Birmingham Theological Journal
A Journal of Birmingham Theological Seminary
Volume 2 | Issue 1 | Dec. 2024

LETTERS

ARTICLES

BOOK REVIEWS

 ISSN: 2998-7164 (online)

Birmingham Theological Journal
A Journal of Birmingham Theological Seminary
2200 Briarwood Way
Birmingham, AL 35243-2923
Printed in the United States of America

About the *BTJ*

The *Birmingham Theological Journal* (*BTJ*) is the open access, annual, peer-reviewed journal published by Birmingham Theological Seminary (BTS). The journal provides a venue for BTS students, faculty, and alumni to publish articles and book reviews in the following fields of study: biblical theology, Old and New Testament studies, church history, systematic theology, and related disciplines. The journal seeks to further scholarship by focusing on areas of academic study related to the Bible and its application primarily within the Reformed tradition and a broadly historic Reformed community.

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 ISSN: 2998-7164 (online)

From the Editors

Dear Readers,

Many exciting things are happening at Birmingham Theological Seminary. These developments include the launch of the Reeder Center for Pastoral Studies, as well as significant growth in enrollment, with students in over 30 US states, more than 100 countries around the world, and the most ever in our prison ministry at the Bibb County Correctional Facility. We are pleased to contribute the 2024 issue of the *Birmingham Theological Journal* to this outstanding list.

This year's diversity of articles opens academic conversations on a variety of topics. These articles range from AI and theology, to conceptions of divinity in the Ancient Near East, and the government's role in the work of biblical counselors. Like last year, submissions went through an internal, double-blind review process, and this year, we started an external review process that we hope to expand further next year. Our articles are followed by two book reviews of particular interest. First, we are delighted to have a guest submission from Dalton Hicks, an NOBTS PhD student who, due to his upcoming dissertation, is uniquely qualified to review the *Editio Critica Maior VI: Revelation*. Pastors will be interested in how this volume of the Greek New Testament may impact future versions of the Bible. The second review marks the 100th anniversary edition of J. Gresham Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism*. As founder of Westminster Theological Seminary, Machen's thoughtful distinction between 20th-century German liberalism and orthodox Christianity is still relevant today.

Finally, we want to call your attention to our best article award from our 2023 issue of the *BTJ*. The 2023 faculty review board voted for the article "Christology and Trinitarianism in John 1:1 via Grammatico-Historical Exegesis Updated with Tools from Linguistics" by Russell T. Booth. Congratulations to Russell! The recommended citation for his award-winning article follows:

Booth, Russell T. "Christology and Trinitarianism in John 1:1 via Grammatico-Historical Exegesis Updated with Tools from Linguistics." *Birmingham Theological Journal* 1, no. 1 (Dec. 2023): 25-47.

Thanks to the many people who make the journal a success, from authors to reviewers and readers. We appreciate your continued support.

Sincerely,
The *BTJ* Editors

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 ISSN: 2998-7164 (online)

Birmingham Theological Journal
A Journal of Birmingham Theological Seminary
Volume 2 | Issue 1 | Article 1 | Dec. 2024

AI and Original Sin: Predictions for How Human Nature Might Sabotage the Path to Transhumanist Utopia

Michael Howarth

Abstract: Artificial intelligence (AI) has not taken over the world—yet—but it has taken over the conversation. Since the release of ChatGPT in 2022, nearly every industry has raced to understand the implications of AI and how such new and powerful technologies will change how people work and live. Among those scrambling to discern the implications of the AI revolution are theologians, many of whom, like much of the world, seem to have been caught off guard. The sudden acceleration of AI technology has revealed a theological blind spot and raised numerous questions that many theologians have not even begun to ask, let alone answer.

Further, as many theologians begin to engage in the AI conversation, they might be surprised or even alarmed to find the conversation already occupied by scholars who have been thinking about and eagerly awaiting AI for some time — namely transhumanists. Thus, theologians have not only a host of new and urgent questions to answer but also various competing visions for human flourishing with which to contend. While many Christians understand technology as merely a tool, some transhumanists view AI as something much more, as a God-ordained means of continued human evolution—and even salvation.

Among the most critical theological questions related to AI is this: in what ways, and to what extent, might sinful human nature affect the development and uses of AI? This paper begins to answer that question, reviewing current literature to establish the competing points of view, and concluding that, while AI may be a uniquely powerful tool, it remains merely that—a tool. Far from being an instrument of salvation, AI will inevitably be—and has already been—pulled into humanity's cycle of sinful self-sabotage.

Recommended Citation

Howarth, Michael. "AI and Original Sin: Predictions for How Human Nature Might Sabotage the Path to Transhumanist Utopia." *Birmingham Theological Journal* 2, no. 1 (Dec. 2024): 2–18.

If this article is accessed online, please add the URL to the citation.

 ISSN: 2998-7164 (online)

Introduction

Imagine a man driving home from the airport. As he drives down the freeway, traffic becomes heavier and slower until he is forced to a complete stop. Suddenly, his smartphone's GPS chimes, automatically offering him an escape route out of the traffic jam. What is unique about this story? Nothing; this type of technology has become commonplace, but it is the very mundanity of the story above that exemplifies just how deeply artificial intelligence (AI) has already become embedded in everyday life. However, if AI has become commonplace, why does there seem to be fever-pitch conversation about it everywhere these days?

In late 2022, the topic of AI surged to the forefront of nearly every industry and sphere of society with the release of ChatGPT, a large-language-model (LLM) AI chatbot capable of human-like conversational dialogue, which quickly became the fastest-growing application of all time.[1] Common GPS applications and ChatGPT fall into the category of "narrow AI," meaning "programs that accomplish a specific task in a limited domain."[2] However, as anyone who has used ChatGPT can attest, the experience is hardly comparable to using GPS. Some believe ChatGPT's human-like responsiveness to be an early indicator of the eventual advent of artificial general intelligence (AGI), an "integrated intelligent system that can accomplish a wide variety of tasks by carrying learning from one domain to another, as humans do."[3] Some see even the potential for AGI as an urgent wake-up call for theologians to begin engaging the topic of AI in earnest, with one scholar proclaiming that "if AGI ever does come to be, it will require

[1] Stan Schroeder, "ChatGPT Is the Fastest Growing App of All Time," *Mashable*, February 2, 2023, https://mashable.com/article/chatgpt-fastest-growing. In its first two months, ChatGPT had 100 million monthly users.

[2] Noreen Herzfeld, *The Artifice of Intelligence: Divine and Human Relationship in a Robotic Age* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2023), 4.

[3] Ibid., 5.

significant theological discussion about AI personhood, robot rights, human-AI relationships, and so on."[4]

Theology and AI

While the term *artificial intelligence* was coined by the computer scientist John McCarthy in 1955, much of the serious theological engagement with the topic is relatively recent.[5] This delayed engagement has been noted consistently over the last twenty years, beginning with theologian Noreen Herzfeld's first book on the topic in 2002, *In Our Image: Artificial Intelligence and the Human Spirit*, which claimed to be "the first extensive theological engagement with Artificial Intelligence."[6] Ronald Cole-Turner noted the delayed engagement again in 2011 in regard to a field closely related to AI called "transhumanism," where he claims, "Relatively few religious scholars and leaders have joined in, despite the fact that the religious themes are often apparent at the very surface of these debates."[7] In 2020, mathematician and philosopher John C. Lennox proclaimed, "Indeed, since the outcomes and ideas surrounding work on AI will inevitably affect us all, many people are thinking and writing about it who are not scientists at all. The implications are such that it is important that, for instance, philosophers, ethicists, theologians, cultural commentators, novelists, and artists get involved in the wider debate.[8]

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[4] Matthew J. Gaudet, "An Introduction to the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence," *Journal of Moral Theology* 11, no. 1 (2022): 1–12, https://jmt.scholasticahq.com/issue/4236.

[5] Ilia Delio, *Re-Enchanting the Earth: Why AI Needs Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2020), xii.

[6] Noreen Herzfeld, *In Our Image: Artificial Intelligence and the Human Spirit* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), back cover.

[7] Ronald Cole-Turner, ed. *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 2.

[8] John C. Lennox, *2084: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 16.

 ISSN: 2998-7164 (online)

Then, in 2022, in response to the lack of theological engagement, the Catholic *Journal of Moral Theology* dedicated an entire nine-article special issue to the subject because "today, technology has only marched onward, while responses from Catholic moral theology remain 'few and far between.'"[9] In summary, theologians remained somewhat sleepy on the topic of AI until events in the late 90s and early 2000s began to awaken their interest in the conversation.[10] This delayed engagement has had important consequences, as will be explored below.

Definitions

The topic of AI brings with it some terms that may not be familiar to readers. These include terms such as "artificial general intelligence" and "narrow AI" which have been defined above. The term *large language model* refers to technologies such as ChatGPT that are "trained on immense amounts of data making them capable of understanding and generating natural language and other types of content to perform a wide range of tasks."[11] Transhumanism is a broader "cultural and philosophical movement . . . whereby we humans could improve ourselves and transcend our biological limits."[12] As professor Ted Peters succinctly puts it: "The transhumanist destination is a posthuman species characterized by good health, enhanced

[9] Matthew J. Gaudet, "An Introduction to the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence," *Journal of Moral Theology* 11, no. 1 (2022): 1–12, https://jmt.scholasticahq.com/issue/4236.

[10] Noreen Herzfeld, *In Our Image: Artificial Intelligence and the Human Spirit* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 3. Herzfeld attributes the wider cultural awakening to AI to two significant media events. The first was the January 12, 1997 birthday of the fictional computer HAL from Arthur C. Cooke's novel *2001.* The second was the defeat of chess master Gary Kasparov by IBM's supercomputer "Deep Blue."

[11] "What are large language models (LLMs)?" IBM, accessed September 24, 2024, https://www.ibm.com/topics/large-language-models.

[12] Ilia Delio, *Re-Enchanting the Earth: Why AI Needs Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2020), xxi–xxii.

 ISSN: 2998-7164 (online)

intelligence, and perhaps even immortality. The road to get there has been paved by the conflation of biological evolution and technological progress."[13]

For many, visions of such a transhumanist utopia are relegated to the realm of science fiction, but for transhumanists, technological advancement is evolution in progress. Every step forward fortifies the transhumanists' hope for an optimized humanity of the future that will be

> regeneticized, nanotechized, cyborgized, and perhaps even immortalized. Genetic science hybridized with nanotechnology will carry modern medicine well beyond our current occupation with healing the sick. The next generation will devise bodily systems that avoid disease, enhance our capacities, and qualitatively improve our physical and intellectual well-being. The transhumanist vision includes immortality. Two roads might lead to overcoming death, one via the body and the other via the mind. First, perhaps with just the right genetic selection and genetic engineering, our enhanced physical health may make us immune to aging and ward off diseases that might kill us prematurely. We will live forever (unless we get run over by a truck) in our bodies. But if this fails, second, technogeniuses might find a way to upload our brain capacity, including our self-consciousness, into a computer. Then, in our minds, we could live forever as software within computer hardware.[14]

A Theological Blind Spot

The delayed engagement of theologians with the subject of AI has created a theological blind spot: the issue of AI's relationship to sinful human nature has not been adequately addressed. To begin addressing this theological blind spot in the AI conversation, one should ask, in what ways, and to what extent might sinful human nature affect the development and uses of AI? Because of humanity's fallen, sinful nature, it can be expected that AI will be used widely for malicious purposes, thus ultimately sabotaging any AI-enabled journey to the posthuman promised land envisioned by transhumanists. This paper will investigate how theologians

[13] Ted Peters, "Progress and Provolution," in *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement*, ed. Ronald Cole-Turner (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 65.

[14] Ted Peters, "Progress and Provolution," in *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement*, ed. Ronald Cole-Turner (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 63–64.

 ISSN: 2998-7164 (online)

currently view sin and its relationship to AI and explore some of the digital innovations that have preceded AI to see how they fared once put into the hands of sinful human beings.

