Finally, to my wife, friend and colleague, my debt is enormous. She is not mentioned here out of any convention, but rather because she has contributed greatly as a theologian to the final outcome of this book through many valuable insights and corrections. Her partnership in ministry enabled me to find time which otherwise would have been impossible. It is to her that this work is dedicated in love and in the hope that she will one day truly have the freedom to exercise fully her many gifts, in the footsteps of the Johannine women.

Martin Scott
Manchester, 1992

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
AJSL	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures</i>
ALGHJ	Arbeiten zur Literatur und Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ANET	J.B. Pritchard (ed.), <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts</i>
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
BAGD	W. Bauer, W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich and F.W. Danker, <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament</i>
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BDB	F. Brown, S.R. Driver and C.A. Briggs, <i>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
BDF	F. Blass, A. Debrunner and R.W. Funk, <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovaniensium
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur ZAW
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
ExpTim	<i>Expository Times</i>
ETL	<i>Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses</i>
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
Hatch-Redpath	E. Hatch and H.A. Redpath, <i>A Concordance to the Septuagint and Other Versions of the Old Testament</i> (2 vols.; Graz: Akademische Druck und Verlagsanstalt, 1954 [1897])
HR	<i>History of Religions</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	G.A. Buttrick (ed.), <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LUÅ	Lunds universitets årsskrift
NCB	New Century Bible

<i>NIDNTT</i>	C. Brown (ed.), <i>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i>
NovTSup	<i>Novum Testamentum</i> Supplements
<i>NRT</i>	<i>La nouvelle revue théologique</i>
NTD	Das Neue Testament Deutsch
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OIL	Old Testament Library
SANT	Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
SBLDS	SBL Dissertation Series
SBLMS	SBL Monograph Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
<i>SE</i>	<i>Studia Evangelica</i> I, II, III (= TU 73 [1959], 87 [1964], 88 [1964], etc.)
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SNT	Studien zum Neuen Testament
SNTSMS	Society of New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
<i>TDNT</i>	G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (eds.), <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Setting the Scene

Of all the New Testament documents, the Gospel of John has probably exerted more influence on the traditional christological formulations of the Church than any other. For this reason alone, the interpretation of Johannine Christology may well be seen as a crucial gauge of the contemporary concerns of the Church at any given point in history. As we approach the end of the second millenium of Christian witness, it might be tempting to imagine that there is little new to be said concerning it, not least when one considers the vast amount of ink already spilled on the subject! However, if the New Testament as a whole, and the Johannine contribution to it in particular, is to remain a *vital* part of Christian tradition, it must continue to respond to today's questions, however difficult these may be. We cannot be content with what it said 'back then' without asking what it says to the 'here and now'.

It is out of a 'here and now' question that this book arises, namely, the issue of the role of women in the Christian community. The question has been approached from many different angles, most often by those seeking to support one view or another concerning the ordination of women. However, interest in the particular subject matter of this study was stimulated initially by the author's participation in a seminar on the subject of 'Women in the Gospels'. At the time, the only significant available material on the subject relating to the Johannine tradition was an article by Raymond Brown briefly outlining some of the notable features of the Johannine women.¹ This prompted further reflections, among which the most striking observation was the prominence of women at crucial *christological* points in

1. R.E. Brown, 'Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel', in *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), pp. 183-98.

the unfolding drama of the Fourth Gospel. It was that unexplained connection between Christology and the role of women which proved to be the seed out of which this study has grown. Subsequently, the recognition of the crucial influence of Wisdom speculation on the Johannine picture of Jesus, especially as noted by Brown,¹ and as further reinforced by James Dunn's conclusions,² led the author to investigate the significance of the *gender*³ of Sophia in the development of Johannine Christology. This in turn provided a basis for trying to understand the relationship between Christology and the role of women in particular.

The overall purpose of this book is twofold: first, to examine in detail the relationship between the Jewish figure of Wisdom, known by her Greek name Sophia, and the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel. Secondly, to investigate what effect, if any, the use of a female figure as a basis for christological reflection had on the way in which women were portrayed in the Gospel. The choice of the name Sophia, rather than the abstract term Wisdom, is deliberate since it immediately reveals her gender.⁴ The importance of that will become clearer as we examine the problem faced by New Testament writers, and in particular the

1. R.E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1966), *passim*.

2. J.D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: An Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (London: SCM Press, 2nd edn, 1989 [1980]), pp. 163-212; 'Let John be John: A Gospel for its Time', in P. Stuhlmacher (ed.), *Das Evangelium und die Evangelien* (WUNT, 28; Tübingen: Mohr, 1983), pp. 309-39.

