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Kitty (C.H.M.) Bouwman, *Mater Sapientia. De mystagogische functie van het moederschap van God en het geestelijke moederschap bij Augustinus.* (2015 Vught, uitg. Skandalon.) diss. Utrecht University 4th June 2015. ISBN 978-94-92183-07-1 X + 551 pp. € 39,95.

As scholars such as Catherine Conybeare, Gillian Clark and Patricia Cox Miller have demonstrated in their excellent publications on women in early Christianity, research projects which are open to postmodern attention for gender in its epistemological and hermeneutical toolsets were in contemporary scholarly debate received as a rich source of knowledge and scholarship.¹ Nevertheless, it still takes courage and is praiseworthy to publish a monograph on what by the author Kitty Bouwman is characterized as 'gender determined symbolic' (p. 37) in the male dominated *objectum materiale* of patristics. Bouwman's courageous project finds its result in a close-reading of texts concerning maternal symbolic of *Mater Sapientia*. It covers an extended portion of Augustine's oeuvre: i.e. *Confessiones, Sermones, Io. ev. tr., cat. rud., beata. u.* In her selection, Kitty Bouwman offers a rich variety of texts and genres and includes for many passages her own working translation in Dutch, which is the main language of this published dissertation with a summary in English.

The author discusses the complex topic of the mystagogical function of Augustine's maternal metaphoric and spiritual maternity² in the nexus of philosophical anthropology, history and patristic. She explains in her introduction why the analysis of this theme, asks for an interdisciplinary approach. Bouwman chooses for a fivefold approach including the disciplines of theology, Bible, philosophy, psychology and gender. (p. 87-89). In its methodology, this research project combines the results of a historical focus, (context of Augustine's and Monnica's life) a hermeneutical focus (traces of divine and spiritual maternity in the *Corpus Augustinianum*), and a systemic theological focus. (analysis of these traces in symbolic maternity in order to characterize the mystagogical function of these traces) (p. 89) Thanks to the praiseworthy effort the author made to perform her own searches in the CAG2, (pp. 94-95) the selected texts offer a rich and original variety. Searched was for words concerning capacities and activities concerning biological maternity. (i.e. *sinus, uterus, praegnans, parere, partus, uber mamilla, lactare, lac, ablactare.*) At the end of the book the author provides the reader with clear tables of the texts studied in this book, their interrelationship with the CAG searches, persons and theological theme's. (pp. 533-536)

The monograph is divided in seven chapters including an introductory chapter on the *status quaestionis*: maternal aspects of God and spiritual maternity. The closing chapter summarizes the authors conclusions. In order to strengthen the argumentative force of the gender focussed discussion, the second chapter offers an overview of historical and cultural context of relevant themes for this research project: Monnica's maternity, Adeodatus' mother's maternity, the literary personage *Continentia* and maternal symbolic connotations

¹ C. Conybeare, *The Irrational Augustine* (Oxford 2006); G. Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity: Pagan and Christian Lifestyles.* (Oxford 1994)., P. Cox – Miller, *Women in Early Christianity: Translations from Greek Texts,* CUA Press, Washington 2005).

²Some of these texts were discussed from the perspective of incarnation in: Bavel, Tarsicius Jan van., 'Maternal aspects in salvation history according to Augustine.' In: *Augustiniana* 47 (1997) pp. 251-290.

of the Church. The major section of this dissertation provides the reader with close-readings on three topics. The first close-reading (chapter 3) aims to investigate Monnica's spiritual maternity and covers mainly the first nine books of Augustine's *Confessiones*. This section is followed by a chapter on God's maternity and spiritual maternity in relationship to Augustine. The majority of the texts of chapter 4 were selected from *Confessiones IV-VIII*. In chapter 5 Kitty Bouwman reads and analyses texts regarding expressions of God's maternity and spiritual maternity in relationship to the humankind. The texts for this chapter were selected from *Io. ev. tr, En. Ps. Civ. Sermo, and cat rud*. This section of this book ends with a systematic theological exploration on the mystagogical functions on God's maternity and spiritual maternity: chapter 6. In this section Bouwman discerns two paths in maternal symbolic related to salvation. The first path is a tradition which finds its roots in Sir. 24 and finds its expression in a sapiential Christology which describes Jesus as an Envoy of Wisdom. The second path is a traditional ecclesiastical path of Mary's maternity in giving birth to God's Son. (p. 492) Main conclusion of the author is that the close-readings of the selected texts demonstrate the presence of a sapiential theology in Augustine's oeuvre which is expressed in a nurturing (maternal) aspect of God. (p. 499) Bouwman finds traces of this aspect in *Sapientia's* maternity (Christ and God) and metaphors on spiritual maternity in Paul, Church, Scripture and Monnica. (499) This leads the author amongst others to the conclusion that in Augustine's texts *Sapientia's* divine maternity does not exclusively refer to the incarnated Wisdom (Jesus), but to a pre-existent Wisdom (499) which nurtures humankind with grace (500). In Bouwman's reading grace is prepared by mother *Sapientia* in a mystagogical praxis which represents the redemptive power of Jesus Christ. (500)

