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Jesus' Spirituality of [Af]filiation in the Fourth Gospel

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Abstract: The spirituality of Jesus, embedded within the literary contours of the Johannine narrative, is primarily grounded in a relationship of affiliation and friendship. It is a spirituality of abiding whose origins and goal lie in the unity of heart and mind that the Johannine Jesus as Son shares with the Father. This core relationship connotes not only the love that binds Jesus to God but is also the basis of the motif of sending and the divine authority over life and death which Jesus possesses in this Gospel. Jesus' spirituality is grounded in the abiding presence of the Spirit-Paraclete whom he bequeaths to the disciples. In handing over the Spirit to the gathered community through his death and resurrection, Jesus donates his own spirituality, ultimately drawing all creation into the divine circle of love. This spirituality is the result of the Spirit's presence, restoring human beings to their original, created identity as children and friends of God and empowering them for mission. While the dominant imagery is masculine there are also feminine images, particularly that of divine Wisdom, which provide a counterbalance and create an inclusive sense of appropriation and welcome.

Keywords: spirituality; affiliation; abiding; sending; Father–Son; Spirit-Paraclete; incarnation; death and resurrection; mission; creation; gender; Wisdom

1. Introduction

The spirituality of a biblical text concerns primarily the objective reality of the text and, in a secondary sense, the affective response of the reader or hearer. It can be defined as "the sense of the presence of God" which emerges from the text and summons the audience to the experience of "living in the light of that presence" (Barton 1992, p. 113). It encompasses, in other words, both the message of Jesus and the mentality of the contemporary reader (Theobald 2002, p. 166), acting as a model for "how one understands engaging with God" (Loader 2022b, p. 181). In theological terms, spirituality also takes into account the place of prayer as engagement in divine presence through the role of the Spirit. These features are transparent in the spirituality of the Fourth Gospel which entices its audience into an experience of interiority and community, an experience based on love, and leading to transformation of life (van der Merwe 2020).

There are two aspects to the spirituality depicted in the Fourth Gospel (Lee 2018b, pp. 259–73). In the first place, its distinctive spirituality is grounded in the filial identity of the Johannine Jesus and the intricate nature of his relationship with God. This identity is substantiated in the undertakings of Jesus' life: his mission generated by the Spirit, and his voluntary death and self-authenticating resurrection. The second aspect is the spirituality Jesus generates in his disciples through his life, death, and resurrection,[1] a spirituality predicated on the donation of the Spirit. The mission of the believing community draws them into the sending vocation of Jesus himself with the enabling presence of the Spirit. These two dimensions make up a singular spirituality of affiliation and love encompassing not only disciples, but also creation within the mystery of Jesus' Johannine identity. The spirituality, though lofty in one sense, is also profoundly concrete in another through the incarnation (Kelly and Moloney 2003, pp. 14–15).

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2. Jesus' Filial Spirituality

The spirituality of the Johannine Jesus begins in his primary appellation as ὁ υἱός ("son") which arises from the prologue to become a core symbol of the Gospel. The title is not divulged in the prologue until 1:14 where, in a sense, it explicates and rearranges the taxonomy of λόγος and θεός ("God", 1:1). The idea of λόγος is closely tied in Judaism to σοφία ("wisdom"), both terms being used synonymously in Jewish writings of the period (Loader 2022a, pp. 49–53). This radical move occurs at the point where the divine λόγος-σοφία, source of the world's being in empathy with God (1:1–2), takes on flesh (σάρξ) and reveals, from within fleshly contours, the grace-filled and truthful divine δόξα. Jesus' self-revelation as υἱός, implying by definition the anterior revelation of God as πατήρ, "father",[2] connotes a relationship of both intimacy and compliance. Jesus frequently refers to God as "father" (Jn 3:35, 4:21, 5:17–26, 6:27, 10:30, 12:26, 14:6–13, 16:28, 18:11, 20:17) or, more significantly, "my father" (e.g., 2:16, 8:19,10:18, 14:2, 15:1, 20:17), a usage that points to theocentric nature of the Gospel in its "christological monotheism" (Zumstein 2018, p. 344). The Word dwells with God and co-operates with God in the formation of the world, but in becoming flesh the language shifts from "word" to "son", clarifying the otherwise bewildering connection between "word" and "God". The υἱός title in the prologue is not simply identical with the pre-existing λόγος-σοφία but represents an elaboration or emanation: the movement from abstract to concrete, from creator to creation.[3] λόγος is not used again of the Johannine Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, not because the prologue is a later and somewhat alien addition to the Gospel, but because it is already superseded within the prologue itself (though there are frequent references through the Gospel to Jesus' or God's word; 4:41, 50; 5:24, 38; 8:31–55; 12:28; 14:23–24; 15:3, 20; 17:6, 14, 17, 20; 18:9, 32; Lee 2018a, pp. 107–8). The symbolism emerges at the point of incarnation—the enfleshment of the divine Word—which underpins Johannine spirituality from beginning to end.[4]