In addressing AI and sin, one of the most pressing presuppositions theologians bring to this conversation about AI concerns their belief about sin, its origin, its consequences, and its remedy. The Reformed tradition of this author, articulated in *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, states that humanity's original forebearers disobeyed God, fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, that their guilt of this sin was then imputed to all subsequent generations, and from this original corruption all people are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good and inclined to all evil.[15] A full treatment of the main Christian theological positions regarding sin is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the argument put forth in this paper does not rest solely on the Reformed understanding of original sin. The same basic argument could be made from, for example, the Eastern Orthodox or Roman Catholic point of view. These traditions concur that "God created the world for a good and loving purpose, which included a community of morally good human beings" and that "this divine plan was impeded in some significant way and that restoration was required. The commonly used term to denote this impediment is the fall, and a term often used to indicate its source is original sin."[16] One could imagine a counterargument being raised from an Arminian/Wesleyan point of view, which holds that "human nature was gravely impaired by the fall (the doctrine of original sin), but . . . that God had already initiated, across the whole human family, his restoration of human capacities for responding to God by means of his grace (the

[15] "Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Punishment Thereof," *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996), chapter 6.

[16] J. B. Stump and Chad Meister, eds. *Original Sin and the Fall: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 1.

 ISSN: 2998-7164 (online)

doctrine of prevenient grace)."[17] This Arminian point of view could, theoretically, be joined with transhumanist theories that envision technology as a means of grace and transformation. However, this conclusion is not required by the Arminian position, which could also dove-tail perfectly well with the conclusion stated in this paper, that technologies such as AI are merely tools, and tools should indeed be received as gracious gifts from God to be used with thanksgiving and for human flourishing—but they should not be mistaken for instruments or means of salvation.

Literature Review

First, where do human nature and the concept of sin fit within the current theological discussion regarding AI? Here it is important to note that much of the scholarly conversation regarding AI is subsumed by the larger debate around transhumanism. To gain understanding of the overall theological landscape regarding transhumanism, the 2011 book *Transhumanism and Transcendence,* edited by Ronald Cole-Turner, is a helpful guide. The similarity between Christianity and transhumanism is found in their shared hope for future progress, human betterment, and eternal life, but important differences appear in answering how these goals are achieved.[18] Cole-Turner asks, "Should we think of technology as a misguided effort to save ourselves, a refusal to live as God intends and await the salvation God brings? Or is it a risky but necessary way in which we open ourselves to what God is doing in us and through us, thereby allowing God's work to be done in us and through us by new means?"[19] In this question, Cole-

[17] Joel B. Green, "The Wesleyan View," in *Original Sin and the Fall: Five Views*, ed. J. B. Stump and Chad Meister (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 59.

[18] Ronald Cole-Turner, ed. *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 193.

[19] Ibid., 7.

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Turner gives a basic orientation to the two polar ends of the larger theological conversation and the most important point of disagreement between Christianity and transhumanism, with one position being, roughly, "tech is a tool—await God's coming," and the other being, in essence, "tech is God's coming."

For a view of the "tech is God's coming" side of the discussion, Ilia Delio and her 2020 book, *Re-Enchanting the Earth: Why AI Needs Religion,* provides perspective. Here Delio pushes in a direction that might be surprising to many, arguing for and foreseeing a coming evolutionary oneness between humans and AI. Delio sees AI as part of God's work in redeeming humanity.[20] She argues that "the root principles of AI are actually found in nature,"[21] that the advent of computer technology and AI are an evolutionary response to the chaos and violence of the mid-twentieth century,[22] and that AI is, in fact, at the heart of the next phase of human evolution:

> We need to own our evolution honestly and openly because it is accelerating; without accepting evolution, the changes brought about by technology can be destabilizing. And here is where I want to challenge the critics of technology who are writing with the first axial person in mind; there is a new type of person emerging in our midst, the post human, and this new person demands our utmost attention.[23]

Delio argues that AI needs religion to help stabilize and focus its power, but she sees current institutional religion as needing to embrace science and evolution and throw off the constraints of "first axial" thinking.[24] In sum, Delio calls not just for the embracing of AI but for the full-scale reorientation and integration of all of religion and all of society around and with AI as an

[20] Ilia Delio, *Re-Enchanting the Earth: Why AI Needs Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2020), 225.

[21] Ibid., xiii.

[22] Ibid., 216.

[23] Ibid., 217.

[24] Ibid., 224.

 ISSN: 2998-7164 (online)

integral means to the evolution and destiny as a species and for the sake of the planet.

Current Concerns with Narrow AI

While Delio's vision of the AI future appears to involve every form of AI seamlessly integrating and empowering a new world and new form of humanity, it is important to take a step back and briefly assess the current state of AI. Narrow AI already permeates daily life. Therefore, the scholarly conversations around narrow AI tend to be more grounded in immediate concerns, which are many. Ethicist Matthew J. Gaudet observes, "Many of the moral problems related to AI are simply exacerbations of moral issues already present in society. Among the most prevalent of these is the problem of bias. A machine learning algorithm can only be as good and reliable as the data set it is trained on."[25] Here the theological blind spot begins to be revealed, and it is this issue of bias where theologians can be very helpful in the conversation about AI. While the concept of human bias is recognized by scholars across every discipline, Christian theologians can offer a unique and valuable perspective on human bias by undergirding it with their perspectives on sin, the effects of which secular scholars often dismiss but which can be seen time and time again throughout history.

In Delio's *Re-Enchanting the Earth,* her discussion of sin is essentially an indictment of individualism, where she states, "If one were to posit an origin of 'sin' in the human community, it would be in the rise of the first axial person . . . instead of imitating nature in its communal flow, humans became aware of one another as individuals . . . turning the other into a competitor

[25] Matthew J. Gaudet, "An Introduction to the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence," *Journal of Moral Theology* 11, no. 1 (2022): 1–12, https://jmt.scholasticahq.com/issue/4236.

and foe."[26] A more historically and biblically grounded perspective on sin may be found in chapter 5 of *Transhumanism and Transcendence,* "Progress and Provolution." This chapter is authored by theologian Ted Peters, who falls on the "tech is a tool—await God's coming" side of the debate. Peters challenges transhumanists such as Delio, proclaiming, "It appears to me that members of the transhumanist school of thought are naïve about human nature. . . . They take insufficient account of the human propensity for using neutral or even good things for selfish purposes, which results in chaos and suffering.[27] Importantly, Peters also notes how such theological blind spots have occurred before, observing that "the invention of the computer virus is an invention with one sole purpose: to destroy. . . . No increase in human intelligence or advance in technology will alter this ever-lurking human proclivity. . . . At the birth of the computer age, we should have been able to predict the coming of the computer virus, or something like it. Now, at the birth of transhumanist technology, similar predictions would be in order."[28] Therefore, given the relatively limited theological engagement regarding narrow AI and the concept of sin, one can adopt Peter's question and aim it toward AI: if at the birth of the computer age people should have been able to predict the coming of the computer virus, then today, at the dawn of the AI age, what predications should people be able to make?

The Evolution of the Computer Virus

One could simply begin where Peters left off, with the computer virus and similar technologies that have also been developed for their own malicious purposes: spyware,

[26] Ilia Delio, *Re-Enchanting the Earth: Why AI Needs Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2020), 213.

[27] Ted Peters, "Progress and Provolution," in *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement*, ed. Ronald Cole-Turner (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 81.

[28] Ibid., 80.

 ISSN: 2998-7164 (online)

ransomware, "trojan horses," keyloggers, and social engineering schemes such as email phishing attacks, all of which pose major threats to individuals and organizations. Global cybersecurity spending is expected to exceed $1.75 trillion between 2021–2025.[29] According to Forbes, "cyber threat awareness programs for employees are vital. The fundamental component of almost all cybersecurity attacks is social engineering. Thus, training should cover issues like spotting phishing emails, choosing strong passwords, practicing safe surfing habits and identifying these approaches."[30] Social engineering of this nature and in the cybercrime context is "a manipulation technique that exploits human error to gain private information, access, or valuables."[31]

One might ask, how might the use of AI add a new dimension to social engineering and phishing scams? With many types of AI technologies already being made available for free, certain predictions seem clear. For example, many AI voice-cloning applications are now available, and one could imagine such technology being used to clone the voice of a coworker, CEO, or even a family member for malicious purposes. In fact, such criminal use of AI is already beginning to take place, as reporting in a July 2023 article from CBS News in Pittsburgh shows:

> When Janis Creason got a call from an unknown telephone number, she answered it, thinking it was a doctor's call she was expecting. "[I] heard on the phone my daughter sobbing," [said] Creason of Lower Paxton Township. "'Mom, I've been in an accident. My nose is broken.' I recognized that voice as my daughter." Turns out that it was a scam artist using artificial intelligence to replicate her daughter's voice.[32]

[29] David Braue, "Global Cybersecurity Spending to Exceed $1.75 Trillion from 2021-2025," *Cybercrime Magazine*, September 10, 2021, https://cybersecurityventures.com/cybersecurity-spending-2021-2025/.

[30] Juta Gurinaviciute, "Cybersecurity Investment Trends in the U.S.," *Forbes Magazine,* August 1, 2023, https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2023/08/01/cybersecurity-investment-trends-in-the-us/?sh=4d6edbf7ae24.

[31] "What is Social Engineering?" *Kaspersky,* accessed December 2, 2023, https://usa.kaspersky.com/resource-center/definitions/what-is-social-engineering.

[32] Jon Delano, "AI Scam Artists Impersonate Familiar Voices to Scam the Rest of Us," *CBS News Pittsburgh*, July 11, 2023, https://www.cbsnews.com/pittsburgh/news/ai-scam-artists-impersonate-familiar-voices-scams/.

 ISSN: 2998-7164 (online)

Moreover, it is perhaps even easier to envision large-language-model AI being used maliciously to clone the written communication style of CEOs, politicians, or coworkers. Here again, such malicious use of AI has, unfortunately, already begun, with a recent CNBC News headline stating, "AI Tools Such as ChatGPT Are Generating a Mammoth Increase in Malicious Phishing Emails."[33]

Sin and Social Media

As can be seen above, the computer virus and its various permutations are created with malicious aims, and it is now apparent how AI is already being used sinfully to increase the effectiveness of such harmful technologies. However, it is also beneficial for us to investigate how humanity's sinful nature corrupts even those digital technologies created with the best of intentions. How have human nature and sin corrupted technologies that, unlike the computer virus, were initially created for good, or at least non-malicious, purposes? For insights regarding this question, New York University Stern School of Business professor Jonathan Haidt and his research on digital technology and social media provide some disconcerting findings.

In a 2022 article for *The Atlantic,* Haidt shows how even seemingly minor changes to social media platforms can inadvertently incentivize the worst in human nature.[34] He observes that "in their early incarnations, platforms such as Myspace and Facebook were relatively harmless. . . . Early social media can be seen as just another step in the long progression of technological improvements—from the Postal Service through the telephone to email and

[33] Bob Violino, "AI Tools Such as ChatGPT are Generating a Mammoth Increase in Malicious Phishing Emails," *CNBC*, November 28, 2023, https://www.cnbc.com/2023/11/28/ai-like-chatgpt-is-creating-huge-increase-in-malicious-phishing-email.html.

[34] Jonathan Haidt, "Why the Past 10 Years of American Life Have Been Uniquely Stupid," *The Atlantic*, April 11, 2022, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/05/social-media-democracy-trust-babel/629369/.