As these conclusions shine a fresh and new light on contemporary scholarly debate on Augustine's reflections on incarnation and grace, it seems worth the effort to study the argumentative force of Bouwman's dissertation more in detail. As mentioned before, the author has chosen for a complex fivefold multidisciplinary approach of this topic. This choice brings in a potential wealth of knowledge and methods. It also introduces the risk on confusion and inconsequence. Although the author takes her time to explain her choices in disciplines and methods in an extensive introductory chapter (pp. 15-99), she did not always successfully discuss the epistemological consequences of the choices made. This way it unfortunately happens that Bouwman criticizes and dismisses the hagiographer Trapé because of his lack of historical accuracy. (p. 61) However, she refers to the same work in a paragraph on historical details of Monnica's youth. (pp. 105 and 107)

More fundamental is the question whether Kitty Bouwman has been successful in her quest for traces of the presence and expression of the above mentioned maternal sapiential tradition in Augustine's texts and Christology. (i.e. pp. 26-29; 316-321; 422) As Van Bavel already pointed out in his article 'Maternal aspects' (1997), Augustine used maternal metaphors in his texts in order to explain the complex theology of incarnation to his audience and readers. What is new about Bouwman's thesis, is links to an early Christian maternal sapiential tradition, whose rise and developments are closely related to extended Greek version of Sir. 24,24. According to the author these texts and sapiential tradition might have been familiar to Augustine because of its popular use in the setting of the education of catechumens. (p. 317) The author, however, does not explicitly demonstrate or prove this supposed link between this tradition and Augustine's texts. Concerning description and history of this maternal sapiential tradition Kitty Bouwman refers to secondary literature, amongst others to Edward Schillebeeckx, the systematic theologian

Schoonenberg (pp. 28-29), and the feminist theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. However, neither of these authors established an explicit link between a maternal sapiential Christology and Augustine. Both Schillebeeckx and Schoonenberg³ discuss the presence and influence of this sapiential tradition in the context of Christology in the Q-tradition, the synoptic gospels and Paul. Schillebeeckx explicitly connects this type of Christology with the development of Gnostic speculation and situates this type of Christology in the environment of a sophisticated Greek Jewish milieu.⁴ None of these authors refers to Augustine in this context. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza discussed in her work *Jesus: Miriam's child, Sophia's prophet* a reconstruction of this maternal sapiential tradition. However, she relates this tradition predominately to Philo of Alexandria, the Q tradition, the pre-Markan and Pre-Pauline traditions, Matthew and John. She did not explicitly suggest or demonstrate a connection with the *Corpus Augustinianum*.⁵ Consequently it is the burden of Kitty Bouwman's close-readings of the selected Augustinian texts to demonstrate the presence and function of this specific type of Christology in this research project.

As mentioned before, Bouwman offers a rich variety of texts from the oeuvre of Augustine and in this way expands the corpus of texts already studied on incarnation by Tars van Bavel. Unfortunately the authors' readings and analysis suffer more than once from terminological inaccuracies and inconsequence. This leads Bouwman for example to the implausible observation of two *subjects* in Augustine's Christology: the sibling Jesus and the divine Christ. (pp. 362-364; see also p. 429) This suggestion of a dualist interpretation of Augustine's Christology is amplified by Bouwman's habit to refer to Jesus as 'the man Jesus' (i.e. p. 295, 362, 406, 407) and the divine Christ, the Word. (p. 362, 429) That Kitty Bouwman does not discuss her position in Christology in confrontation with scholars such as Lewis Ayres and Michael Cameron is a serious omission of this study. Their extensive studies and publications have deepened the insights on the roots of Augustine's Christology in Nice and post-Nicene theology.⁶

Despite these critical remarks concerning imperfections in the argumentative force of this monograph, Bouwman deserves praise for her courage and originality from the perspective of text reading. She has offered a survey of texts concerning a topic in patristic research which potentially makes a rich contribution to our knowledge and understanding of Augustine's use of female and male metaphors in describing and explaining the theology of incarnation. What appears to be an indispensable part of such future research on this topic, is a confrontation with sources from neoplatonic tradition. An interesting example offers Porphyrius' metaphor on nurturing the soul.⁷ Neoplatonic sources which discuss criticism on religious anthropomorphism offer a promising context for the reading of Augustine's theological reflections on this topic. A postmodern or feminist reading perspective certainly

³ Bouwman refers to Schillebeeckx on pp. 398-99; to Schoonenberg on the pp. 28-29; 398; 403.

⁴ E. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus het verhaal van een levende*, (1974, 1982⁹ Baarn) , pp. 334- 339; 350-354.

⁵ E Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet. Critical Issues in Feminist Christology*. (TT & Clark, London 1995), pp. 143-178. Cf. Bouwman, p. 28

⁶ M. Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere. Augustine's Early Figurative Exegesis* Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford 2012); L. Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy. An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*, (Oxford 2004), L. Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge 2010).

⁷ G. Clark, 'Fattening the Soul: Christian Ascetism and Porphyry on Abstinence.' In: *Studia Patristica. Papers presented at the Thirteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 1999* (Leuven 2001) XXXV, pp. 41-51.

would enrich the hermeneutical process in an anthropological evaluation of Augustine's use of female and male metaphors in his explanations on incarnation.

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