3. Since this book was produced as a PhD thesis, the author has become increasingly aware of the distinction made by many feminists between 'gender' and 'sex'. While at times an attempt has been made to use the word 'femaleness' instead of 'gender', it was unrealistic to adapt the thesis style to do this consistently. In the large majority of cases, the word 'gender' may be taken to mean 'femaleness' or 'female sex'.

4. The use of the Greek name also reveals my assumption that the Fourth Evangelist used Greek as the language for writing the Gospel from the beginning, rather than Aramaic, 'even though the language displays many Semitisms or Semitic colouring' (R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St John* [London: Burns & Oates, 1968], I, p. 11). This presupposition is of some importance with respect to my handling of materials in Chapter 3, where reference will be made to the Septuagint (LXX) text of the writings under consideration rather than to the Hebrew text (MT), even where this is extant (Proverbs). For a review of the research on the linguistic origins of the Gospel, see Schnackenburg, *John*, I, pp. 105-11.

Fourth Evangelist, in seeking to identify an exclusively female figure with the male Jesus.

Some might want to ask already at this point if there is not a danger of engaging in a pure flight of fantasy. Was the *gender* of Sophia ever seen as a problem by the Wisdom writers themselves, much less by the evangelists and other New Testament writers, in their application of her features to Jesus? Is not Sophia 'merely' another of those metaphors picked up and reinterpreted by the early Christian theologians? Are we not simply imposing a twentieth-century question on texts which are hopelessly inadequate to answer it? These are important questions, and I shall attempt to address them under the rubric 'Who is Sophia, What is She?', outlining both the development of Sophia as a figure in Jewish speculation and the importance of her femaleness in that development. My aim will be to show that the Fourth Evangelist could not but have been conscious of the issue of gender in adopting Sophia as the *primary* source for christological reflection at the end of the first century (CE). How satisfactorily s/he¹ did this in the context of that day will be open to scrutiny.

If these questions dominate Chapters 2 and 3, then Chapter 4 is concerned with the way in which the Christology of the Fourth Evangelist affects the portrayal of women in the Gospel. While the paradigmatic nature of the women's discipleship has been noted before, I shall point to the way that the influence of Sophia extends also to this area, providing a 'perceptive corrective'² to other New Testament writings which stress the subordination of women. In addition it may cause us to reassess the role which women may actually have played in the community to which the Fourth Gospel was originally addressed.

Inevitably, the approach taken here and the type of questions being asked together raise the issue of methodology. We find ourselves in an era of New Testament scholarship which, perhaps more than any

1. In the conclusions to Chapter 4, I will speculate on the possibility that the Fourth Gospel was written by a *woman*, rather than assume the traditionally held view of male authorship. I recognize, of course, that it is more likely, given the historical situation of the early Church and the very limited educational opportunities afforded to women of that era, that the author was male. However, taking into account the nature of the later conclusions below regarding the role of women in the Johannine community, I would wish at least to leave the issue of the sex of the author open through the designation adopted (s/he or him/her) on the few occasions throughout the book when a personal pronoun is required by English usage.

2. Brown, *Community*, p. 186.

before, lacks a clear or unified approach to method.¹ Yet despite this, there is at least some common ground in terms of the aims of employing a particular type of methodology. Two principles are worthy of note in relation to any New Testament method: first, it must aim at *exactness*, or precision, in handling the subject material. Secondly, it should seek to enable the writer to say something *reasonably secure* about the subject matter addressed. However, as Sanders has remarked, 'finding agreement about the ground rules by which what is relatively secure can be identified is very difficult'.² The increasing polarity between exponents of different 'schools' of methodology does nothing to aid the task of scholarly dialogue, an important part of the process of seeking an authentic interpretation of the Bible today.