 ISSN: 2998-7164 (online)

texting—that helped people achieve the eternal goal of maintaining their social ties." However, everything changed in 2009 when Facebook added the "Like" button and Twitter added the "Retweet" function. As a result, both companies then developed algorithms that promoted the most "liked" and most "retweeted" content, and "later research showed that posts that trigger emotions—especially anger at outgroups— are the most likely to be shared" and this "new game encouraged dishonesty and mob dynamics," with the result that outrage has become the key to online virality.[35] Perhaps most concerning is Haidt's conclusion, where he makes an AI predication of his own: "Artificial intelligence is close to enabling the limitless spread of highly believable disinformation."[36]

Conclusion

Is what Christians call sin merely an unfortunate evolutionary holdover from humanity's past, a sort of evolutionary bump in the road? If so, then the solution proposed by Delio and other progressive transhumanists makes sense: more progress. Accelerate innovation as fast as possible and leave the evolutionary speed bump of sin in the dust. According to Delio, technological innovation is evolution in progress, and evolution and God are synonymous.[37] For Delio, technology is God's coming. Christians, of course, hold a different view; that the solution for sin is not blind progress but true repentance. Indeed, technology is merely a tool. Await God's coming.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ilia Delio, "Deep Incarnation and Co-Creation in an Unfinished Universe," St. Frances Cabrini Roman Catholic Church, Oct 2, 2023, video of lecture, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1Y0iQNKgKA.

 ISSN: 2998-7164 (online)

The world is currently at the dawn of the AI age, and its effects on human emotional growth and mental health have yet to be researched in depth. While AGI does not yet exist, how does the mere appearance of human-like intelligence in computers affect people's spiritual health and growth? Does having an "all-knowing" narrow AI such as ChatGPT available make people less likely to pray? What will be some of the unforeseen reactions to the spread of AI technology? Will it increase distrust in institutions? These will be important questions to answer. As for the question before us now, which side is more supported by the evidence? Is technology God's coming, or is technology a tool while the world awaits God's coming? The hypothesis explored above is that, if humans are by their nature limited and by their fallen nature universally sinful, AI will inevitably inherit many human biases and assumptions. Further, because of humanity's fallen, sinful nature, one can expect AI to be used for malicious purposes. From even a small sampling of the evidence, one can see strong support for this. Not only might AI be used for sinful purposes—it is already being used for sinful purposes.

One can imagine the contours of Delio's rebuttal: that I am using "first axial" thinking; that I am mired in a "theology of sin," and that I need to evolve to a "theology of love."[38] In response, it could be argued that the world needs both. A proper "theology of love" requires a robust and accurate theology of sin because the world that God loves—and that He calls Christians to love—suffers under a repeating cycle of sin. That cycle of sin can be easily seen throughout human history even by non-academics and non-theologians such as American industrialist Henning Webb Prentis, who coined "The Prentis Cycle." Prentis observed that human societies are subject to a particular repeating cycle "from bondage to spiritual faith; from spiritual faith to courage; from courage to liberty; from liberty to abundance; from abundance to

[38] Ibid.

 ISSN: 2998-7164 (online)

selfishness; from selfishness to apathy; from apathy to dependency; from dependency back to bondage once more."[39] Prentis made this observation in the 1940s, but the cycle can clearly be seen throughout the biblical book of Judges as well, where Israel repeatedly turns away from God (apathy) and is therefore invaded by other pagan nations (bondage). Israel then repents (spiritual awakening), and God raises up a judge to deliver them (courage). Israel is then restored to their independence (liberty). To Delio and other transhumanists one should ask, is there any reason to believe that AI will be the tool that finally breaks this cycle of sinful self-sabotage? If so, the onus is on Delio and other transhumanists to bring forth that evidence and make the case that AI will somehow empower this generation to become the exception to history's rule. As with every other utopian dream, it seems there is just one problem standing in the way of the gleaming transhumanist dream becoming a reality: human beings.

While transhumanists like Delio see AI as another evolutionary step toward conquering sin and overcoming fallen human nature, history and theology point toward a different outcome—that AI will suffer the same fate as every other tool and technology that has come before it. It will be used for some good, of course, but sinful human nature will ultimately short-circuit any path to an AI-enabled transhumanist utopia.

[39] H. W. Prentis, *Bulwarks of Freedom* (New York: Newcomen Society of England, American Branch, 1946), 11.

 ISSN: 2998-7164 (online)

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Birmingham Theological Journal
A Journal of Birmingham Theological Seminary
Volume 2 | Issue 1 | Article 2 | Dec. 2024

Division of the Divine: A Brief Study on Divine Objects in the Ancient Near East

R. R. Lord

Abstract: This paper examines the concept of divinity in the Ancient Near East (ANE) by exploring the implications of a divisible divinity. The phrase "divide your divinity" is included as a request from the priests of Pirinkir to their deity, the Goddess of the Night, in a Hittite ritual translated by Gary Beckman. The unique language of the request raises several questions. Is divinity a divisible quality, and if so, what exactly is being divided? Are all ANE deities subject to a division of their divinity, or are some deities indivisible? Drawing on the research of Beckman, Natalie May, and the Open Richly Annotated Cuneiform Corpus (ORACC) project, this study centers on several ways divinity was conceptualized in ANE cultures. Specifically, it addresses whether ANE cultures believed that deities could divide their divinity across multiple locations, such as sanctuaries or statues, without diminishing their power. Such division is considered by evaluating the use of divine objects including images, mobile shrines, symbols and other material artifacts on three conceptual levels: material, multi-site, and characteristic division. The levels of division in the ANE gods serve to support the oneness of Yahweh because he cannot be shown to be divided along these lines. The possibility of division is contrasted with the oneness of Yahweh, as represented in the Old Testament. The use of the Ark of the Covenant throughout the history of Israel's migration, warfare, and settlement allows for a direct contrast between divine objects associated with divisible deities and those associated with a deity shown to be indivisible.

Recommended Citation

R. R. Lord. "Division of the Divine: A Brief Study on Divine Objects in the Ancient Near East." *Birmingham Theological Journal* 2, no. 1 (Dec. 2024): 19–50.

If this article is accessed online, please add the URL to the citation.

Introduction

An important current of divinity runs beneath the material remains of Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) cultures. The destinies of city states, kingdoms, and eventual empires were not gambled in mortal combat, but believed to be decided in the realm of the divine. The interaction between divinity and humanity gives rise now, as in those ancient days, to a number of questions and speculations. This paper examines the current of divinity guiding the rituals, warfare, and building projects of the ANE, rather than produce an overview of the various pantheons and god-lists of the ANE or attempt to reconstruct one of its many religions, as so many scholars have already done. In this examination, the oneness of Yahweh's divinity is contrasted with the divisible divinity of ANE deities such as Pirinkir and Aššur, based on the material remains now available online through the Open Richly Annotated Cuneiform Corpus (ORACC) project. Providing such a contrast between deities and their cults examines how ANE cultures conceptualized the divine.

This paper owes much to the research of Gary Beckman, Natalie May, and the ORACC project. Beckman's translation of the dedication ritual for the Hittite "Goddess of the Night" introduced the phrase "divide your divinity" into the vernacular of this research project.[1] Beckman's translation of the request from the ritual adherents to the physical image (statue) presents the problem this paper addresses. How did people in the ANE conceptualize the divine? What is included or excluded in divinity? If a divine being divides its divinity, is something lost or lessened in the process? When a deity has divine images in multiple sanctuaries across an empire, is the divinity of that deity fragmented?

[1] Gary Beckman, "Temple Building among the Hittites," in *From the Foundations to the Crenellations: Essays on Temple Building in the Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible*, ed. Mark J. Boda and Jamie Novotny (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010), 71– 89.

Two research questions flow from the possibility of a divided divinity. First, did the gods interact with their people in the fullness of their divinity, or did they divide themselves between locations such as fixed and mobile sanctuaries? Second, when Yahweh led Israel in war or migration, did He do so in the fullness of His divinity, or was His divinity divided between His presence in the camp and with the men of war on the march?

The proximal goal of this research article is to extend the work of Beckman by exploring possible ways in which divinity can be divided. Immediately, rituals concerned with divine objects across three contemporaneous, yet distinct, ANE cultures will be compared. Once these rituals are evaluated and the mobilization of divine objects in warfare is considered, two things will be evident: First, records of the Ark and Tabernacle in the Old Testament do not include a possible division of Yahweh's divinity. Second, divinity amongst other ANE cultures is not a static target, and extrabiblical sources record several ways in which ANE divinity can be observably divided.

Three extrabiblical sources will provide the context for an ultimate evaluation of Old Testament texts focused on the Ark of the Covenant and its role across the stages of Hebrew religious development. Two primary texts from Hittite and Assyrian sources are considered: first, the dedication of a statue for the Hittite "Goddess of the Night" and second, a court exorcist's record of cultic topography in the city of Assur. Third, this paper considers the quality of divinity itself, and since many peoples in the ANE were nomadic or at least mobile, their deities likewise moved with them. The importance of divine objects, especially images in migration and warfare, is thus a needful consideration.[2] This use of divine objects within mobile sanctuaries and structures is the focus of May's work.

[2] Images are objects, but objects are not necessarily images.

Literature Review

Within the extrabiblical sources used for this research, divinity is divided in several ways. First, division is observed at the physical level of deity, *material division*. Plainly put, every individual statue representing a singular ANE deity possesses the attributes and potency of the deity in some measure. Beckman has produced several works on Hittite rituals which center on the treatment of deities and their images within the Hittite pantheon. Beckman's translation and commentary on a ritual describing the bathing of the goddess Šawuška is illuminating here.[3] The statue is treated in a surprisingly human way: it is fed, clothed, bathed, and maintained in a manner commensurate with the service it was expected to perform for the ritual participants.[4] In another example of material division, Beckman's treatment of a ritual pertaining to the Hittite "Goddess of the Night" includes a direct appeal to the goddess to divide her divinity between two sanctuaries of the Hittites.[5] This is a formal request from the priests to the goddess manifested in the statue to transfer its divinity into another statue for use elsewhere. Beckman's translation and subsequent commentary utilizes delineating language referring to the "mother institution" and the "new temple."[6] Section thirty of the text, found in Appendix A, underscores the necessary role of the old temple and its materials in the formation of the new temple site.

[3] Gary Beckman, "Bathing the Goddess (CTH 714)," in *Marbeh Ḥokmah: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East in Loving Memory of Victor Avigdor Hurowitz,* ed. Shamir Yonah, Edward L. Greenstein, Mayer I. Gruber, Peter Machinist, and Shalom M. Paul (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 43-63.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Gary Beckman, "Temple Building among the Hittites," in *From the Foundations to the Crenellations: Essays on Temple Building in the Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible*, ed. Mark J. Boda and Jamie Novotny (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010), 71– 89.

[6] Ibid., 80.

Divine images must at some point be activated to be of any use. What transfers the divinity of a being into a material object made in the likeness of a deity? Uri Gabbay provides several instances of activation through various rituals, including cultic whispering into the ears of objects and even living creatures that were designated for the worship of a particular deity.[7] Likewise, Beckman's translation of the "Goddess of the Night" ritual details the nature of an image activation ritual in the Hittite culture, as noted above.

The ritual request for division to a new temple points to the second level of divisibility, which is highlighted in May's work and also present in the invaluable *Marbeh Hokmah* volume with Beckman, in which May evaluates the characteristics of mobile sanctuaries and divine objects on the move in times of war and migration; this level of divisibility is best summarized as *multi-site division*.[8] May highlights the importance of mobile sanctuaries and notes the importance of divine objects as functional vessels to hold the presence of the divine, ensuring their influence over the martial affairs of the nation.[9] Later sections of the paper will elaborate how May is mostly correct in this observation, but her language assumes that the Ark functions exactly the same way as the divine objects in other ANE cultures.

A third level of divisibility is observable in the cultic worship of unique attributes or aspects of the same deity, or *characteristic division*. Richard Litke's reconstructed lists of

[7] Uri Gabbay, "Ancient Mesopotamian Cultic Whispering into the Ears," in *Marbeh Ḥokmah: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East in Loving Memory of Victor Avigdor Hurowitz,* ed. Shamir Yonah, Edward L. Greenstein, Mayer I. Gruber, Peter Machinist, and Shalom M. Paul (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 185-220.