In this sense Jesus in the Fourth Gospel lives out of a continuous sense of the presence of God as the heart of his spirituality. This spiritual experience pervades the Gospel, grounded in Jesus' filial identity: most frequently "Son of God" (e.g., 1:34, 49; 5:25; 11:27; 19:7) or "Son" in an absolute sense (e.g., 3:35–36; 5:19–23; 8:35; 17:1) and sometimes "Son of Man" (e.g., 1:51; 3:13; 6:53; 12:23; Reinhartz 1992, pp. 31–34). In the prologue it is also tied to the key title μονογενής, "only Son", at 1:18:

> The author's use of the term μονογενής symbolizes that the filial relationship between Jesus and God . . . . is neither aloof nor abstract; rather, it is characterized by intimacy and love. μονογενής is, therefore, the starting point for understanding the transcendent, filial relationship between Son and Father (Akala 2014, p. 140).

The interrelationship between Jesus and God is depicted in familial symbolism, therefore, conveying a complex and intertwined spirituality that underpins the plot of the Gospel. There are theological puzzles within that relationship, and particularly whether it conveys an egalitarian or subordinate correlation (see 5:18), but in the end the Johannine paradox is that "[t]he Son is equal to the Father in all ways precisely because he does solely what the Father instructs" (Anderson 2011, p. 180, also pp. 27–28).

(a) Union

The filial spirituality of Jesus is articulated in two aspects throughout the Gospel. In the first place, John depicts the mutual, loving union between God and Jesus. This union of heart and mind is present from the opening verses of the Gospel, as we have seen, where the λόγος exists in communion with God, a communion that radiates outward to creation (πρὸς τὸν θεόν, 1:1–2). Throughout the Gospel, the evangelist confirms the love the Father has for the Son (3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 15:9–10; 17:23–24, 2511:41–42; 12:28) and the Son for the Father (14:31).[5]

The same sense of communion is apparent in the absence of a Gethsemane scene in this Gospel. There is a kind of parody scene earlier in John, but it takes place in the public sphere

following the arrival of the Greeks and is, in large part, a response to their presence (12:27–33). Here the Johannine Jesus does not struggle with the will of God as does the Synoptic Jesus (Mk 14:32–42/pars.). When he experiences distress and agitation, recognizing the signs of the Passion drawing near, Jesus is not tempted, as in the Synoptic account, to ask for the hour to pass him by or to have the cup removed (Mk 14:35–36/pars.). He raises the possibility but almost at once rejects it (Jn 12:27b) and, later at the arrest, confirms his readiness to drink the cup (18:11). His response to the coming of the hour (12:23) expresses the oneness of heart which renders such a request unnecessary, a oneness that allows no breach in the affiliation of Son and Father. Instead the prayer moves in a uniquely Johannine direction that expresses immediate acquiescence, born of unwavering love and trust, a prayer that is immediately answered: "Father, glorify your name!" (12:28–29; Lincoln 2005, pp. 353–54; Thompson 2015, pp. 269–70).

In this respect, the Johannine Jesus displays an unusual attitude towards prayer. Unlike the Synoptics, there is no record in the Fourth Gospel of Jesus retreating to a mountain for prayer (e.g., Mk 6:46/par.; Lk 5:16; 6:12). On the contrary, at the tomb of Lazarus Jesus tells Martha that intercessory prayer is unnecessary for him, uttered rather to complete her faith (11:27) and for the sake of the bystanders (11:41–42). The Johannine Jesus, in other words:

> does not need to make prayer requests like others, who have to rouse themselves out of their attitude of prayerlessness and therefore godlessness; for he continually stands before God as the asker and therefore as the receiver (Bultmann 1971, p. 408).

The point may seem to stand in some tension with Jesus' two other prayers where there is no such qualification: his much longer prayer, in addition to his brief prayer as he faces the hour, at the end of the Farewell Discourse (17:1–26). Yet all three prayers cohere, as each has as its primary purpose the illumination of the hearers. The prayer which concludes the Last Supper is a gift to the community of believers, "his own" (17:6–19), as it is for subsequent believers (17:20–26). It acts as a kind of shield, reassuring the disciples of Jesus' unceasing, protective love and guardianship in a hostile world, a reassurance founded on his oneness with God. Jesus' own relationship to God is so constant and unchanging that even to think or feel at all is to pray; his inner life lies always open to God and God's to him.