One approach which has come in for particularly dismissive treatment from some quarters of the predominantly male academic community is feminist interpretation. Now there is as much variety among feminist approaches as, for example, among the new literary schools, so it is difficult to make generalizations in discussing method. However, it would be fair to say that many feminist biblical scholars have developed and work with a *heuristic* approach to the text. This allows questions to be asked of the biblical materials which have led both to tentative new historical reconstructions, and to imaginative and refreshing forms of theological reflection which would have been impossible to achieve using traditional historical-critical methodology alone. Fiorenza sums up the ideal of such method when she says, 'the task is, therefore, not so much rediscovering new sources, as rereading the available sources in a different key'.³

It will become clear to the reader in the course of this study that it is to this heuristic approach that I am most indebted. While I would not be so presumptuous as to call this book a 'feminist' work (the author being male!), I have sought to take seriously the insights of feminist scholarship in formulating an approach to the text. In doing so I have attempted to bear in mind the principal aims of methodology outlined earlier. The first methodological principle of *exactness* carries with it the necessity to take serious account of the text itself and

1. For the fullest recent discussion of the variety of both Old Testament and New Testament approaches to methodology, see R. Morgan and J. Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

2. E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1985), p. 3.

3. E.S. Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (London: SCM Press, 1983), p. xx.

ultimately to judge the results of this study in the light of it, particularly where my findings run contrary to traditionally held interpretations. This is not to imply that exactness should be equated with *objectivity* in an empirical sense, for all New Testament study is coloured by the background and starting point of the individual commentator. Responding to the accusation often levelled at feminist writers, that they are merely projecting back today's questions onto texts which cannot possibly answer them, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza says:

Such an argument overlooks the fact that all scholarship on early Christianity is determined by contemporary questions and interests. Biblical historical inquiries are always determined by ecclesial and societal interests and questions.¹

While I agree wholeheartedly with Fiorenza's sentiments here, I also recognize the danger of lapsing into a methodology which overlooks the *historical context* of the New Testament writings in a desire to claim authenticity for one's own understanding.² Responding to this potential danger, Susanne Heine comments:

Over against this I would set an understanding of scholarship which begins from an awareness of its limitations: there is a particular method for every object which produces a corresponding result. Every method begins from a heuristic interest which determines the results and which must also be taken into account for exactness.³

What then do I mean by a *heuristic* methodology? Essentially this means that we are setting out to find certain answers (which can only at best be provisional) to specific questions which we address to the text. This is not to say that these questions are simply drawn at *random* from our twentieth-century interests and imposed on the Johannine text. On the contrary, I hope to show that they are questions both related to and determined by the text.

There are two angles from which this may be seen in relation to the overall theme of Jesus and Sophia in this study. On the one hand we

1. E.S. Fiorenza, 'You are not to be Called Father: Early Christian History in a Feminist Perspective', *Cross Currents* 3 (1979), p. 32.

2. I am *not* implying that this is a danger to which Fiorenza herself has succumbed.

3. S. Heine, *Women and Early Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1987), p. 5.

are faced with texts written in a particular era, with all the implications of their historical context, which talk about the man Jesus, using language which, in the context of Jewish literature and its environment, can be identified as characteristically used of the female figure Sophia. Was this language, which scholars have clearly identified as evocative of Wisdom tradition, used by John in order *deliberately* to evoke Sophia? Since the language in which the text was written itself indicates the gender of words by use of articles, we may ask whether or not it is historically possible or plausible that the Fourth Evangelist was *conscious* of the femaleness of Sophia as an issue in identifying her with Jesus. Firm conclusions here may not be possible, but we may look for pointers both in the historical environment leading up to and surrounding the writing of the Fourth Gospel, and in the language and method of the Fourth Evangelist. Whatever conclusions we come to, however, it is the Evangelist's choice of language, given its use elsewhere, and its presence *in the text*, which provokes the question.

On the other hand, the heuristic method is not completely dependent on historical *certainty* in order to make a valid interpretation of the text. It might be argued that it is impossible to enter the mind of the Fourth Evangelist and determine the reasons for the choice of the particular language employed. However, we may still legitimately look at that language in the light of that used by other writers up to the era of the New Testament and ask whether or not it is possible to *read that language in a new way* which interacts also with our contemporary experience and situation.