[8] Natalie N. May, "Portable Sanctuaries and Their Evolution: The Biblical Tabernacle (ʿōhel môʿēd/miškān) and the Akkadian qersu," in *Marbeh Ḥokmah: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East in Loving Memory of Victor Avigdor Hurowitz,* ed. Shamir Yonah, Edward L. Greenstein, Mayer I. Gruber, Peter Machinist, and Shalom M. Paul (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 369-388.

[9] Ibid., 378.

Assyro-Babylonian deities bear this out; the gods, such as Enlil, have dozens of entries referring to attributes, such as wisdom, agriculture, and masonry.[10] Another interesting characteristic is the gentilic worship of deities associated with specific shrines and sanctuaries. This is a feature implicit in the works of Litke, Beckman, and May. A deity is worshipped in relation to the city or lands it inhabits. Its particular gentilic shrine has its own image(s), supplied with the requisite sacred materials and some degree of numinosity commensurate with sacred spaces. If the secondary literature opens a crack in the doorway to discuss divinity as a divisible quality, then this paper seeks to open that door further and take a closer look at some possible ways in which ANE cultures perceived divinity can be divided.

Methodology

John H. Walton's work on ANE thought informed the research process and methodology of this paper, providing guardrails for the evaluation of the data under consideration. Walton provides ten principles for comparative study of material remains and textual evidence. Among these principles is an exhortation for scholars to look for surface similarities or conceptual differences between cultures within the data collected for historical, archaeological, literary, and linguistic evaluations.[11] According to Walton, there is no single ANE culture, and even within unique cultures, developments occur representing major shifts in language, literature, and material culture. When differences between cultures are found, the next step is to look for similarities between cultures, or vice versa.[12] In addition, the work of W. W. Hallo and

[10] Richard L. Litke, *A Reconstruction of the Assyro-Babylonian God-Lists* (New Haven, CT: Yale Babylonian Collection, 1998), 21-65.

[11] John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought in the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 17-18.

[12] Before Walton gives a list of principles for evaluation, he devotes much ink to examples of evaluation that oversimplified or ignored data outright. Some early ANE studies suffered from errors that lead to an assumption

K. Lawson Younger is invaluable and informs the methods used in this paper. Younger's essay on "contextual method" concludes, like Walton's, with a list of evaluative principles and considerations for research.[13] Walton considers Hallo's approach to be the origin of methodological maturity in ANE studies for a simple reason: he not only identified similarities between the Bible and ANE sources, but their observable differences.[14]

The extrabiblical texts chosen for this analysis spotlight surface similarities between divine objects within the literary and linguistic tradition of several distinct ANE cultures. These texts provide context for meaningful observations into how divine images and other objects associated with divinity were treated broadly in the ANE. These observations are then contrasted with biblical texts pertaining to the Ark of the Covenant, the material object most closely associated with Yahweh. Within the material religious culture of the Hebrew people, the Ark of the Covenant is the only object comparable to those objects which fit within the conceptual understanding of divine images, though it is more accurately regarded as a divine object or divine symbol.

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of borrowing between the Hebrew Bible and contemporary sources in the ANE. Reactionary scholarship either ignored links between biblical and extrabiblical ANE sources or over extended findings to bring data into alignment with presuppositions based on biblical scholarship.

[13] William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, *Context of Scripture* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), xxix-xlii.

[14] Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 5. Walton's entire discussion on appropriate methods flows from Hallo's work; the "contextual approach" does not eliminate distinctions between similar data to support a defensive or polemical point, unlike earlier miscarriages of scholarship which trended either toward reconciling sources to harmonize with biblical data or assuming that all similarities between biblical and extra-biblical sources were evidence of "borrowing." Ibid., 7-8. Hallo provides a helpful summary of his "contextual approach," highlighting the need for equal parts of comparison and contrast fixed within the geographic setting of the text. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, *Context of Scripture* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), liii. Walton, informed by Hallo, aids this research in providing necessary planks to build a valid methodology. Hallo's considerations for evaluating source material contribute to this excellent framework for conducting research in the ANE, but also for the evaluation of current scholarship, as to whether it features a responsible methodological approach. Hallo and Younger, xli. Natalie May's assertions regarding the Ark will be borne out in a later section but are certainly an example of scholarship saying more than the evidence allows in order to make a parallel; an important consideration of Younger is to avoid this exact sort of conclusion.

In this paper, the term *divine image* narrowly refers to the man-made likeness of a given deity, such as a statue. By contrast, *divine objects* are best conceptualized as a category for the material remains associated with a particular deity. There are no sanctioned images of Yahweh, only objects. Thus, the treatment of the Ark of the Covenant, its behavior, the other material culture associated with it, its tents, its city, and ultimately, its temple are the best available points to evaluate the qualities of Yahweh's divinity against the divinity displayed in the material culture of other religions. The similarities between the Ark and other objects provide an entrance into a closer look at how greatly they differ conceptually. Deity represented by a physical object like an image is akin to the molecular structure of an element if considered in terms of scale. The physical and cosmic makeup of a particular image can be broken down further into parts, but a single divine object is essentially the smallest observable unit of a deity. Thus, observations on divine objects are foundational to this work and constitute the majority of this paper.

The order of evaluations following this section is sequential, beginning with Beckman's treatment of the Night Goddess text, from one divine image with one shrine to a divided divinity with two shrines. Then, in May's text, the research turns to examples of one or more divine objects and introduces a new aspect of divided divinity resulting from the mobilization of portable shrines during migration and warfare. In the final text, SAA 20 49, the extrabiblical analysis ends with original observations on the cultic topography of the Assyrian homeland and conclusions derived from the ORACC translation of the original text. These sources, assessed below, provide necessary context to evaluate the ritual use and activity of the Ark of the Covenant, and subsequent observations about the character of Yahweh's divinity are borne out in these evaluations. While these findings and observations are helpful, they certainly should not be extended to all ANE cultures and religions, a good and needful limitation.

Beckman: Pirinkir the Goddess of the Night

Divine objects represent the smallest observable unit of a deity. The following incantation ritual describes the transfer of potency from one object, an image of Pirinkir, to another such image; thus, it is a logical starting point for an analysis of divinity. The process of the ritual, as will be described below, is easy to understand, even if certain terms remain obscure or fragments are missing.[15] There is a pre-existent cultic shrine for Pirinkir, a Hittite deity described as the "Goddess of the Night." A new shrine in a new temple with a new image of Pirinkir are essential elements in the establishment of the new cult center. A mother image is required to create a new image, indicating a transferable quality of divinity between material objects at the level of an image. If these images are lost or destroyed, would the cult participants need to revisit the ritual which originally drew Pirinkir from the night into an image for worship? No such extant ritual was found for this research, but this ritual necessitates an original at some point in the cult of Pirinkir, and one may rightly ask where the image originated and what sort of numinous quality was imbued in the original image.

In section twenty-one an incantation is given requesting Pirinkir to "guard your person but divide your divinity."[16] This request is made of Pirinkir, but ultimately it is executed by the ritual adherents. They utilize fine oil and objects made of red wool called *tarpala* to draw the old image from its place in the mother sanctuary, and then they draw the new image into its place in

[15] It must be noted that while translations and commentary on this and other texts were read in their totality, the scope of this paper requires broad analysis which zooms in on chosen passages immediately concerned with details most relevant to the concept of divinity and the material religious culture represented in each text. Omitted references to lines of text are made in good faith, and not intended to exclude details which are perceived as contradictory to the conclusions of this research. The referenced articles are included in the bibliography at the end of the paper.

[16] Beckman, 83.

the new temple.[17] Within the ritual the use of these objects is directly associated with human participants actively drawing the deity from different temples, terrains, cities, and metaphysical locales like the underworld or the sky.[18] The numinous quality of Pirinkir is not present until the deity is drawn to the old temple and then bound to the image with a type of object called an *ulihi*.[19] These *ulihi* convey the divinity of Pirinkir from the old sanctuary and image into the new sanctuary and image. The *ulihi* are bound onto the red *kureššar* garment of the image, assuring the transfer and continual divine presence of Pirinkir.[20]

The level of influence humanity seemingly has over Pirinkir is complete. They control where the deity appears by either luring or wooing Pirinkir to the temple. The priests clothe the image with a holy garment, the *kureššar* on which the *ulihi* is bound and indeed which binds her divinity to the image. Walton observes that peoples in the ANE lacked revelation from the gods as to what they wanted or preferred during ritual activity, and thus many such rituals operate on the assumption that gods want attention paid to them like earthly kings, but to a higher degree of magnitude.[21] Walton concludes that cult followers at best could only speculate as to what might please a given deity.[22] In order to please Pirinkir, this ritual performed by the priests includes a chaotic mixture of cultic activity, such as washing, offerings, anointings, meals, and sacrifices.

The request for division of divinity stands out from the other lines of the ritual text. It implies divinity must be fragmentary in some way; in this case at least the presence of the deity

[17] Ibid., 83.

[18] Ibid., 82.

[19] Ibid., 80.

[20] Ibid., 82 and 84.

[21] Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 94.

[22] Ibid., 95.

is limited to a finite image having been drawn from several locations. At the atomic level of divinity, the image must in every way be manipulated by human hands. The only possible activity of the deity is implied in the request for Pirinkir to divide her divinity, but not her person. Yet, even her divinity is manipulated or stewarded by the priests using the *ulihi.* The division itself, though, is carried out with no recorded response from Pirinkir; surely her assent or acquiescence is preferable to the terror of a voice responding out of the night.

May: Mobile Sanctuaries

If the image itself can somehow be divided and drawn from fixed, finite locations as attested above, then what can be made of those gods whose people were nomadic or of those gods who went out to war from their temples carried in mobile shrines? At what point does the territory of one god end and another begin? Does the potency of divine beings have borders? Therefore, it is necessary to differentiate between divine objects and divine images. Walton again helps with this distinction by pointing out that in most ANE cults the image was not viewed as the deity itself but the physical presence of the deity's essence; it is the earthly image which reflects the reality of the divine.[23] Divine objects, such as shrines, weapons, and vestments, are indeed significant, but they perform a different function.

The backdrop of May's work is her study on the development of the Akkadian word, *qersu,* which denotes a portable sanctuary.[24] The term appears in several sources with a range of usage in texts from the Assyrian and Mari cultures. The *qersu* is described varyingly as the structure supporting a large tent, the tent covering itself, or the entire structure and canopy.[25] In

[23] Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 75.

[24] May, 371.

[25] Ibid., 373-375.

the Neo-Assyrian period the *qersu* is most often referenced as a portable wartime sanctuary for divine images and their accoutrements.[26] It is this most developed iteration of the term which captures the scope of meaning preferred in this research. The tent would serve the army as the cultic center away from home, while the shrines at home were simultaneously used and full of the presence of the deity who may divide its divinity between the permanent and temporary structures.

May compares the use of *qersus* and similar structures throughout her work. The most salient comparisons are made between the mobile sanctuaries of Amorites and other nomads and that of the Hebrew Tabernacle. Recalling the earlier conflation May makes between images and objects is vital at this point. In her conclusion she extends the numinous quality of divine images to those of other material objects associated with divine beings, contending that "the Ark, which was the receptacle for the divine presence, was used in military campaigns, *just as the divine symbols were in Mesopotamia."*[27] May's error is doubled when she compares the function of the Ark to the function of tents and mobile shrines *and* the images held within them.

Until this point, the views presented in this paper considered an image to be the smallest unit of divinity, and indeed the image is the physical embodiment or presence of the deity's essence. However, the Ark is nowhere described in such terms as either the container of the image of Yahweh or the physical embodiment of Yahweh's presence. The Tabernacle and Ark of Yahweh are divine objects, not images, and thus serve a different function, as the latter analysis

[26] Ibid., 376.

[27] May, 382; emphasis added.

of biblical texts will demonstrate. This misunderstanding of the function of the Ark lends insight into the error the Israelites make when they take the Ark up from Shiloh to fight the Philistines.