Yet the final prayer has a further purpose that equally connects to the affiliation between Father and Son. It is a performative prayer, depicting in full color, within the bounds of space and time, the relationship of the Son to the Father in John's spirituality (17:1–5, 24–26). It is not the "high priestly" prayer of Jesus, as it was once popularly called, (Beasley-Murray 1987, pp. 203–4), but rather the spiritual ascent (ἀνάβασις) of Jesus to the Father (already indicated in the "lifting up" of the bronze serpent, 3:14), which prefigures and anticipates the triumphant exaltation of the cross (Dodd 1953, pp. 419–20).

The same affiliation carries through to the crucifixion, in ways that once again allow for no breach in the communion between the Son and the Father, even in the context of suffering and death. The seamless robe is itself a symbol of that loving union which the soldiers cannot perforate (19:23–24; Moloney 2013, pp. 140–41), as is the unwavering fulfilment of Scripture (19:28). In this sense, through love and union Jesus experiences the cross as a participation in glory (as well as suffering) in which he both glorifies and is glorified. His last utterance is paradoxically one of triumph, not abandonment as in Mark's account (Mk 15:39): τετέλεσται, "it is accomplished" (Jn 19:30). In this moment, "[t]he crucified Jesus is a victorious Christ". (Zumstein 2018, p. 341; see also Kovacs 1995, pp. 227–47). Jesus' spirituality enables him to reveal God's glory in and through death, experiencing not shame and despair but the triumph of love.

(b) The Spirit

Secondly, the filiation of the Johannine Jesus is articulated through his intimate association with the divine πνεῦμα ("spirit") across the Gospel narrative (1:32–33; 3:3–8; 4:23–24; 6:63; 7:39; 14:17, 26; 15:26; 16:13; 20:22). At his baptism (though there is no mention of a

baptism in water), Jesus receives the Spirit who descends and "abides" on him (1:32–33): not just in a single event but as a continuous reality, apparent in future usage of the verb μένειν ("to abide") as it unfolds throughout the Gospel (6:56; 8:31; 15:4–9). Even so, the story is not told as a public event but in a vision: an expression of the spirituality of John the Baptist. It is an interior epiphany that enables the Baptist to recognize and articulate Jesus' identity as the one uniquely connected to the Spirit (1:33). Later in the Gospel, once he is glorified (7:39), Jesus will give the Spirit-Paraclete to his disciples from the Father as his ongoing presence-in-absence (14:16, 26; 1526; 16:7–11, 13–15; 19:30; 20:22; Thompson 2001, pp. 145–88).

Through possession of the Spirit, Jesus participates in—and indeed spearheads—the *missio Dei*, the mission of God in the world as an essential aspect of his spirituality. The sending language of the Gospel is particularly associated with the Father–Son relationship. God in this Gospel is the "having-sent-me-Father" while Jesus is "the sent one" (Anderson 1999, pp. 33–57), both expressions functioning more or less as titles (e.g., 4:34; 5:36–37; 6:29, 44, 57; 7:16; 8:16–18; 9:4, 7; 12:49; 14:24; 17:21; Schnelle 2018, pp. 324–25, 310–30). The image of agency recurs through the Gospel, emphasizing Jesus' status as the divine envoy who is given the seal of the sender (6:27), imagery that is grounded in the prophet-like-Moses typology (Deut 18:15–22; Anderson 1999, pp. 36–40): "in nearly all of John's narrative, dialogue, and discourse sections where the Father is mentioned, some aspect of the Son's emissary mission is also narrated" (Anderson 1999, p. 37). In this sense, Jesus' mission and divine commission in the Gospel are intrinsic to the shape of his spirituality.

The missional vocation implies also a unique authority, donated by the Spirit. Thus, Jesus receives divine "exemption" over the sabbath,[6] along with God's own authority over life and death, an authority that springs from fully requited love (5:17–29; van der Merwe 2020). Jesus speaks of himself as an apprenticed son learning from his father in the family workshop; the "work" he does in his ministry is not self-generated but directed by the Father and carried out with the Father's authority (5:19; Zumstein 2014, pp. 188–91; Thompson 2015, pp. 125–31), with the empowering presence of the Spirit. The same authority, which will take Jesus to the cross, is foreshadowed in the parable of the Sheepfold (10:1–21), where Jesus as the Good Shepherd demonstrates the extent to which he gives life to the flock: ἐγὼ τίθημι τὴν ψυχήν μου, ἵνα πάλιν λάβω αὐτήν ("I myself lay down my life in order that I might take it up again", 10:17). Jesus has authority over his own life; on the cross he remains in control, even in unspeakable suffering, and takes the initiative in dying (an initiative he has held throughout his life), as indicated by the active form of the main verb: κλίνας τὴν κεφαλὴν παρέδωκεν τὸ πνεῦμα ("having bowed his head, he gave up the Spirit", 19:30).