The heuristic methodology seeks to employ both these approaches to the text. While I agree with Morgan that 'historical truthfulness is a value worth preserving',¹ I also remain aware that it is never absolute. Fiorenza reminds us that 'historical "objectivity" can only be approached by reflecting critically on and naming one's theoretical presuppositions and political allegiances'.² The word 'political' is here used in its widest sense—an important observation, when we consider that the primary subject material of this work touches upon two of the most sensitive areas of modern Christian 'politics', namely, (1) the question of the adequacy of human language (particularly in its use of *gender* terms) in relation to talking about God, and (2) the role of women in the Christian community. If 'allegiances' are to be declared

1. Morgan and Barton, *Biblical Interpretation*, p. 159.

2. Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, p. xvii.

in the interests of exactness, then it is important to alert the reader to two basic convictions held by myself as the writer.¹ First, while *all* human language is ultimately inadequate in expressing our understanding of God, the traditional custom of referring to God *only* in male terminology is the more inadequate because of its restricted code. Secondly, the striving towards equality of opportunity for women and men in all avenues of Christian service and leadership (whether lay or ordained) is not simply desirable, but is *necessary* in the search for a holistic understanding of Christian community.

These two issues are not directly addressed in this book, but they are part of the context out of which I approach the task of New Testament exegesis. Like Fiorenza, 'I do not want to advocate a value-free exegesis but only to clarify the values at stake'.² In the heuristic endeavour I shall address questions which I believe to be provoked by the text itself, but which may not have been clearly heard before. This may be due to some extent to the constraining influence of traditional historical-critical methodology. The formulation of questions in this study, however, will also show dependence on the influence of feminist New Testament scholars, whose willingness and courage to break free from the dominant male-oriented practice of theology has challenged the roots of much of my thinking.

The heuristic method used here depends on an interaction between text and question. While the questions come out of a contemporary interest and are influenced by factors not necessarily part of the original context of the New Testament world, the text nevertheless remains a fundamental part of the dialogue and itself governs the answers. In terms of my overall thesis, this means that the presence of *female* Sophia in the text of the Old Testament and intertestamental writings poses the question of *gender* in relation to God, even if some might say that this was not a conscious issue in the mind of the original writer. The phenomenon of the parallelism between the text of the Fourth Gospel and statements concerning female Sophia further poses the question of gender in relation to the man Jesus.

Despite adopting such an approach, I will not abandon the tools of historical criticism. These will be of particular importance in attempting to determine the meaning of specific texts in context. Thus the

1. I do not demand that the reader shares these convictions, but state them in order that they may be 'taken into account for exactness'.

2. Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, p. 27.

chosen methodology should not be construed as anti-historical-critical, but rather as one which seeks to use the best features of that method within what is arguably a more imaginative and flexible framework.

Apart from the principle of returning to the text and its context, what checks and balances may be employed with regard to the criterion of 'exactness'? Here, perhaps, the dictum proposed by Sanders may be helpful: 'how sure are we of the possible range of meanings of any given action or saying; how many lines of evidence converge towards the same meaning'.¹ It is fairly obvious that the need to maintain a reasonable flow of thought, taken with the constraints of time and volume, will limit the extent to which it is possible to list and examine *all* the ranges of meaning of every text and subject touched upon. However, I will attempt to indicate the extent to which I believe my interpretation should be seen as possible or probable. The second part of Sanders's statement will be of particular importance in the third and fourth chapters, where the *number* of lines of evidence converging towards the conclusions reached will, to a large extent, help to determine their validity as answers to the questions posed.

What then are the key questions to answer? First, I want to ask how significant the femaleness of Sophia was in her emergence as a figure in Jewish thought. To what extent were the Jewish writers *aware* of this femaleness in their reflections on her? Is there any evidence to suggest that her femaleness was seen as *problematic*, in particular in relation to both monotheism and Yahwism?

Secondly, I ask whether or not there is evidence to support the claim that the Fourth Evangelist used Sophia as a background, or model, for the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel. If so, could the Evangelist have been conscious of a *gender problem* in identifying the male Jesus with a female figure? If Sophia indeed lies behind the Prologue in some measure, does she also effectively influence the Gospel as a whole, and to what extent? If the Fourth Evangelist has used Sophia as some kind of model, what method is used to present this christological perspective?

Thirdly, I ask what effect such use of Sophia Christology might have had on the Fourth Evangelist's portrayal of female figures in the Gospel. What function do women have in the Gospel? How do they relate to John's picture of Jesus? Is there any evidence of influence

1. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, p. 9.

from Sophia tradition on the stories concerning women? What, if anything, can be inferred from our conclusions concerning the community to which the Fourth Gospel is addressed?

