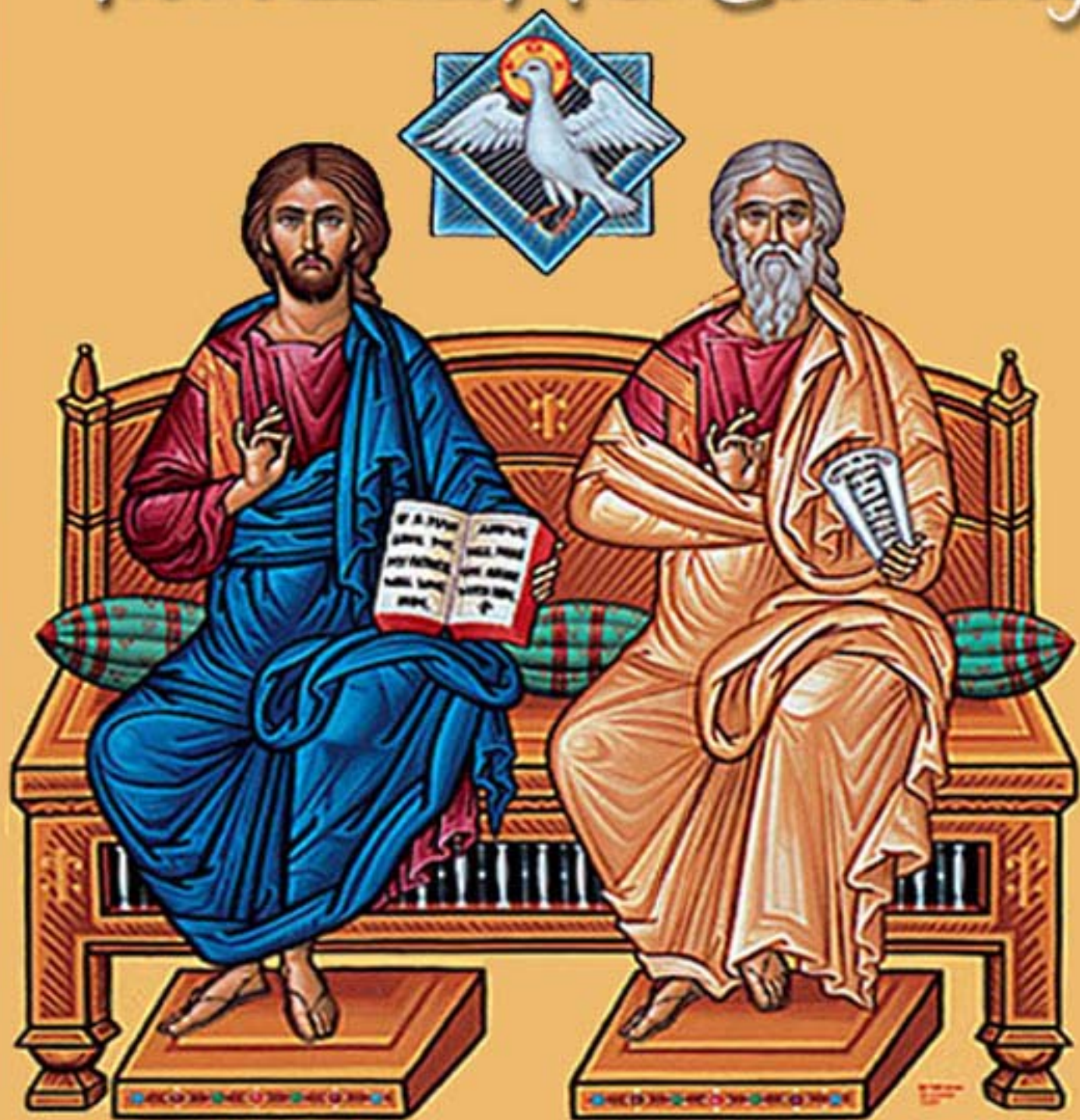


# "Begotten, not made": The Role of Prov. 8:22 in the Arian Controversy



Steve Singleton

## PROVERBS 8:22 IN THE ARIAN CONTROVERSY

With the close of the apostolic age came the end of divinely inspired teaching regarding the reality of the Messiah's coming, its nature, and its significance.<sup>1</sup> The generations that followed began the process of reflecting on all that the apostles and their associates had disclosed, of unpacking the implications of the revelation they had received in Christ. This thinking-through occurred in reaction to Gnosticism, Marcionism, Montanism, and a number of other challenges to the "faith once for all delivered to the saints."<sup>2</sup>

Beginning in the early second century Christian scholars scanned the Hebrew Scriptures, searching for references to Christ. The indicators they followed were the titles of Christ in the Greek Scriptures, such as Son of Man, Son of God, Christ, Lord, Word, and Wisdom.<sup>3</sup>

The last of these titles, Wisdom, occurs explicitly only in First Corinthians chapter one. There Paul initiates the first skirmishes in a war that would continue for

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<sup>1</sup>That the New Testament authors were conscious that their writings were divinely inspired, see Wayne Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 19-59.