By implication the resurrection also occurs through the direct agency of the Johannine Jesus and only indirectly through God's action (cf. Mk 16:6/pars.; Jn 21:14; Acts 2:24; Rom 4:24; 1 Cor 15:15). While there is nothing explicit in the resurrection accounts themselves, the symbolic connection between Jesus' rising from the dead and that of Lazarus reinforces the Shepherd's utterance, "that I might take it up again". The raising of Lazarus is a continuation of his mortal life (12:10), acting metaphorically for Jesus' own resurrection which signifies the definitive triumph over death. The three commands at Lazarus' tomb (11:39, 43, 44), despite Martha's reservations (11:39), are significant for their figurative connection to Jesus' powerful actions in his own resurrection: the removal of the stone (20:1), the shedding of the grave clothes (20:6–7), and the emergence from the tomb (20:14). Jesus' spirituality, his endowment with the Spirit and his mission from the Father, grant him access to divine authority over his own life and death.[7]

Thus, through life and death, Jesus' spirituality in the Fourth Gospel—the bond he shares with the abiding Spirit—thrives even in the depths of violence, privation, pain and death. It is closely tied to his filial identity which "encompasses the ministry of Jesus in its entirety" (Schnelle 2018, p. 318). It is a spirituality that sustains him in resilience, despite the ferocity of the opposition against him (11:46–53). In taking the way of the cross, the

Johannine Jesus reveals a radical and countercultural love: the very opposite of what we would expect in a protective Father–Son relationship (van der Merwe 2020).

3. The Spirituality Jesus Bequeaths

(a) Life-giving

In fulfilment of his divine mission, Jesus bequeaths a distinctive spirituality to his followers which is, first and foremost, life-giving. For John, spirituality and mission are part of the one "creative theological paradox" that stands at the living heart of this Gospel (Gorman 2018, p. 9). Contrary to earlier views that saw John as sectarian, cut off from the wider community and the rest of the Christian church (Meeks 1972, pp. 69–72), the Johannine Jesus displays a missional dynamic whose purpose is "to make God known" and, in particular, God's love (Moloney 2013, p. 37). In this way Jesus draws believers into life-giving union with God. The explicit purpose of the Gospel's spirituality is to bring about faith leading to life (20:30–31): enticing people into the authentic worship of God, in and through Jesus,[8] and into trust in Jesus' creative word (2:5). This life-giving mission, for example, brings Jesus to an encounter with a Samaritan, a woman doubly marginalized by race and gender (4:1–42). Here he offers her living water (4:10), by which she comes to know her thirst for life (Theobald 2002, pp. 174–75); Jesus then draws her into a fuller sense of life through the Spirit who overcomes the hostile barriers between them (4:23–24).

This sense of mission leads the Johannine Jesus to bestow life on those in need through all the miraculous "signs" in the first half of the Gospel: water into wine at a wedding to sustain a faltering celebration and avoid social stigma (2:1–11), healing for the disabled and those who are blind (5:1–9; 9:1–7), food for the hungry (6:1–13), safety for those at sea (6:16–21), and life for the dead (11:38–44). In themselves the "signs" become symbols of a life in and beyond the physical: spiritual life, eternal life, that can be experienced in the here-and-now (καὶ νῦν ἐστιν, "and now is", 4:23; 5:25). In Johannine spirituality, there is no depth of suffering, no agony of experience, no heartache or menace that this life-giving love cannot reach (9:1–7, 35–38). Jesus walks the pathways of life and death, bearing with him the life-giving authority which rests on him and which enables his voice to resonate even through the cold stone walls of human mortality (5:28–29; 11:43–44). The love he bestows is a mutual love, epitomized particularly in the symbolic action of Mary of Bethany in anointing Jesus' feet with oil in an act of mutual love and gratitude, the costliness of the oil mirroring—however dimly—the cost of Jesus' life (12:1–8; Lee 2002, pp. 197–211).

The same spirituality empowers the Johannine Jesus paradoxically not only to heal and give life but also to confront the powers of darkness with truth, exposing the lie and the counterfeit by which they are lead, and lead others, astray. This is not an inoffensive spirituality without challenge or demands. Jesus' encounters show benevolence and goodness (11:21–27) but they can also be exacting in the same desire to generate life, confronting those who reject that life in words that today can still disturb and trouble us (8:44–49; 9:39–41; 10:31–39; 12:34–43; 18:19–23; 37).