Lastly, I will want to ask briefly what conclusions this reading of the text may allow us to draw in relation to the modern day Christian community. Whatever the Fourth Evangelist may have intended the Johannine community to understand by giving women a prominent role and using Sophia as a cornerstone of Christology, it is in the contemporary Church that the Gospel is now read, and it is that community which it must now address.

Setting the Context

A study of this kind does not develop in a vacuum, but naturally relates to other works which form its context. We shall briefly examine the three major areas of biblical study—Wisdom Studies, Johannine Christology, and Women in the New Testament—with which this book interacts, in order that the reader may form a clearer picture of where we come from and where we are seeking to go.

Wisdom Studies

The Wisdom literature of Israel has always posed problems for biblical scholars, because of its consistent defiance of attempts at schematization or simple categorization. In contrast to the Old Testament's general preoccupation with divine purpose and order in Israel's life and history, the Wisdom writers present a marked strand of 'secularity', which shows more interest in everyday life experience and the benefits of sound common sense than in discerning Yahweh's word and will. The discovery that Israel's Wisdom literature was also 'a phenomenon common to the ancient East, a cultural commodity with respect to which Israel was to a great extent a recipient and not a donor',¹ has led to it being placed within the context of the wider ancient Near Eastern world rather than being seen in the splendid isolation of comparison only with other Old Testament traditions.

Much of the study of Wisdom literature has concentrated on the task of making comparisons between Israel's Wisdom and that of other traditions, notably those Egyptian, Canaanite and Mesopotamian

1. G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1972), p. 9.

materials unearthed this century.¹ While the comparative approach provided many illuminating parallels, its value lay in the basis it gave for understanding Israel's use of ancient Near Eastern traditions within the context of a *monotheistic* framework of faith. The more recent approach has been to ask how what was *adopted* has been understood and *adapted* by those who borrowed it from the wider religious climate of their day.²

The discussion of Sophia herself has tended to centre on two main issues: the influence of ancient Near Eastern goddesses on her formation, and the question of her status as personification or hypostasis. In neither of these areas has much attention been directed to the issue with which we are concerned here, namely her *gender significance*. Thus we find that Mack, in his influential study on the relationship between Logos and Sophia in the later stream of Jewish Wisdom represented by the Wisdom of Solomon and the works of Philo, can talk quite freely of Sophia representing part of a mythological scheme whereby it became possible to develop a 'theology of the transcendence of God',³ without ever discussing the implications of using a *feminine* figure to do so. This comes across even more clearly in the language which authors use to describe Sophia's function, for example, in Dunn's claim that *she* is 'a way of speaking about God

1. Examples of this approach include W.F. Albright, 'The Goddess of Life and Wisdom', *AJSL* 36 (1919–20), pp. 258–94; W.O.E. Oesterley, *The Wisdom of Egypt and the Old Testament* (1927); J. Fichtner, *Die altorientalische Weisheit in ihrer israelitisch-jüdischen Ausprägung* (BZAW, 62; Giessen: Töpelmann, 1933); H. Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom* (London: University Microfilms International Reprints, 1980 [1947]); H. Gese, *Lehre und Wirklichkeit in der alten Weisheit* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1958).

2. So, for example, R.N. Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs* (London: SCM Press, 1965); B.L. Mack, *Logos and Sophia: Untersuchungen zur Weisheitstheologie im hellenistischen Judentum* (SUNT, 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973); J.L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (London: SCM Press, 1982); B. Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: An Israelite Goddess Redefined* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1986). There has also been a growing recognition of the influence that Israel's Wisdom traditions exercised on other Old Testament writers, including the Prophets and the Deuteronomic historians. See, for example, R.B.Y. Scott, *The Way of Wisdom in the Old Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1971); D.F. Morgan, *Wisdom in the Old Testament Traditions* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