SAA 20 049: The Gods, Shrines, and Holy Palaces of Assur

SAA 20 049 is perhaps the most fascinating of the texts considered in this research. Quick perusals of the cultic topography in Assur leave the reader with a distinct impression: the city of Assur, indeed the city for which the empire and its citizens drew their name, must have been quite a hub of religious activity. Assur was the original capital of the Assyrian homeland.[28] The modern site in Iraq, known as Qal'at Sherqat, still bears remnants of the once great city-state, including a massive ziggurat complex dedicated to the national deity, Aššur.[29] The presence of such architecture dovetails with the accounts of Aššur's resurgence during the neo-Assyrian period, in which Sennacherib's cultic reforms rebuilt and expanded the temple of Aššur as befitting His triumph over the Babylonian deity, Marduk.[30] Within this important city exists a network of cultic architecture, symbols, and images. The text is composed as a detailed record of the various deities, shrines, and holy palaces within the city, and its composition is the duty of Kiṣir-Aššur, who is self-described as an "exorcist of the House of Aššur," following in the footsteps of his father.[31]

[28] Oracc: ATAE: Archival Texts of the Assyrian Empire. "Neo-Assyrian Archival Texts from Assur." Directed by Poppy Tushingham, with the assistance of Nathan Morello and Jamie Novotny. Accessed September 18, 2024. https://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/atae/assur/.

[29] Oracc: TCMA: Text Corpus of Middle Assyrian. "Archival Texts of the Middle Assyria Period." Directed by Jacob J. de Ridder. Homepage. Accessed September 18, 2024. https://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/tcma/.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Oracc: SAAo: State Archives of Assyria Online. "SAA 20 049. The Gods, Shrines and Holy Palaces of Assur (KAV 042 +)." Directed by Simo Parpola. Accessed September 18, 2024. http://oracc.org/saao/Q004802/.

The exorcist provides a list of numerous deities and their houses, as well as the placement of those deities in specific rooms within holy palace complexes. From the first line, Aššur's preeminence is evident. While there are many holy artifacts in the city of Assur, it is Aššur listed first among the gods and images of the holiest shrine in the empire.[32] Of particular interest in this list is the inclusion of the image of Assyria's king Tiglath-Pileser III within the "holy of holies" in the house of Aššur.[33] The exorcist's record, though lacking an exact date, comes from the extant state archives of the neo-Assyrian period; thus, the only possibility for Tiglath-Pileser is Tiglath-Pileser III, corroborated by legal transactions attributed to the time of his reign from 744-727 BC.[34]

The implications of the exorcist's list are noteworthy; before the conquering of Babylon the first kings of a resurgent Assyria were closely identified with the chief deity of their homeland, so closely in fact that the king's image is in the presence of Aššur in the holiest part of the most important temple in the heart of the empire. It is no great surprise for Aššur's retinue to include other divine beings; a divine council or host is a common feature in ANE religions. How should a mortal be considered who is not only reified but given standing with the divine in the sacred temple? The remaining sections of the exorcist's record provide further instances of such royal inclusion in the "houses" of Anu, Adad, the Assyrian Ištar, and Gula. Beyond the holiest of holies, the exorcist's record continues, listing fourteen houses belonging to distinct deities including Aššur, Samaš, Sĭn, and not one but three Ištars identified with the cities Assyria,

[32] Ibid., line 1.

[33] Ibid., line 12.

[34] Oracc: SAAo: State Archives of Assyria Online. "SAA 06 001. Mušallim-Issar Purchases Slaves (742-XI-26) (ADD 0075)." Directed by Simo Parpola. Accessed September 18, 2024. http://oracc.org/saao/P335027/.

Arbela, and Nineveh respectively.[35] Further, the exorcist identifies houses in the city of Assur by titles such as, "E(šu)buranna, the 'Pantry': the house where meals are prepared."[36] In this pantry the exorcist records several images, including those of Dagan and Enlil. This inclusion is curious. Enlil is attested in earlier periods as a chief deity in Mesopotamia, and there is a possible relationship between Dagan and the harvest of grain.[37] In the Neo-Assyrian period, these two deities are present in the "Pantry" where sacramental meals are prepared, and their function is altered somewhat.

There are myriad observations from the text; foremost perhaps is whether ANE peoples, at least those in the Assyrian empire, formally or informally conceptualized the activity of the divine within a *divine bureaucracy.* Aššur shares his city, his temple, and his holy of holies with images of other gods and human kings. Like earthly kings, deities in the city of Assur can share sovereignty, but they do not and cannot enjoy total sovereignty. Each deity, even the chiefs of the pantheons, can only compose a part of the divine. The Enūma Eliš records how Enlil himself was succeeded by Marduk, who by the time of this ritual was supplanted by Aššur while Assyria dominated the region.[38] These changes in divine headship map neatly onto changes of hegemony in the ANE between Sumer, Babylon, and Assyria. If the status of divine beings merely changes, and they are assigned new duties rather than annihilated in some sort of sympathetic divine combat reflecting conditions on earth, could it be that divinity in the ANE is best understood as a

[35] Ibid., lines 1-7.

[36] Ibid., line 11.

[37] Itamar Singer, "Towards the Image of Dagon the god of the Philistines," *Syria* 69, no. 3/4 (1992): 431-50, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4198967.

[38] Dina Katz, "Reconstructing Babylon: Recycling Mythological Traditions Toward a New Theology," in *Babylon: Wissenskultur in Orient und Okzident,* ed. Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum, Margarete van Ess, and Joachim Marzahn (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2011), 126, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110222128.123.

constellation of duties and privileges carried out with degrees of potency by any number of beings?

Evaluations from the Old Testament

The tent of meeting and the Tabernacle, the Philistine Temple of Dagon, and the Solomonic temple of Jerusalem provide three opportunities to trace the Ark of the Covenant through various stages in the development of Yahweh's worship and the history of the people of Israel.[39] The Ark is the quintessential material artifact of Yahweh in the Old Testament, and these three stages reveal the solitary divinity of Yahweh from the Ark's early mobilization in migration and warfare, and ultimately the permanent dwelling of the Ark in the temple of Jerusalem. The Ark is not to be conflated with a divine image as May has done.[40] It is the paramount physical object associated with the life and worship of the Hebrew people, and conceptually it is appropriate to compare its use within the material religious culture of the ANE. Importantly, Yahweh did not require these sanctuaries and objects to have an encounter with His people. To understand the proper function of the Ark as a divine object, it is vital to first weigh the historical period predating its use in which Yahweh was quite active without it. Important observations can be made pertaining to Yahweh's divinity prior to His association with divine objects.

[39] Itamar Singer, "Towards the Image of Dagon, the god of the Philistines," *Syria* 69, no. 3/4 (1992): 431-50, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4198967. Dagon and Dagan are plausible name variations of the same deity; for further study, "Toward the Image of Dagon" addresses this possibility. Establishing the link between Dagan in the Assur ritual and the Dagon of Philistia would be an interesting inquiry; how did Dagan end up in the Pantry?

[40] Natalie N. May, "Portable Sanctuaries and Their Evolution: The Biblical Tabernacle (ʿōhel môʿēd/miškān) and the Akkadian qersu," in *Marbeh Ḥokmah: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East in Loving Memory of Victor Avigdor Hurowitz,* ed. Shamir Yonah, Edward L. Greenstein, Mayer I. Gruber, Peter Machinist, and Shalom M. Paul (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 382. Recall May's assertion that "the Ark, which was the receptacle for the divine presence, was used in military campaigns, just as the divine symbols were in Mesopotamia." Divine objects, as a category, include material culture, such as images and symbols associated with deities, but the divine presence is imbued in images which bear the likeness of a deity, which the Ark certainly does not. Further, nowhere is the Ark considered to hold or contain the presence of Yahweh; it is a divine object, not a divine image.

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."

Long before the Ark of Yahweh was made, Yahweh met with His people. In the Garden He met with Adam and Eve. He called to Abram in Haran and appeared to him on the first of several occasions at the oak of Moreh (Gen. 12:6-7, ESV).[41] Isaac encountered Him at Gerar and Beersheba, Jacob at Bethel, and Moses in the burning bush on Mount Horeb. These men met with the same God, who identifies Himself to Moses as "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" before telling Moses His name, "I AM WHO I AM" (Ex. 3:14-15). God uses the names of people He has met as the reference point for Moses to know to whom He is speaking. Before the Law, the Tabernacle, and the Ark, Yahweh was known and present.

The plagues visited on Egypt served to drive the Israelites out of slavery and into the land of promise, away from the forced denial of Yahweh and into the freedom to worship Him. Rather than Israel's fortunes being bound to the chief deity of their enslavers, or even the god of a liberator nation conquering the Egyptians, they are once again linked with Yahweh in His action of rescue unto the end He promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yahweh's plagues are directed at the core of religious activity in ancient Egypt. Human-animal hybrid deities, such as Isis of the Nile and Ra of the sun, have supposed dominion over natural phenomenon, but Yahweh destroys this notion by exercising actual dominion over the purview of Isis, Ra, and indeed the whole pantheon of Egypt. Exodus 9:14 details a revelation from Yahweh to the captive Hebrews and their Egyptian masters ahead of the seventh plague: "There is none like Me in all the earth." With each plague He further displays this singular authority and potency. The continuity of Yahweh is remarkable, and when He brings His people out of Egypt, it is for the same unified purpose, to

[41] Unless otherwise noted, all Biblical passages referenced employ the *English Standard Version*.

build a people for himself who will acknowledge His great and holy name in all the earth. Nothing changes in Yahweh's motives; His purpose is singular and perpetual from the Garden to the New Jerusalem.

The introduction of the Ark is a watershed moment in Hebrew worship because Yahweh chooses to make a place for Himself amongst His people according to detailed instructions and continued observance of all He commands. Earlier, Yahweh met only with those few individuals whom He called to himself; now the covenant continuity applies to the entirety of Israel through a mediator who meets directly with God. Yahweh prearranges these meetings with Moses in a unique way, differing greatly from prior encounters. Yahweh Himself first establishes a temporary meeting place, then a more permanent setting for these meetings. The first of these set meetings takes place on the mountain of God, Mount Horeb. Once the law is given and instructions for the Tabernacle and the Ark are put into action, Exodus 33:7-11 records Moses's meeting with God "face to face" in the "tent of meeting," while the construction of Yahweh's Tabernacle and Ark takes place. Once the Tabernacle is built and the Ark is finished, the meeting place is no longer outside the camp, but at the very center of the life and worship of Israel.

The Ark cannot be understood as the divine image of Yahweh who expressly prohibits man-made images of worship, including representations of himself in Exodus 20:4-5. It is not the receptacle of the divine presence of Yahweh. It is the throne where Yahweh comes down to lead and to judge His people, governing the affairs of their lives. Yahweh describes it as the meeting place between Himself and His people; a continuation of the relationship He had with the patriarchs of the Hebrews. If the Tabernacle is where Yahweh comes to dwell with His nomadic people, the Ark is the throne where He sits in authority over them. Yahweh does not delegate martial, judicial, religious, or governmental affairs to other divine beings, nor does He make His

images (mankind) divine. There is no method for the binding of Yahweh to His Ark and no way for His priests to coerce action from Him. They cannot draw Him any closer or remove Him from their midst with ritual objects like *tarpala, ulihi* or other equivalent means.

Yahweh has complete prerogative in His dealings with Israel and the Ark, the object most closely associated with Him in the Old Testament. It is where Yahweh promises to meet with His people without reducing His numinous quality to one location; it is simply the one place where His people can anticipate His presence. It is in the presence of this God and His people that Moses gives the Shema, declaring the oneness of God and requiring complete exclusivity of all the heart, soul, and might of the people. This is no exaggeration meant to suggest Israel must love Yahweh the most; it is testament to an utterly different conception of divinity within the ANE, one that is total, singular, and therefore indivisible.

"Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before."

Unauthorized use of force in ancient Israel was always accompanied by disastrous results. Numbers 14:40-45 recounts Israel's rebellion against God and refusal to enter Canaan; they ignored the admonishment of God and sought to take Canaan by their own hand. They went up to fight without the Ark and without a leader. Without the authorization and power of Yahweh, they were crushed by Canaanites, their reactionary fervor amounting only to death and ruin. In the Ark narrative found in the first book of Samuel, the Israelites do not fail to bring the Ark to the battle from its place in Shiloh, though as before in the failed foray into Canaan, their leadership is dubious. Hophni and Phineas, like Nadab and Abihu, do not consult with the Lord before acting on behalf of Israel and utilizing the consecrated material objects of Yahweh in a manner of their own device (Lev. 10:1). These four men, all sons of a high priest, pay for their

wickedness with their lives, and in the case of Hophni and Phineas, Israel is led astray by these wayward sons into a fatal conflict with Philistia.

Assumptions, speculation, and superstitions are at play in the background of the Ark narrative. The Israelites and Philistines both seem to mistake the purpose of the Ark, and more precisely, they err in understanding the character of the God associated with the Ark. From the Israelite perspective, this is the Ark which led the people around the walls of Jericho, toppling the city's defenses and punctuating their dramatic entrance into the promised land. Before this victory, the same Ark dried up a path through the Jordan river for the hosts of Israel to cross into Canaan. Surely the Israelites were in awe of the Ark, but could it be that they ascribed power to the object itself as though it were a talisman, trusting in its martial use and its influence over the natural world? Likewise, the Philistines consider the Ark to represent a powerful god or even multiple gods who afflicted the Egyptians with plagues (1 Sam. 4:8). The Philistines recognize divine power; they even acknowledge that the god(s) of the Ark in the camp of Israel may be more powerful than their own gods, and steel themselves to fight as though their own gods would not deliver them (1 Sam. 4:7). Ultimately Philistia prevails over Israel and a curious thing happens. They take possession of the very Ark which filled them with so much dread.

When the Ark is captured, Israel drinks deeply of despair. The people lament, Eli the priest dies not long after his wicked sons, and Eli's infant grandchild, Ichabod, is named for the supposed departure of God's glory from Israel because the Ark was captured (1 Sam. 4:11-22). Israel's lamentation would be appropriate if the Ark were indeed the receptacle of Yahweh's divine presence, as May contends. However, what takes place next in the narrative shatters the assumption that Yahweh is bound to His Ark. In what follows the glory of Yahweh remains intact behind enemy lines, and the power of Yahweh is shown to be without border. The Philistines set

the Ark in the temple of their deity, Dagon. It matters little whether this is meant to curry favor with Yahweh by adding him to the ranks of their gods or to make Yahweh subordinate to Dagon. Whatever the reason, the result is incredible. In a temple dedicated to another god, the earthly throne of Yahweh is placed, and He asserts His preeminence over the sanctuary. The hands of Dagon are cut off, the head of Dagon is severed, and everywhere the Ark is sent, it brings calamity to the Philistines (1 Sam. 5:1-6). The kings and leaders of Philistia, like the elders of Israel, consult with one another as to what should be done with the Ark, and Yahweh is not pleased with their speculative attempts to assuage Him.

The Ark is not the locus of Yahweh's power in Israel within or outside the bounds of their camp. Even in the temple of another god, the throne of Yahweh is the seat of all power on the earth. The king of this throne sits upon it at His own pleasure without influence from worshippers or ritual specialists regardless of their religion or supposed fealty. Yahweh is acutely active around the immediate area of the Ark for the duration of its travels. Truly, the Glory of the Lord does not depart from Israel because of impotence. It extends further than the remembrance of the Israelites who had seen Yahweh victorious so many times before. In this narrative there is an important reminder: Yahweh is self-existent, He does not begin and end with His people, and He does not require mankind to act on His behalf. He needs no army to vanquish Egypt or subdue the cities of the Philistines. The Ark, like the whole of the earth, and indeed all things, belongs to Yahweh, and He does what He pleases.

"And this house will become a heap of ruins"

Second Samuel 6:12-15 describes the entrance of Yahweh's Ark into Jerusalem and the ensuing celebration led by King David. The Ark had dwelled in Kiriath-jearim since its return from Philistia but had not been housed or treated in the manner which Yahweh prescribed during

that time (1 Sam. 7:1-2). The Ark, apparently forgotten, had to be sought in the house of Abinadab before it could be brought to Jerusalem, and until the time of Solomon, the Ark would not be at rest in Israel. Four hundred and eighty years after bringing His people out of the land of Egypt, Yahweh gives rest to His people on every side and allows Solomon to build Him a house in Jerusalem (1 Kings 6:1). The splendor of the first Temple of God is detailed in the books of the kings, and those exiles who witness the dedication of the second temple weep because it cannot compare to the first. Throughout the years between the Exodus and the construction of the temple, there had been other altars and memorials in Israel dedicated to Yahweh, but there was only one Tabernacle and only one Ark. Wherever these divine objects were, the people of God gathered to worship one God, Yahweh, in the manner He prescribed.

It is only fitting for such a God to have one holy city, Jerusalem. Unlike the city of Assur, Jerusalem does not begin as a religious center for a plurality of divine beings and their associated objects and shrines. Jerusalem is consecrated for Yahweh only, and so it has but one temple. In size and magnificence, the temple is scaled up from the Tabernacle, and 1 Kings 8:10-11 attests how the glory of the Lord fills the temple, as it had when the Tabernacle had been consecrated. Yahweh appears to Solomon in His temple making it clear that He Himself, not the priests nor Solomon, has consecrated the temple, "by putting My name there forever" (1 Kings 9:3). The house is for His name alone, and Yahweh warns Solomon of what will happen to Israel, the line of David, and the very house in which Yahweh is pleased to dwell, if Solomon or His children turn from following Yahweh and serve other gods; then the house of Yahweh's name will become a house of ruins (1 Kings 9:8).

Jerusalem, the City of David where the temple of God was erected, did not endure as a holy city. Even in the time of Solomon, Jerusalem hosted the detestable practices of other nations

serving other gods. Throughout the monarchic period of Israel and Judah, the kings who lived in Jerusalem vacillated between walking in wickedness or righteousness during their reigns. The Ark, which had once toppled the image of Dagon in his temple, shared its house with abominations from Canaan. Therefore, Yahweh abandoned His house, since it was profaned by His people. Like Assur, Jerusalem became a city for many gods and their manifold cults. The temple, Jerusalem, and the nation of Israel were not irrefragable like the God who chose to be present among them, and soon they descended into division and plurality of worship.

The Ark is not mentioned again until the book of Revelation, when it is briefly seen in John's vision of God's temple in heaven (Rev. 11:19). It is not, however, mentioned in the vision of the new heavens and the new earth, for there is no temple there and thus, no place for the Ark: "For its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" (Rev. 21:22). When the Lord God has peace on all sides, so will mankind. The Tabernacle, the Temple, and the Ark of God were all temporary visual symbols pointing to the invisible reality of an indivisible God. Nothing is diminished by the lack of divine objects, on earth and in heaven. Their absence speaks to the wholeness of God's divinity, supplying all that is necessary for existence from His being.

Conclusions

In summary, divinity was the essential subject of this research. The possibility of divisible divinity introduced in Beckman's translation of the Pirinkir ritual served as the catalyst for this research. If divinity is divisible in some way, as suggested in the ritual, questions seeking to explore those possible dividing lines inevitably arise. Throughout this project the author revisited the question: What is implied or asserted about divinity in this text?

This paper asked whether gods of the ANE interact with their people in the fullness of their divinity or if they divide themselves between different locations in fixed and mobile

sanctuaries. In the case of Pirinkir and other deities in the ANE, omnipresence does not appear to be a feature of divinity; thus, these gods cannot fully interact with the metaphysical and physical world in the full scope of their divinity. There seem to be limits.

The second question is more easily addressed. Many gods of the ANE, except Yahweh, had multiple images, shrines, and sanctuaries where the material reality of their divine presence was assumed. This does not exclude the possibility of other cults worshipping a singular deity with one temple at the exclusion of all other deities and temples, but even if such a cult were discovered, it would not be normative. In support of the second half of the hypothesis for this paper, the research has shown that divinity amongst the non-Hebrew ANE cultures is not a static target, and there are several ways in which divinity can be observably divided.

This paper also considered the activity of Yahweh along the same possible line of divisible divinity. Yahweh led Israel throughout their migrations and their conquest of Canaan. He does so in the fullness of His divinity. Affirming the first part of this paper's hypothesis, records of the Ark and Tabernacle in the Old Testament do not include a possible division of Yahweh's divinity. This is largely due to the delineation between divine images and objects. Unlike the gods of the ANE, Yahweh has no images except mankind, which suggests His potency, influence, and presence are complete, covering the entire earth even as He maintains order and divine rule over all things. His images are everywhere reflecting the reality that He is everywhere. The continuity of Yahweh's oneness is unbroken before, during, and after the Ark is present in Israel. The Ark serves a different purpose than that of the images and shrines present in other cultures. It is a temporary throne reflecting an eternally existent, invisible reality. It is a divine object, but the function of the Ark is as different as the God with whom it is associated.

Further Research

None of the extrabiblical texts included in this research contain explicit mention of divine activity or response on the part of those deities associated with divine objects. In fairness, the included biblical texts contain both inactivity and activity on the part of Yahweh pertaining to Hebrew usage of divine objects. An obvious extension of this research would be to identify and compile extrabiblical texts in which the activity of ANE deities is described in direct relationship to their associated divine objects. Pirinkir, for example, is described as the "Goddess of the Night," but a source describing a ritual in which Pirinkir's image somehow influences the night would further the understanding of how the Hittite culture understood the purpose of Pirinkir's image.

One surprising finding stemming from the broader research for this paper is the relationship between divinity and royalty in the Ancient Near East. Darius and Sennacherib had their satraps and governors; the gods likewise had their own vassals. It would be a worthwhile endeavor to study the relationship between ANE conceptions of royalty and divinity, and how their development influenced the other. The numerous inclusions of royal images in the shrines of divine beings suggest more than a patron-client relationship between gods and kings. There are, of course, other avenues for further research, and hopefully some suggestions will be offered and pursued by readers of this project.

Appendix A

Text of the Priest of the Deity of the Night

Excerpts from Text 6 in "Temple Building among the Hittites"

"§9 The next day, the second day, while the sun is still up, they take these things from the house of that ritual patron: one *tarpala* of red wool, one *tarpala* of blue wool, one woolen *kišri*, one shekel of silver, one *gazzarnul*-cloth, a little fine oil, three unleavened breads, and one jug of wine. And they go to the waters of purification to draw (some), and they draw water of purification. Then they carry it to the temple of the Deity of the Night from which the (new) temple of the Deity of the Night is built. They place it on the roof, and it spends the night beneath the stars. On the day that they take the water of purification, they draw the old deity from the mountain, the river, the pasture, the sky, and the earth along the seven roads and the seven paths by means of the red wool and the fine oil." [42]

"§10 They draw her to the old temple and bind an *uliḫi* on the deity. The personnel of the deity take these things: one *tarpala* of red wool, one *tarpala* of blue wool, one woolen *kišri*, one white *kureššar*-garment, one bead of *kirinni*-stone, one shekel of silver, a little fine oil, five unleavened breads, two *mūlati*-loaves of one-half handful (of flour), one small cheese, and one jug of wine—they take these things for the Ritual of Drawing Up. One *tarpala* of red wool, one *tarpala* of blue wool, one loop of white wool, two *mūlati*-loaves of one-half handful, five unleavened breads, (and) a little fine oil—they take these things for the *duḫapši*-Ritual."

[42] Gary Beckman, "Temple Building among the Hittites," in *From the Foundations to the Crenellations: Essays on Temple Building in the Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible*, ed. Mark J. Boda and Jamie Novotny (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010), 80-85.