(b) Filial identity

Secondly, the spirituality Jesus bestows invites disciples into the fictive family of God. "The relationship of mutual love between Father and Son is the source and the pattern for the relationships of love which are the goal and content of salvation" (Loader 2017, p. 316). 'Just as Jesus' spirituality is predicated on his own filial identity, so too is that of disciples. The spirituality into which they are drawn arises from the identity they receive as those born into the divine family (van der Merwe 2020). The theme begins, as do so many in John, in the prologue where the second cycle, beginning and ending with faith (1:6–13), concludes with the authority bestowed on those who accept the Light to become τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ ("children of God", 1:12). The evangelist is at pains to confirm that this birth is not the work of flesh, even flesh created by God and the λόγος (1:13; cf 6:63). Only the Spirit of God can effect the new birth (cf. 3:3–8), marking the beginnings of the community's life in

the Spirit as God's children: "*we* beheld his glory" (ἐθεασάμεθα, 1:14). It reaches its climax in Jesus' handing over the Spirit on the cross (19:38).

Towards the end of the Gospel, following the resurrection, Jesus' words to Mary Magdalene about why she cannot hold onto him (20:17) are particularly significant in this regard: ἀναβαίνω πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου καὶ πατέρα ὑμῶν καὶ θεόν μου καὶ θεὸν ὑμῶν ("I am ascending to my Father and your Father, and my God and your God", 20:17). This carefully nuanced utterance unites the fictive family, divine and human, in a union confirmed by the commission which precedes it: πορεύου δὲ πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφούς μου καὶ εἰπὲ αὐτοῖς. The NRSV translates this as "my brothers", presumably referring to the twelve, despite the fact that they play a minimal role in the Fourth Gospel (6:67, 70; 20:24). The language is more likely to be inclusive, however, given the eminence of women as disciples in this Gospel: "go to my brothers and sisters and tell them" (so CEB).[9] At the same time, the commission draws a distinction between them; it is not "our Father" and "our God" but "my Father and your Father", "my God and your God" (Lee 2021, pp. 87–88; Byers 2017, pp. 49–71). The implication is that Jesus' filial relationship with the Father has primacy: he is "the Son" and God is, in a unique sense, "my Father". On that basis, disciples can also be affiliated to God as "your Father" and "your God" but only by entering into Jesus' filiation, becoming daughters and sons of God, as well sisters and brothers to one another. It is Jesus' identity as the Son that makes possible the restored identity, and thus the spirituality, of believers as children of God. This new identity is validated in Mary's subsequent proclamation of the resurrection: ἑώρακα τὸν κύριον ("I have seen the Lord", 20:18).

(c) Theosis

Another way of speaking of this relationship, which has its origin in the language of the early church, is that of *theosis* ("divinization").[10] Based on the Patristic dictum that "God became what we are that we might become what God is",[11] it is possible to argue for a similar notion within the framework of the Fourth Gospel (Byers 2017, pp. 153–234; Gorman 2018). *Theosis* is the movement towards ever greater union with God, understood as salvation, and the theme of filiation lends itself to this conception. In becoming sons and daughters of God by entry into Jesus' filiation, believers come to share in the divine nature and thus union with God (17:20–23; cf. 2 Pet 1:4). In so doing, as children of God, they regain their original status as living beings formed in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27); through Christ who is the Image they too regain their forfeited identity as images of God (Lee 2018a, pp. 108–11; Schneiders 1999, p. 74). In this sense, *theosis* is the ultimate goal and purpose of spirituality; it is a gradual ascent to divinity by growing more and more into identification with Jesus in an affiliation that leads to transformation of life, ethical as well as spiritual (cf. 1 Jn 3:2).

The same unity of heart and mind that the Johannine Son shares with the Father is also made available for believers. Just as he "continually stands before God as the asker and therefore as the receiver", as we have seen, so too with the children of God. Sharing the Son's status, they share his oneness with the Father. In consequence, their prayers like his are given immediate and affirmative answer; they too have access to the Father and are at one in the divine love so that their prayers are heard (16:26–27). Jesus will hear and respond positively to their prayers, which themselves accord with the divine will, on account of the same unity of mind and heart that flows between himself and his disciples (14:13–14). Prayer is the expression of union with God, given as gift through the Johannine Jesus.

(d) Sending

Thirdly, the making of a new (restored) identity, involves also a spirituality of sending. Believers are to bear testimony in such a way that the true witness recedes, like John the Baptist before the advent of the bridegroom (3:30) or the Samaritan woman before the villagers (4:42). The community is not to be a fearful group huddled together in a closed circle, though that is how the risen Jesus finds them when he appears to them on the evening of Easter day (20:19), despite the believing testimony of Mary Magdalene (20:18).