3. Mack, *Logos und Sophia*, p. 6.

himself. . . without compromising *his* transcendence'¹

One recent exception to this trend has been the work undertaken by Claudia Camp attempting to relate the figure of Sophia to other feminine aspects of the book of Proverbs and to ground this in a plausible *Sitz im Leben*.² She sees the feminine aspects of the book, including Sophia herself, as 'serving to unify the composition and message of the book',³ a fact which is demonstrated by the way in which the Sophia poems of chs. 1-9 are balanced at the end of the book by two poems about women. She sums this unifying function up by concluding that 'in the book of Proverbs, one stands or falls in the eyes of God and community based on one's relationship to various women'.⁴ Camp sees the divine Sophia and the idealized woman of Proverbs 31 as symbols legitimizing the changing society of postexilic Israel, where a 'greater balance in the contributive roles of women and men. . . would be expected in a period of economic pressure, deurbanization, and incipient democratization'.⁵ Camp presents us with a serious and worthwhile attempt to understand the significance of Sophia's femaleness in the midst of an overwhelmingly patriarchal tradition.⁶

Camp's interest lies in the literary function of Sophia within the book of *Proverbs*. While her conclusions may point us to the way in which the gender of Sophia may be taken seriously, they cannot take us far enough towards understanding Sophia's significance in the New Testament era. We will need to come to some understanding of the dichotomy which exists in the book of Sirach between the exalted figure of Sophia as the embodiment of Torah in Sirach 24 and the very negative attitude of the author towards women. I will seek to show that this can only be resolved by understanding Sophia's relationship to Torah as an attempt at confinement, and a move toward the removal of her significance as a *female* figure. Further developments of this will also be investigated in the work of Philo, who, far from

1. Dunn, *Christology*, p. 176 (italics mine).

2. C. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Bible and Literature Series, 11; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985).

3. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, p. 255. For an example of how this functions, see her analysis on pp. 191-207.

4. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, p. 256.

5. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, p. 290.

6. This remains true whether or not we accept either her rather random methodology or the accuracy of her analysis of postexilic society in Israel.

presenting an *asexual* view of God,¹ betrays a somewhat sinister motive in seeking to confine Sophia to the heavenly realm. Philo's attitude to Sophia will be seen as important because of the emergence of his work in such close temporal proximity to the writings of the New Testament, and thus as a witness to the currency of discussion of the *gender* of Sophia as an issue in at least one branch of first-century CE Judaism.

The discussion of the influence of ancient Near Eastern goddesses on Sophia speculation has always been problematic. Some have sought to draw out a series of linguistic parallels, for example, between Isis traditions and the figure of Sophia in Wisdom of Solomon,² but the attempt has proved largely unsatisfactory.³ More helpful have been studies which have pointed to the way general configurations of ideas connected with the goddess have exercised an influence at various stages of Sophia's development.⁴ This second approach is nearer to the one which I will adopt, for I will define some specific areas in which similarities may be seen between Sophia and the goddesses. However, my aim will be to establish that the needs and experiences of the people of the ancient Near East, which were projected onto the goddesses, particularly through the fertility cults, were common *universal* needs. I will ask if the Jewish Wisdom writers saw in the female figure Sophia a means of response to these needs while attempting to retain allegiance to the concept of monotheism. In other words, I will be setting out to show that there was an identifiable desire to find an expression of femaleness in the deity, which was met, at least in Proverbs and more clearly in the Wisdom of Solomon, through the use of the female figure Sophia.⁵

1. This is the view of R.A. Baer, *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female* (ALGHJ, 3; Leiden: Brill, 1970). I shall argue that this fits Baer's scheme more than it reflects Philo's intentions!

2. Cf. J.M. Reese, *Hellenistic Influence on the Book of Wisdom and its Consequences* (AnBib, 51; Rome: Pontifical Institute, 1970).

3. See the critique offered of Reese's work by J.S. Kloppenborg, 'Isis and the Book of Wisdom', *HTR* 75 (1982), pp. 60ff.

4. Cf. on Proverbs, Lang, *Wisdom and Proverbs*; on Sirach, W.L. Knox, 'The Divine Wisdom', *JTS* 38 (1937), pp. 230-37; on Wisdom of Solomon, Kloppenborg, 'Isis', pp. 57-84.

5. I shall seek to avoid the problem of reading back too many conclusions concerning the position of women in society from the cultic references of the ancient Near East. The view of M. Daly (*Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of*

In relation to the Wisdom traditions of Israel, then, our discussion will be directed to three areas. First, we will look at the question of the significance of Sophia's femaleness from her earliest manifestation in the book of Proverbs through to the beginning of the Christian era in the Wisdom of Solomon and Philo. Secondly, we will aim towards a more precise understanding of the reasons for Sophia's identification with Torah in Sirach and Baruch, and for her confinement and transsexual switch in the writings of Philo. Thirdly, we will examine the influence of ancient Near Eastern goddesses on Sophia with a view to determining the extent to which each expresses a universally felt need for feminine participation in the act of creation and lifegiving. All this we shall do in awareness of the need for Israel to set any speculation in the context of a monotheistic faith.