<sup>2</sup>"If early Christian theology represents a legitimate and necessary working out, in Hellenistic terms, of the authentic Gospel [and it does], then Gnosticism actually performed a service for the church, by compelling it to think the Gospel through and work out its implications" (Harold O. J. Brown, *Heresies: The Image of Christ in the Mirror of Heresy and Orthodoxy from the Apostles to the Present* [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984], 41; see also 70). See also Edward Schillebeeckx, *Revelation and Theology, Vol. I* (Theological Soundings), (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1967), 57-58. One reason this explanation is more plausible than the evolutionary developmental theory of Baur and classical liberalism is its conservative rather than creative agenda.

<sup>3</sup>C. F. D. Moule has examined the first four of these six titles in *The Origin of Christology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977). Moule (7) favors what he calls a "developmental, as against an evolutionary view of the genesis of Christology," and he names Cullmann as being in basic agreement with his approach.

generations—the struggle between Judaeo-Christian revelation and the speculations of pagan philosophy.<sup>4</sup> The battleground concerned such issues as the legitimacy of rhetoric, the nature of sexuality, the effect of sin on communion with deity, and the possibility of a bodily resurrection.<sup>5</sup> To confront the claims of the Corinthian opponents, Paul points to Christ as both God’s power and His wisdom.<sup>6</sup> He acclaims Christ as “wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.”<sup>7</sup> Other texts in First Corinthians and elsewhere develop the same theme less directly.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Of course, this must be qualified in two directions. First, because even Palestine had been immersed in Hellenistic culture for three centuries, New Testament revelation was not free from Hellenistic concepts (e.g., dichotomous and trichotomous anthropology as in Heb. 4:12 and 1 Thess. 5:23). Second, the gospel kerygma did not conform to contemporary Jewish messianic expectations. It is simplistic, therefore, to characterize Christianity as being on a continuum with Judaism, on the one hand, and as being completely disjunctive with Hellenism on the other (Donald G. Bloesch, *God the Almighty: Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995], 207; cf., Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Jürgen Roloff, trans. John E. Alsup [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], 2: 33). These qualifications, however, do not set aside the basic thrust of the argument.

<sup>5</sup>According to Gordon D. Fee’s analysis, “[N]othing in the letter *cannot* be explained in light of its Greco-Roman origins; whereas several items are extremely difficult to explain on the hypothesis of Hellenistic Jewish origins” (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [The New International Commentary on the New Testament], [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 14); cf., Robert M. Grant, “Hellenistic Elements in I Corinthians,” in *Early Christian Origins: Studies in Honor of Harold R. Willoughby*, ed. Allen Wikgren (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961), 60-66. Richard Horsley suggests that Paul’s critique of rhetoric is directed against Hellenistic Jewish tradition as exemplified by Philo and Wisdom of Solomon (“Wisdom of Word and Words of Wisdom in Corinth,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39 [1977]:224-239). Even if mediated through Diaspora Judaism, however, the Corinthian problem remains the corrupting influence of pagan philosophy.

<sup>6</sup>1 Cor. 1:24. Cf., Robert M. Grant, “The Wisdom of the Corinthians,” in *The Joy of Study: Papers on New Testament and Related Subjects Presented to Honor Frederick Clifton Grant*, ed. Sherman E. Johnson (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 51-55.

<sup>7</sup>1 Cor. 1:30. Unless otherwise stated, all biblical references in this paper are taken from the New International Version.

<sup>8</sup>E.g., 1 Cor. 10:4, in which Christ is the rock that accompanied the Israelites in the wilderness; rabbinic tradition identified the rock with God’s Wisdom (see Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 2.86; *The Worse Attacks the Better* 117-118; see E. Earle Ellis, “A Note on First Corinthians 10:4,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76 [1957]:53-56); and Col. 2:2-3, in which Christ is the source of all the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge. For a discussion of additional passages that may imply that Christ is God’s Wisdom, see W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology*, 4th ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 147-176; M. Jack Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology, and Law in Matthew’s Gospel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1970); Ben Witherington, III, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994); and many others.

Understanding Christ as God's Wisdom led the church fathers to Proverbs 8:22-31, in which Lady Wisdom describes her role as God's partner<sup>9</sup> in creating the universe. They recognized that this passage provides the Old Testament basis for four New Testament texts that speak of the Son as God's agent in creation (1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15-16; Heb. 1:2-3; John 1:1-3).<sup>10</sup>

A difficulty arose, however, in the Septuagint's translation of Proverbs 8:22: "The Lord created me as a beginning of his ways unto his works" (κύριος ἔκτισέν με ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ). Does this mean that the Father created the Son instead of sharing with Him an eternal existence? Certainly the fourth-century Arians thought so.<sup>11</sup> Centuries earlier, however, church fathers discussed this question, offering at least two answers. The extant Ante-Nicene and Nicene fathers who comment on or allude to Proverbs 8:22 fall into four groupings: early second century, late second century, third century, and early fourth century.