On the contrary, intrinsic to their spirituality is their vocation to mission. The believing community, made up of the sons and daughters of the Father through the risen Son, is to be missional in its spiritual outlook and experience (20:21). The Johannine Jesus summons them to be sent out with the reconciling and challenging power of the Spirit (20:23), just as earlier in the Gospel they are called to be a locus of love that will illuminate and entice others outside the community (13:35; 17:23). They are to abide yet also to bear fruit (15:1–8). There is both a being/abiding and a sending in this spirituality.

(e) Creation

If the spirituality which Jesus bequeaths to the community is neither sectarian nor exclusive can it also be extended to creation? To ask this question is in one sense to move beyond the Johannine text, although in another sense the theology of the Gospel presupposes creation, as the parallels between the prologue and Genesis 1 make plain (Coloe 2011, pp. 1–2). Though this theme may not be particularly overt in the Gospel, it is still possible to draw a trajectory from the text and expand Johannine spirituality to the whole creation. This pathway arises from the Johannine language of σάρξ (1:14; 3:6; 6:51–58; 17:2), which is essential to any understanding of filiation. New birth occurs in and through flesh: that of Jesus himself as Son (1:14), encompassing and restoring believers as flesh-and-blood children of God:

> the Word of God, by his Incarnation, his becoming flesh, unveils for us, and so calls us back to, our proper condition as sons [sic] of God, born into life as living ones in the Living One, enfleshed in his flesh, through a birth which has the aspect of a rebirth (Behr 2019, p. 295).

The symbolism is often downplayed in contemporary translations. At 17:2a Jesus has authority not just over all human beings (as the NRSV translates it) but over πάσης σαρκός ("all flesh", Lee 2018a, pp. 14–15). The same scope is implied in the use of the neuter, πᾶν ὅ ("everything which", 17:2b; see 6:37, 39), which may be stylistic variation for human beings but more likely designates that which, in the prologue, belongs to the Creator by right of creation ("all things", πάντα, 1:3).[12] If so, we find here a trajectory in which creation itself is destined for restoration in and through the incarnation (Lee 2017, pp. 241–59), implying an affiliation between all living creatures and their Creator. In the cross, the "how" of God's love for the world ("thus", οὕτως, 3:16) can be interpreted in this extended way, even if it is only human beings who can literally respond by believing and allowing their deeds to be exposed to the light (3:17–20). The restoration of humankind implies the restoration of all creatures, since human beings are inseparable from creation, and their restored identity, in biblical terms (e.g., Rom 8:19–23), implies the restoration also of creation. When believers discover their true identity as children of God, this restored filiation—this *theosis*—has repercussions across creation: in becoming affiliated to God and to each another, they become affiliated to all their fellow-creatures. The filiation given to believers thus has the capacity to stretch beyond the human community to encompass all creation.

4. Gender and σοφία

There is a further dimension to this spirituality within the experience of the reader. Much of the Johannine language of affiliation is male, raising the question of whether it limits the female reader's access to this spirituality, especially if, by the end of the Gospel, "patriarchal structures remain intact" (Brant 2011, p. 84). At one level, it is hard to deny the negative effects of female invisibility in the divine configuration. This is a much larger issue, beyond present confines, but three ameliorating comments need to be made. In the first place, the language of filiation is metaphorical not literal.[13] Metaphors have, by definition, an *is* and an *is not* dimension and both are equally needful in grasping the figurative meaning. Indeed, the *is not* of the image is the first step in attaining the metaphorical. The fact that God is not male and that the Father–Son imagery is not literal language is a vital move in appropriating Jesus' spirituality in John, for the male as well as female reader.

Here it is not the maleness of Jesus that has definitive significance, but rather the σάρξ, the oneness with humanity and all living creatures (Lee 2002, pp. 29–64). The parallel discourse of "image" is also effective, since female and male are co-equally made in the divine image (Gen 1:26–27), and the Johannine Jesus is "the archetypal symbol of God" (Schneiders 1977, pp. 373–75). Imagination is required to leap beyond the literal to the metaphorical, including for the gender-conscious reader.[14]

Secondly, it is important to note that the divine Father of the Johannine Jesus does not act like a Roman *paterfamilias*. God certainly has authority over life and death, but in the Gospel this authority arises from a self-giving, vulnerable love that does not seek to retain power or build up honor. It is far from the *potestas patria* of the ancient world ("paternal power"), and its understanding of honor (closely tied to glory, 5:23, 41, 44; 12:43) is paradoxical, including rather than excluding.[15] In fact, it could be said that the Johannine Father is *anti*-patriarchal because of the way God exercises power and the stress on love as the single, motivating factor in Jesus' mission and ministry (3:16–17; Lee 2021, pp. 93–95).[16] This perspective makes it possible for the female reader to connect to Johannine spirituality. They are enabled to do so through the relational focus and implicit challenges to patriarchy, as well as through the faithful group of women disciples in the Johannine narrative and the spirituality they both receive and share (2:5; 4:27–42; 11:17–27; 12:1–8; 19:25–27; 20:11–18; Lee 2021, pp. 75–95). Jesus' relationship with God, far from being an exclusive possession that accords him honor and status, is rather to be shared and given away: not held closely but distributed, inviting others—female and male—into the same relationship, the same privileges, the same affiliation.[17] While the language of filiation may be paternal it is not necessarily patriarchal.