The Christology of John

The precise nature of Johannine Christology has been a subject of discussion almost from the day the Gospel was written. Within the canon of the New Testament itself, the Johannine Epistles already seem to reflect a struggle against adversaries associated with the community itself, whose interpretation of Johannine Christology led them down the path towards gnosticism.¹ It is clear that, by the middle of the second century, gnostic movements were using the Fourth Gospel as a significant stepping-off point for their own particular brands of speculation.² Indeed, the Valentinian gnostic Heracleon wrote a commentary on the Gospel³ which may well have contributed to the fact that the Gospel itself was open to a charge of gnostic origins as late as the

Women's Liberation [Boston: Beacon Press, 2nd edn, 1985], p. 93), 'that there was a universally matriarchal world which prevailed before the descent into hierarchical domination by males', is difficult to sustain historically. J. Ochshorn (*The Female Experience and the Nature of the Divine* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981], pp. 92-132) has given at least a plausible argument for the possibility that the sexes were viewed more or less equally in some areas of cultic practice, but this does not necessarily imply anything about the role of women in society at large.

1. Brown correctly comments: 'it may well be that the position of the epistolary adversaries had not yet jelled into a distinctive gnostic system of thought'. R.E. Brown, *The Epistles of John* (New York: Doubleday, 1982), p. 64.

2. Brown, *Epistles*, pp. 104-106.

3. Cf. E.H. Pagels, *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis: Heracleon's Commentary on John* (SBLMS, 17; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973).

early third century.¹ However, as Käsemann's famous description of the Fourth Gospel's Christology as a 'form of naïve docetism'² shows us, the issue of John's orthodoxy has remained a question right up to our own day.³

Modern debate on Johannine Christology inevitably begins with the Prologue and in particular the issue of the source from which the Fourth Evangelist has drawn the Logos concept. While there are many nuances attached by scholars to the theories, there are really only three sources which have been mooted seriously as possible source material for the Prologue: a Gnostic background; a link with Philo; a connection with Wisdom traditions.

The classic statement of a proposed Gnostic background to Johannine Christology was given by Rudolf Bultmann, who sought to establish links between Mandaean thought, as representative of a Gnosticism opposed in the Johannine writings, and the picture of Jesus in John.⁴ Bultmann argued that the Logos concept in the Prologue, combined with the apologetic material related to John the Baptist, represented an attempt by the Fourth Evangelist to counter the claims of a Gnostic group who held some allegiance to the Baptist. He saw in the Prologue a reworked version of a Gnostic hymn in praise of the Logos, which the Fourth Evangelist demythologized from its Redeemer-Myth origins into a presentation of Jesus Christ as the Logos who has come ἐν σαρκί.⁵

1. On the history of the early reception of the Fourth Gospel, see J.N. Sanders, *The Fourth Gospel in the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943).

2. E. Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17* (trans. G. Krodel; London: SCM Press, 1968 [1966]), p. 26.

3. Recently, M.M. Thompson has felt it necessary to reassert the authenticity of the Johannine picture of Jesus Christ as fully human, over against Käsemann's stance: *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

4. Cf. R. Bultmann, 'Die religionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund des Prologs zum Johannes-Evangelium', repr. in *Exegetica: Aufsätze zur Erforschung des Neuen Testaments* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1967), pp. 1-35; *idem*, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (trans. G. Beasley-Murray; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), *passim*.

5. Cf. Bultmann, *John*, pp. 11-83; *idem*, *Theology of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1955), II, pp. 12-14. However, even Bultmann is forced to admit the probability of a connection between Logos and Sophia, though he sees her as thoroughly subsumed in Gnostic thought patterns. Cf. Bultmann, *John*, pp. 22-

Bultmann's methodology and conclusions have been criticized by numerous scholars,¹ so we need note only a couple of points. One major problem is that we have no evidence that Gnostic speculation *in the form posited by Bultmann* actually existed in the period up to the writing of the Fourth Gospel. Again, there is also no evidence whatsoever of a connection of such thought with John the Baptist. We may want to agree with Rudolph, that Gnosticism 'was originally a non-Christian phenomenon which was gradually enriched with Christian concepts until it made its appearance as independent Christian Gnosis',² but that the Fourth Gospel either attempts to counter such influence, or belongs to the process of its emergence, remains far from clear. However, perhaps the most significant counter to Bultmann's theory is that it is utterly unnecessary to seek the origins of the Logos in this way.³ As I shall argue, the Logos concept can be understood quite fully without any reference to a supposed Gnostic Redeemer Myth for which there is only the most insubstantial evidence available.