"§21 But when they finish the *tuḫalzi*-Ritual in the old temple, they pour the fine oil into a wooden *tallai*-vessel, and (s)he says before the deity, 'O esteemed deity, guard your person, but divide your divinity! Come (along) to that new temple and take possession of the honored place! When you go, take possession of that very place!' Then they draw the deity seven times from the wall with red wool. And (s)he places the *uliḫi* into the *tallai*-vessel of fine oil."

"§30 As for the *ulihi* brought from the old temple, they open that *tallai*-vessel. Then they mix that old fine oil of the *tallai*-vessel [with] the water with which they will wash the wall of the temple. Then they wash the wall with that so that the temple is purified. But the ritual patron does [not] come."

"§31 Then they bind the old *ulihi* onto the red kureššar-garment of the new deity."

Appendix B

The Gods, Shrines and Holy Palaces of Assur

Excerpts from ORACC SAA 20 049[43]

1-14 "Aššur, Lord Tiara, Aššur of Reading; Šerua, Kippatmati, the Window ofTašmetu; Sîn, Šamaš; Šulpaamaša, Šulpaguna; three gods of the room; the Conquerors, the Weapon, the Axe, Kunuš-kadru; image of Tiglath-Pileser: total (of gods) in the holy of holies."

22-25 "Enlil, Dagan, Bel-labria, the Judges of the dais, Mišaru, Belet-ili, another Belet-ili, Šakkan: total (of gods) in the 'Pantry.'"

54-58 "Anu, Antu, the Fates, the Kulittus, the Kubus, Ningirsu, the Great Gods, Ebeh, a Royal Image: total 9 gods in the houses of Anu."

59-62 "Adad, Šala, Nisaba, Habiru, Kubu, two royal images, Šeriš, Harmiš, Ningirsu: total 10 gods in the house of Adad."

74–81 "The Assyrian Ištar, Ber, Tašmetu, Kutatati, the Fates, Papsukkal, Tammuz, Aruru, Šarrat-eqi, Latarak, Kulili, (Ulaya), a royal image, four lions, Mulahhišu."

[43] Oracc: SAAo: State Archives of Assyria Online. "SAA 20 049. The Gods, Shrines and Holy Palaces of Assur (KAV 042 +)." Directed by Simo Parpola. Accessed September 18, 2024. http://oracc.org/saao/Q004802/.

Appendix C

Excerpts from Natalie May's "Portable Sanctuaries and Their Evolution: The Biblical Tabernacle (*ʿōhel môʿēd/miškān*) and the Akkadian *qersu*"

"The Ark, which was the receptacle for the divine presence, was used in military campaigns, just as the divine symbols were in Mesopotamia. It preceded the tribes of Israel at their entrance into Canaan, showing them the way and drying up the waters of the Jordan (Josh 3:3– 17; 4:18). It accompanied the procession around the walls of the besieged Jericho (Josh 6:5– 8, 10– 12). Finally, Israelites brought along the Ark to support their army in the second battle against the Philistines at Ebenezer (1 Sam 4:3– 6), where it was captured by the latter (fig. 7; 1 Sam 4:11). This event was perceived as the abandonment of Israel by Yhwh (1 Sam 4:21)."[44]

"I suggest the following scheme for the evolution of the *qersu*. In Mari, it was introduced as the wooden frames (*qersū*) of the West Semitic nomadic portable sanctuary, analogous to the biblical Priestly Tabernacle (*ʾōhel m*ôʿēd) and its *qĕrāšîm*. Gradually, due to its being a distinctive feature of a tent sanctuary, the term *qersū* came to be employed *pars pro toto* meaning the entire portable shrine, not just its frame. The donkey sacrifice, which is a typically nomadic

[44] Natalie N. May, "Portable Sanctuaries and Their Evolution: The Biblical Tabernacle (ʿōhel môʿēd/miškān) and the Akkadian qersu," in *Marbeh Ḥokmah: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East in Loving Memory of Victor Avigdor Hurowitz,* ed. Shamir Yonah, Edward L. Greenstein, Mayer I. Gruber, Peter Machinist, and Shalom M. Paul (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 382.

Amorite rite, takes place in the *qersū* according to the *kispum* ritual (M. 12803, lines 10– 12), thus proving the West Semitic character of the whole ritual and its attributes beyond Hebrew and Ugaritic cognates. *Qersū/qersu* was introduced into Akkadian with the meaning 'tent sanctuary' or 'portable sanctuary,' which it later had in the Neo-Assyrian texts. The text of the funeral offerings ritual (M. 12803), where *qersū* is first attested with this meaning, is attributed to Samsī-Addu I, the Assyrian ruler of Mari. Thus, perhaps the term *qersū* as a 'portable shrine' was colloquial in Assyrian Amorite, and the portable sanctuary itself together with the word designating it survived in Assyria as a heritage of the Amorite nomadic milieu."[45]

[45] Ibid., 387.

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Birmingham Theological Journal
A Journal of Birmingham Theological Seminary
Volume 2 | Issue 1 | Article 3 | Dec. 2024

The Spiritual Act of Worship: A Government's Duty to Protect a Biblical Counselor's Purpose

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Abstract: This article explores the complex issue of state licensure for biblical counselors, shedding light on the potential implications of regulating this specific form of counseling. In a diverse landscape of counseling approaches and perspectives, state governments have increasingly sought to regulate the practice to ensure the well-being and safety of clients. However, such regulation raises concerns about religious freedom, ethical dilemmas, and the potential for overregulation and discrimination within the field of biblical counseling. How might state licensure of biblical counselors impact religious freedom, ethical practices, and the risk of overregulation, religious infringement, and discrimination in the field of biblical counseling? The thesis of this research article posits that given the principle of religious freedom in the United States, the state should not license biblical counselors, as doing so may impinge upon their religious convictions and restrict individual liberties. Achieving a balanced approach in counseling is crucial, one that honors the diversity of therapeutic methods while safeguarding the ability of individuals to access biblical counseling in harmony with their religious beliefs.

The article presents seven practical reasons why state licensure for biblical counselors may infringe upon their religious convictions and restrict individual liberties, followed by a biblically based apologetic for an eighth reason that is often overlooked. Drawing on Ed Wilde's insights, the article underscores the importance of freedom of religion in the United States. It also delves into the Reformed view from the Westminster Confession of Faith and the significance of Romans 12:1 and 12:2 in the context of surrender to God and the transformative process of renewing the believer's mind. This analysis highlights the biblical counselor's role in guiding individuals on this spiritual journey and the importance of protecting their right to do so without undue regulation or licensing.

Recommended Citation

Horne, Mark. “The Spiritual Act of Worship: A Government's Duty to Protect a Biblical Counselor's Purpose.” *Birmingham Theological Journal* 2, no. 1 (Dec. 2024): 51–71.

If this article is accessed online, please add the URL to the citation.

Introduction

The practice of counseling, with its diverse array of approaches and perspectives, has been the subject of increasing regulation and oversight by state governments. While the intention behind licensing counselors is to ensure the well-being and safety of clients, it also raises concerns about the potential infringement on religious freedom and the rights of biblical counselors, defined as those who counsel from a nouthetic standpoint and rely wholly on the sufficiency of Scripture in their practice. Achieving a balanced approach in counseling is crucial, one that honors the diversity of therapeutic methods while safeguarding the ability of individuals to access biblical counseling in harmony with their religious beliefs. How might state licensure for biblical counselors impact religious freedom, ethical practices, and the risk of overregulation, religious infringement, and discrimination in the field of biblical counseling? Given the principle of religious freedom in the United States, the state should not license biblical counselors, as doing so may impinge upon their religious convictions and restrict individual liberties. In this paper, seven practical reasons will be identified to support the thesis that the state should not license biblical counselors. Then, a biblically based apologetic will be offered for an eighth reason many do not consider.

Literature Review

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution enshrines the separation of Church and state, safeguarding the rights of individuals to practice their faith freely. This fundamental principle has been tested and shaped by historical, legal, and cultural developments, leading to a broader understanding of religious freedom. It encompasses more than merely the freedom to believe in a particular doctrine; it extends to practicing and expressing one's faith in diverse and meaningful ways. *Legal Issues in Biblical Counseling,* edited by Johnson and Wilde, is a

compendium of essays written "to encourage the church to engage responsibly in the ministry of biblical counseling while seeking to comply with governmental requirements that are not at odds with Scripture."[1] Wilde underscores how religious freedom has grown to include a wide range of beliefs, religious practices, and rituals.[2] Further, he highlights the federal government's neutrality on doctrinal statements and the corresponding position of state governments. This neutrality underscores the principle that the state should not favor one religious doctrine over another. It is a fundamental tenet of religious freedom, ensuring that individuals and religious communities have the liberty to embrace their unique beliefs without state interference.[3]

The United States has a rich tapestry of religious diversity, with individuals and communities adhering to a myriad of doctrinal statements, interpretations, and traditions. This diversity is tolerated and celebrated, reflecting the nation's commitment to religious pluralism. It is at this crossroad that states will not interfere with biblical counselors and pastors. As such, the federal and state governments do not intervene in the specifics of religious doctrines, enabling individuals and groups to define their faith on their terms. Liturgical practices encompass the rituals, ceremonies, and modes of worship that are central to religious traditions. These practices span a broad spectrum in the United States, reflecting various religious communities' unique cultural and spiritual expressions.[4]

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[1] Johnson and Wilde, *Legal Issues in Biblical Counseling: Direction and Help for Churches and Counselors, 5*, Kindle.

[2] Ibid., 42-44.

[3] Ibid., 45. State neutrality in this regard ensures that individuals and religious organizations are free to conduct their religious ceremonies as they see fit, without state intervention or preference. This principle allows for various practices, from wearing vestments and facing directions during prayer to how religious symbols and sacraments are administered. In this sense, religious freedom goes beyond the realm of belief, extending to the manifestation of those beliefs in ritual and practice.

[4] Ibid., 42.

The separation of church and state has its intentional specificities. In *Christian Counseling and the Law*, Levicoff seeks to help those in ministry understand where the law applies to ministry. Among a variety of topics, Levicoff reminds readers that pastors and biblical counselors have a responsibility in how they present themselves to the public.[5] Although they biblically and spiritually counsel, they cannot mislead by touting credentials not earned. Levicoff argues, "Your best protection as a counselor is not to hold yourself out to be more than you're qualified to be. If you are a trained lay Christian counselor, you should not be purporting to be a professional counselor. If you are a pastor, your business cards should not refer to you as a 'professional counselor.' The fact that counseling will be a significant part of your pastoral ministry is a given assumption."[6]

Legal Issues and Religious Counseling by Bullis and Mazur is a handbook that "addresses issues of law for persons who have limited formal exposure to the principles and practice of American jurisprudence."[7] Bullis and Mazur state, "Religious exemption has its genesis in the free exercise clause and has created an autonomous area for clergy at courts, and legislators are reluctant to regulate."[8] Yet, while the principles of state neutrality and the expansive understanding of religious freedom serve as foundational ideals, they are not without challenges and conflicts. The diverse and evolving nature of religious beliefs and practices can sometimes lead to disputes and legal cases when they intersect with other societal interests or values. In some instances, these conflicts have raised questions about the boundaries of religious

[5] Steve Levicoff, *Christian Counseling and the Law* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 33-41.

[6] Ibid., 47.

[7] Ronald K. Bullis and Cynthia S. Mazur, *Legal Issues and Religious Counseling* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 1.