Thirdly, and most importantly, recognition of the filiation language as metaphorical—and therefore, like all metaphors, limited in its scope (Coloe 2021a, pp. lxvii–lxxi)—leaves open the door to other kinds of imagery, whether implicit or explicit in the Johannine text. The point is facilitated by the preference for the language of "filiation" over "sonship", the former incorporating the Latin *filia* ("daughter") as well as *filius* ("son"). Other images serve to complement the Father–Son imagery, such as the maternal overtones in relation both to the Spirit who gives birth to believers and also to Jesus who feeds them with his own body, as infants are fed at the breast (3:3–8; 6:53–58; 16:20–22; Lee 2002, pp. 135–65).[18]

More explicit is the language of σοφία in its synonymous relationship with λόγος and therefore υἱός. It is also closely associated with Torah, sharing the same spirituality, although this language transformed to place the Johannine Jesus at the center (Loader 2022a, pp. 49–73). Jesus in this Gospel is not only associated with σοφία in the prologue but also acts as Sophia elsewhere in the Gospel—in the case of John 6, as the host who graciously invites people to her table, feeding and nourishing them, giving them food and drink to sustain them: herself both the Giver and the gift (6:35; also 4:14; 7:37–38).[19] Here John is affirming that "what was said of Wisdom is not only true of Jesus but that Jesus *is* Wisdom, the Word, and *only* Jesus is Wisdom and Word" (Loader 2022b, p. 185).

In this σοφία-spirituality, not only are believers children of God in and through Jesus' identity, but they are also friends and beloved of Jesus (11:11; 13:23; 15:15; 19:26–27; 20:2; 21:7, 20). To have connection with holy Wisdom is essentially to be in relationship with God: "Being one, she is capable of all things and, abiding in herself, she renews all things, and in every generation crossing over into holy souls she makes them friends of God and prophets" (Wisd 7:27). The language of friendship belongs in the ancient concept of the household, where friends could be considered members of the family (Lee 2002, pp. 99–100). Friendship was highly prized in the world of antiquity (King 2020, pp. 142–49), and it could cross boundaries not always available within the stricter delimitations of the household. The Johannine Jesus draws disciples not only into his own filiation but also into friendship with himself, exemplified in his relationship to Martha, Mary and Lazarus (11:3–5), a friendship that, without denying divine election or the call to obedience, shares knowledge in a spirit of openness and transparency (15:15). This language has close links not only to the fictive family but also to σοφία which the Johannine Jesus embodies.

Friendship, in other words, is a variation on the language of filiation, another way of speaking of love, especially since the Gospel does not differentiate the two verbs for love, φιλέω and ἀγαπάω (11:3, 5; 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 15–17, 20; Brant 2011, p. 229). What Jesus shares with his disciples, as holy Wisdom, is a spirituality of love and knowledge. In either case, affiliation is tied equally to the more articulate, masculine metaphors of filiation for the relationship between God and Jesus, and between Jesus and believers, and also to the more feminine imagery of σοφία as the beneficent and hospitable giver of sustenance for eternal life. These work together to present a compelling invitation to love and intimacy

5. Conclusions

The symbolic spirituality of the Fourth Gospel is based on fictive kinship, a kinship that finds its origin in the nature of God and manifests itself in the incarnation. It is grounded in Jesus' core identity as Son, which is the primary symbol for his relationship with God, and in the abiding Spirit-Paraclete. This kinship is extended to believers, through the symbolism (van der Merwe 2019), as they become affiliated and therefore united with the divine as beloved children of God. Believers enter into the filiation of Jesus himself as the living heart of their spirituality. As well as entering Jesus' filiation, disciples are also granted intimate and loving friendship with him as holy Wisdom. Though obedience is called for in this affiliation, and the gulf between God and creation though bridged is never dissolved, the kinship transcends patriarchal relationships. Its purpose lies in "leading the believer to the life-giving experience of intimacy" with God (Stanley 1986, p. 5).