A second theory regarding the origins of the Logos proposes dependency upon Philo.⁴ In listing a number of parallels between Philo and the Prologue to John, Dodd finds a *λόγος* concept in many respects similar to that of Philo, and it is 'difficult not to think that the

23. See further my critique in the discussion of the prologue in Chapter 1.

1. Cf. E. Percy, *Untersuchungen über den Ursprung der johanneischen Theologie zugleich ein Beitrag zur Frage nach der Entstehung des Gnostizismus* (Lund: Gleerup, 1939); E. Schweizer, *Ego Eimi* (FRLANT, 56; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2nd edn, 1965 [1939]); R. Schnackenburg, 'Logos-Hymnus und johanneischer Prolog', *BZ* 1 (1957), pp. 69-109; *idem*, *John*, I, pp. 481-93; Brown, *John*, I, pp. lii-lvi. However, Bultmann still has some qualified followers, most notably S. Schulz, *Komposition und Herkunft der johanneischen Reden* (BWANT, 5.1; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960); *idem*, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975).

2. K. Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of an Ancient Religion* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), p. 276.

3. Brown, *John*, I, p. lvi.

4. The most forthright proponent of this idea has been A.W. Argyle, 'Philo and the Fourth Gospel', *ExpTim* 63 (1951-52), pp. 385-86; 'The Logos of Philo: Personal or Impersonal', *ExpTim* 66 (1954-55), pp. 13-14. Cf. the reply by R.McL. Wilson ('Philo and the Fourth Gospel', *ExpTim* 65 [1953-54], pp. 47-49), who argues that they both develop from similar backgrounds without a necessary dependence. However, the overall argument has been more carefully put by C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), pp. 54-73.

author intended this'.¹ However, although Philo might seem a better starting point than Gnosticism, especially because of his Jewish faith and his evident use of a Logos concept, caution must be observed in drawing any direct connection between the two. Since Philo and the Fourth Evangelist both show dependence on the wider tradition of Jewish Sophia speculation in the outworking of their respective Logos concepts, the likelihood is that they share a common background in that tradition, rather than that they show direct lines of dependence on one another. It is quite clear that Philo's understanding of the Logos is radically different from that of John, and this opinion will be reinforced in our examination of the different ways that both authors deal with the femaleness of Sophia.

The third major option for understanding the Logos of the Fourth Gospel is the view that it stems from Wisdom tradition. This was already suggested in modern times as early as 1917 by J.R. Harris,² whose treatment seems remarkably modern even today. However, owing largely to the excitement raised by the influence of the history of religions school and Bultmann in particular, the idea was not seriously taken up again until more recently. Brown's contribution has been particularly important,³ but others,⁴ including even Dodd,⁵ have shown interest in this background. Most recently the works of Dunn⁶ and Willett⁷ have moved us towards an even deeper appreciation of Sophia's influence, not only in the Prologue, but also in the Gospel as a whole. With all this work there has been a growing realization that we need no longer search outside the boundaries of Jewish thinking in order to find a plausible source for understanding the Johannine Logos.

It is at this point that this study enters the field of play. In the first instance, I will take up the point that the *gender significance* of Sophia has not yet been fully recognized in the writings of those interested in

1. Dodd, *Interpretation*, p. 277.
2. J.R. Harris, *The Origin of the Prologue to St John's Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1917).
3. Brown, *John*, I, pp. cxxii-cxxv.
4. Cf. H. Gese, 'The Prologue to John's Gospel', in *Essays in Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981), pp. 167-222.
5. Dodd, *Interpretation*, pp. 274-77.
6. Dunn, *Christology*, pp. 161-205; 'Let John be John'.
7. M.E. Willett, *Wisdom Christology in the Fourth Gospel* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1985).