The church fathers of the early second century establish the principles that later generations will develop more fully.<sup>12</sup> Their dependence on Philo of Alexandria

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<sup>9</sup>This assumes the translation of חָכְמָה in Prov. 8:30 as something like the NIV's rendering, 'craftsman,' in contrast to repointing it as חִנּוּן 'nursling, ward.' See the discussion on p. 18, n. 91, below.

<sup>10</sup>Rev. 3:14 may also describe Christ as the agent of creation if ἀρχή is rendered 'origin' or 'principle' instead of 'ruler' (NIV). H. Bietenhard ("Beginning, Origin, Rule, Ruler, Originator," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3 vols., ed. Colin Brown, et al. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975], 1: 164-171) equivocates between 'first cause' and 'absolute beginning' (166). Caird, Mounce, and Beasley-Murray all opt for 'beginning' (Caird adds, "or source"): G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John* (Black's New Testament Commentary) (London: A. & C. Black, 1966; reprint: Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, n.d.), 57; Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (New International Commentary on the New Testament) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 124-125; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (The New Century Bible Commentary), rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 104.

<sup>11</sup>Jaroslav Pelikan believes that Prov. 8:22 is the very passage to which Eusebius of Caesarea (*Life of Constantine* 2.69) alludes when he says the Arian controversy arose because of a dispute between Arius and Alexander (of Alexandria) over the interpretation of a certain passage (*Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1971], 193).

<sup>12</sup>See Robert M. Grant, "Christology in the Apostolic Fathers and Justin," in his *Jesus After the Gospels: The Christ of the Second Century* (The Hale Memorial Lectures of Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, 1989) (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 54-67.

(20 B.C.-A.D. 50),<sup>13</sup> or at least upon the Middle Platonism his teachings represent,<sup>14</sup> is clear regarding Wisdom Christology. Philo chose 'Logos' to be the equivalent of both the philosophy's divine mind (ψυχή or νοῦς) and the Word (דְּבָרִי) of God from the Hebrew Scriptures. He also used Wisdom as a synonym of the Logos of Greek philosophy.<sup>15</sup> Philo used 'Logos' in two senses: as a divine attribute within God and as what Harry A. Wolfson calls "a created mind which is distinct from His essence."<sup>16</sup> In fact, three times Philo alludes to Proverbs 8:22-31, speaking of Wisdom as God's agent in creation.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>According to Henry Chadwick, "The history of Christian philosophy begins not with a Christian, but with a Jew, Philo of Alexandria. . . . Philo's statements about the Logos were to have a notable future when adapted to the uses of Christian doctrine. . . . Philo stands closer to the second- and third-century Christians than to the Judaism of the Talmud. . . . We may see some symbolic recognition of the Christian debt to Philo in the legend quoted by Eusebius that when Philo went on his visit to Rome, he met St. Peter" ("Philo and the Beginnings of Christian Thought," in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. H. Armstrong [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967], 137, 144, 156, 157). The legend is from *Church History* 2.17.1. For more on Philo's Platonism, see John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to A.D. 200* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 145-183.

<sup>14</sup>G. L. Prestige believes that the two kinds of Logos (which he calls 'Logos-immanent' and 'Logos-expressed') were "probably imported into theology direct from the Stoics." That they came from Philo, he says, "is unsupported by positive evidence, and is hardly encouraged by the fact that Philo's name is not mentioned in the Apostolic fathers and is quoted only once (from Tatian) in Dr. Goodspeed's *Index* to the Apologists. Nor does it seem to occur in Theophilus" (*God in Patristic Thought* [n.p.: William Heinemann, 1936; reprint: London: SPCK, 1952], 124). Samuel Sandmel notes the central distinction between the Philonic and the Christian Logos: the former is a timeless idea, while the latter is "always connected with the event of Jesus" (*Philo of Alexandria: An Introduction* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1979], 149). Nevertheless, the Christian pre-existent Logos-Wisdom approximates the timelessness of the Philonic Logos-Sophia. Whether Philo mediated Hellenistic Philosophy or the fathers' concepts derived directly from pagans, Platonism was the ultimate source for both Philo and the subordinationist trinity of the Ante-Nicene fathers, particularly Clement of Alexandria and Origen.

<sup>15</sup>*Allegorical Interpretation* 1.19, 65; see Harry A. Wolfson, *Philo* (Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, & Islam, vol. 1) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947), 253-255.

<sup>16</sup>Wolfson, *Philo*, 253, 255. It is true that Philo did not use the LXX's rendering of קָנַן (ἐκτίσσει) in Prov. 8:22, opting instead for ἐκτίσαστο ('obtained'), but Wolfson cites Philo's use of κτίσασθαι in another passage (Gen. 4:1) in which the context in Philo indicates he intends it to mean 'to create.'

<sup>17</sup>*Worse Attacks the Better* 54; *On Drunkenness* 8.31; *On the Virtues* 10.62. See Jean Laporte, "Philo in the Tradition of Biblical Wisdom Literature," in *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Robert L. Wilken (London: University of Notre Dame, 1975), 114-119; Wolfson, *Philo*, 256.