For all the difficulties of interpretation, the final word about experiencing the presence of God in Johannine spirituality is love experienced through believing. This love is articulated in the sending of the Sophia-Son and the abiding presence of the Spirit; it is patent in the incarnation and ministry, on the cross and in the resurrection, in the giving of the Spirit and in the ongoing life of the community (Kelly and Moloney 2003, pp. 389–94). God's love for the world, and the way it is articulated through incarnation and cross (3:16–17), is all of a piece with the love which motivates God to create the world and draws people back to the restoration of faith. It is, at its core, the overflowing of love between Father and Son, God and holy Wisdom. The spirituality of the Fourth Gospel reaches out to the world seeking affiliation, enticing human beings and ultimately all creation into the filiation of Jesus himself, the Word and Wisdom of God, who abides eternally in the presence of God.

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Notes

1 According to Loader (2022c, pp. 195–210), John 6:51–58 reveals the Johannine tension between Jesus' death as saving and his life and ministry also saving, a tension that needs to be held together.

2 The central metaphor of "Father" is used some 120 times in the Gospel, in comparison to "God" (108 times); further on this, see van der Merwe, "Christian Spirituality".

3 On Greco-Roman and Jewish understandings of "son/s of God", see (Keener 2003), 1.291–97.

4 Here lie key differences from Jewish and Greco-Roman understandings of spiritual experience: while Old Testament spirituality begins in the dynamic word of God in creation (Gen 1:1–2:4a), in the giving of Torah, in the prophetic message of salvation and judgement (e.g., Isa 2:1; Jer 1:2; Hos 1:1), and in Wisdom (Prov 9:3–4; Wisd 6:17–18; Sir 4:11, 24)—all of which John assumes—it does not extend to incarnation. In starker contrast, for the Stoic, the λόγος is the principle of right knowing, binding all things into a cosmic harmony but without personal relationship; what matters is to pursue reason and virtue. For the Epicurean, the gods are outside the world and not intrinsic to it, let alone to be conceived in mortal form, leaving no room for spirituality. See King (2020, pp. 65–81) and Rowe (2016, pp. 207–15).

5 Oddly enough, there is only one explicit reference to the Son's love of the Father; yet the love of the Son for the Father is articulated in other ways, particularly his obedience. Akala (2014, p. 182) points out that in John 17 "the Son's words reflect his love for the Father, for all the Son's actions have been grounded in his love for the Father".

6 On Jewish thinking on God's sabbath work, see (Lee 2002, pp. 116–17).

[7] On the way in which early Christians drew on ancient Mediterranean ideas to shape their understanding of Jesus' resurrection, see esp. (Litwa 2014, pp. 141–54).

[8] This Christological focus represents John's "relocation of worship space from geographical locale to person" (Troost-Cramer 2017, p. 114).

[9] The noun ἀδελφοί can be translated as simply "brothers", sometimes accompanied by ἀδελφαί, "sisters" (e.g., Mk 6:3); however, the masculine form can also be translated generically, "brothers and sisters", the context determining the scope. On the wider issue of inclusive translation, see Strauss (2003, pp. 115–41).

[10] According to Litwa, deification was a common conception in antiquity, yet neglected in subsequent Western thinking (Litwa 2014, pp. 156–79); also (King 2020, pp. 65–81). Cicero hoped for the deification of his deceased daughter and wrote a *Consolatio* to comfort himself on her death (see Englert 2017, pp. 41–66).

[11] So Athanasius: αὐτός . . . ἐνηνθρώπησεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς θεοποιηθῶμεν (Robertson 1893, 54.3).

[12] There is a well-attested textual variant at 12:32 which reads πάντα ("all things") rather than πάντας ("all people"). According to Metzger (2007, p. 203) a major reason given for the choice of the masculine over the neuter is that it is "more congruent with Johannine theology": a debatable point.

[13] Against this, cf. Reinhartz (1999) who argues that at some points (e.g., the prologue) the language has to be read as literal.

[14] On paternal imagery in John and the way it functions, see Lee (2002, pp. 110–34).

[15] Further on honor and its relationship to glory, see King (2020, pp. 87–89).

[16] For a wider perspective, see Soskice (2002, pp. 135–50). See also Coakley (2013, p. 324) who writes from a trinitarian perspective: "The *true* meaning of "Father" is to be found in the Trinity, not dredged up from the scummy realm of human patriarchal fatherhood".

[17] Myers (2015, pp. 191–218) concedes that the characterization of the Johannine Jesus contains a number of feminine as well masculine characteristics (in terms of the ancient world), leading to a degree of redefining what masculinity is in its context).

[18] See especially the commentary on John by Coloe (2021a, 2021b) which highlights implicit and explicit feminine imagery through the Fourth Gospel, including Sophia symbolism and birthing language.

[19] Note the strong sapiential and eucharistic parallels across John 6:35–57 (Coloe 2021a, pp. 168–85).

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