[8] Ibid., 10.

freedom, particularly when they pertain to issues such as public health, civil rights, and discrimination.[9] For example, when a biblical counselor or pastor counsels someone in an abusive situation, they must abide by their state law for reporting such cases. The responsibility of reporting is not moot because the biblical counselor is not state licensed.[10]

Seven Practical Reasons the State Should Not License Biblical Counselors

The literature review and lectures from the 2020 pre-conference of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors Conference in Sun Valley, CA, provided background for reflection on the thesis. Seven practical reasons why state licensure for biblical counselors may infringe upon their religious convictions and restrict individual liberties and an eighth biblically based apologetic for a reason that is often overlooked, restriction to live in spiritual worship, follow:[11]

[9] Ibid., 49, 51. Bullis and Mazur discuss that the religious counselor must not ever counsel outside the "expectations of the cleric's denominational standards." Religious counselors need not seek state licensure because they should not represent themselves as "possessing counseling credentials they do not have." However, religious counselors counsel, and they do with much to say on many matters and many responsibilities albeit from the biblical and spiritual viewpoint, i.e., denominational parameters.

[10] Ibid.; "Alabama's Mandatory Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Law: Code of Alabama. Title 26. Infants and Incompetents. Chapter 14. Reporting of Child Abuse or Neglect." Lee County Schools. Accessed January 26, 2024, https://www.lee.k12.al.us/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=6208&dataid=304&FileName=AL_Reporting_Law.pdf.

[11] Johnson Jr. and Wilde; Bullis and Mazur; Levicoff; George Crawford, "Pre-Conference Session 2: Church Employment Law & Reporting" (lecture, The Association of Certified Biblical Counselors Conference, Sun Valley, CA, October 5-6, 2020); Deborah Dewart, "Pre-Conference Session 4: Biblical Counseling and Religious Liberty" (lecture, The Association of Certified Biblical Counselors Conference, Sun Valley, CA, October 5-6, 2020); Todd Sorell, "Pre-Conference Session 5: The Relationship Between the Local Church and a Local Lawyer" (lecture, The Association of Certified Biblical Counselors Conference, Sun Valley, CA, October 5-6, 2020); Steve Viars, "Pre-Conference Session 3: Shepherding the Flock through Legal Issues" (lecture, The Association of Certified Biblical Counselors Conference, Sun Valley, CA, October 5-6, 2020).

1. Freedom of Religion

One of the fundamental principles underlying the opposition to state licensure for biblical counselors is the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, which guarantees freedom of religion. Licensing biblical counselors could place undue restrictions on their ability to provide faith-based guidance. Though biblical counselors should be familiar with secular treatment modalities, since some counselees have been under the care of a licensed counselor and may use therapeutic language, biblical counselors may be compelled to adopt secular principles in their practice to meet state standards. This potential conflict can infringe upon their constitutional right to practice their faith freely.

2. Ethical Concerns

Biblical counselors adhere to ethical principles rooted in their religious beliefs, which may differ from secular counseling standards. Licensing these counselors by the state could force them to compromise their religious convictions by requiring adherence to guidelines that may contradict their beliefs. This ethical dilemma could undermine the integrity of their counseling and the well-being of their clients.

3. Diverse Religious Perspectives

There are numerous religious and spiritual belief systems, each with its own distinct counseling approach. Mandating state licensure of those who deliver spiritual counsel could result in a bias towards one religious perspective while overlooking the diverse array of belief systems. This type of government mandate risks marginalizing biblical counselors and restricting access to faith-based counseling services on which many individuals and communities rely.

4. Overregulation

Proponents of licensing argue that it ensures a certain level of competence and safeguards clients from unqualified practitioners. However, excessive regulation may lead to a shortage of qualified counselors, as many biblical counselors may choose not to undergo the state licensure process due to their deeply held religious convictions. This shortage could negatively impact individuals seeking faith-based counseling.

5. Client Autonomy

State licensure for biblical counselors may also undermine the autonomy of clients who willingly seek counseling from faith-based practitioners. By imposing state standards, the government may interfere with clients' choices and limit their access to counselors who align with their religious beliefs and values.

6. Interference with Ministry

Many biblical counselors consider their work an extension of their ministry, and state licensure can be perceived as governmental interference in religious practices.[12] The government

[12] It should be noted this is based upon the First Amendment, and Fourteenth Amendment, Section 1 rights of the U.S. Constitution Bill of Rights: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" ("The Bill of Rights: A Transcription," National Archives, accessed October 22, 2024, https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights-transcript) and "nor shall any State . . . deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of laws" ("The Constitution: Amendments 11-27," National Archives, accessed October 22, 2024, https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/amendments-11-27). In the case, *Cantwell v. Connecticut*, 1940, the Supreme Court ruled that "freedom of conscience and freedom to adhere to such religious organization or form of worship as the individual may choose cannot be restricted by law" ("Cantwell v. Connecticut, 310 U.S. 296 (1940)," Justia: U.S. Supreme Court, accessed October 22, 2024, https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/310/296/). In this author's state of South Carolina, state code 40-75-190 exempts clergy from exercising ministerial responsibilities including counseling that protects confidences ("South Carolina Code of Laws Unannotated," South Carolina Legislature, accessed October 22, 2024, https://www.scstatehouse.gov/code/t40c075.php). Invariably, there are Federal and State laws in place to protect one's means of religious practices.

may inadvertently stifle religious institutions' role in addressing their congregants' nouthetic health needs by requiring licensure.

7. Potential for Discrimination

State licensure can lead to discrimination against certain religious groups or counseling approaches. It tends to create a hierarchical system that places secular counseling above faith-based counseling. Such a system may lead to unequal access to mental health services and prejudice against specific religious beliefs.

The above are sound reasons for the state not to regulate biblical counselors through licensure. However, an eighth reason why the state should not license biblical counselors is often missed, and the literature provides no good biblically based apologetic, at least not one this researcher has come across: restriction to live in spiritual worship.

A Biblically-Based Eighth Reason the State Should Not License Biblical Counselors

8. Restriction to Live in Spiritual Worship

Wilde highlights the enduring principle of religious liberty and underscores the challenges that emerge when defining the practical scope of this fundamental right. For example, he explains, “But you also must understand that in this welter of laws and regulations, the people making the laws think they are doing something useful. Even when a government official has a personal aim of stopping the public practice of the Christian religion, that official thinks he is doing something good (John 16:2).”[13]

[13] Johnson and Wilde, 37.

Throughout history, the United States has upheld religious freedom as a core tenet, recognizing the inherent worth of each individual's beliefs and the principle that the state shall not establish or interfere with religious institutions. This commitment has resulted in an intricate legal framework accommodating an astonishing array of religious practices, beliefs, and diversity, creating a nation known for its religious pluralism.

Though the church must operate under the laws of the nation, it also has doctrinal statements to consider. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* supports the state's responsibility to protect religious worship without interference, though it would limit that worship to the one, true God. In addition, Paul's exhortation in Romans 12:1-2 refers to the content of the biblical counselor's essential work—discipleship. An analysis of these two works will demonstrate that a restriction to live in spiritual worship poses another reason the state should not license biblical counselors.

Reformed View of State Protection

Chapter 23 of *The Westminster Confession of Faith* is titled "Of the Civil Magistrate" and deals with the state's role concerning religious worship, particularly the civil magistrate. This chapter underscores the importance of government in safeguarding and protecting the freedom of religious worship. *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, a foundational document in Reformed Christian theology, emphasizes that the state, represented by the civil magistrate, has a divinely ordained duty to protect the true worship of God.[14] It asserts that the civil magistrates' authority is derived from God and that they are accountable to Him for their actions.[15] Therefore, the civil

[14] "The WCF Chapter 23: Of the Civil Magistrate," The Westminster Standards with Video and Audio Teaching Resources, accessed January 26, 2024, https://thewestminsterstandards.com/wcf-chapter-23-of-the-civil-magistrate/.

[15] Ibid.

magistrates should use their authority to uphold and promote true religion, protect religious worship from any form of interference, and prevent false worship and idolatry. Likewise, a biblical counselor should be exempt from interference as well.

This chapter articulates that the state should ensure that religious assemblies are held peacefully and without hindrance.[16] It also addresses the importance of preserving and promoting unity in the faith, while respecting the conscience of individual believers. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* acknowledges that the state's involvement in religious matters should not entail infringing on the jurisdiction of the Church, which maintains its spiritual authority.

In summary, chapter 23 of *The Westminster Confession of Faith* underscores the importance of the state in safeguarding religious worship and ensuring that it is conducted without interference or persecution. It recognizes the civil magistrates' responsibility to protect true religion, uphold the peace, and prevent idolatry, while respecting the Church's spiritual jurisdiction, which extends to the biblical counselor. This chapter emphasizes the need for a harmonious relationship between the state and the Church to promote religious freedom and the purity of worship. What does that "worship" include? It will be the apologetic of the continuation of this article that one's worship is one's daily living.

Romans 12:1-2 – Your Spiritual Act of Worship

Although the state views the Christian's worship as what may happen within the four walls of the church building and includes the liturgy, vestments, and aesthetics, Paul makes the point in Romans 12:1-2 that the Christian's worship is one's life. The Christian's daily worship is spiritual.

> *12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to*

[16] Ibid.

> *this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*[17]

Goal

In Romans 12:1, the Apostle Paul delivers a compelling call to the believers in Rome, marked by the words, "Therefore I urge you." These two words in the original language carry profound significance in the context of Paul's message, as they emphasize the necessity of a complete surrender to God. The profound theological and practical implications of Paul's exhortation shed light on the significance of presenting one's body as a living sacrifice. Paul's exhortation is the biblical counselor's essential work—discipleship.

Paul's challenge to present one's body as a living sacrifice underlines the essence of the victorious Christian life. The biblical counselor's message extends outside the four walls of the church building, worship service, and yes, even the counseling room because it is not enough to possess theoretical knowledge of the truths expounded in Romans 6-8, which deal with the freedom from sin's penalty and power through faith in Christ. The practical outworking of this transformation hinges on surrendering one's body so that Christ's life can manifest in everyday living.

Surrendering one's body is a deliberate act of worship, a response to God's unmerited mercy and grace. It entails acknowledging that our lives are not our own but are now devoted to the service of the Creator. This act of consecration is the ultimate key to living the Christian life victoriously.

Paul's choice of words in "I urge you" highlights the character of God's invitation to believers. God does not compel or coerce individuals into presenting their bodies as living

[17] Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced employ the English Standard Version. "Romans 12:1–2 ESV," Biblia by Logos, https://biblia.com/bible/esv/romans/12/1-2.

sacrifices. He does not treat them as unruly horses that require bridling and forced obedience. Instead, God beseeches them, calling them to make this offering willingly. The appeal carries an inherent respect for human free will and a desire for unbridled devotion, where surrender is a heartfelt response to God's love and grace.

The critical link between the word “therefore” and the phrase “I urge you” cannot be understated. Paul's plea emerges from a profound consideration of the “mercies of God” that he has elaborated in the preceding chapters of Romans. These mercies encompass God's grand work of salvation—redeeming humanity from sin, sanctifying believers to become set apart for His purposes, and ultimately promising glorification.

God's mercies besiege the believer with unmerited favor, a ceaseless “cannonade of kindness” that overflows into the believer's life.[18] The “therefore” serves as a bridge, connecting the magnificent work of God with the believer's appropriate response. It affirms that presenting one's body to God is the right and fitting thing to do, an inevitable and heartwarming response to a love that is both amazing and divine.

Paul's appeal in Romans 12:1 is not a one-time event but the first step in a lifelong journey of surrender and sanctification. While deeper levels of submission may follow, the initial presentation of the body is essential. It marks the starting point for Christians to live in obedience and devotion to God. Biblical counselors disciple others in two areas for daily obedience and devotion to God: thinking and behaving.

[18] John Phillips, *Exploring Romans: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2009), Romans 12:1, Logos Electronic Software.

Teaching People How to Behave

Romans 12:1 begins with the compelling exhortation, “Therefore I urge you,” before unveiling the significance of presenting one's body as a “living and holy sacrifice” to God. A common misconception that plagues some believers is the separation of doctrine from duty in the Christian life. This dichotomy arises when individuals express a desire to live their faith without grounding themselves in a deep understanding of God's Word. However, the Apostle Paul presents a different perspective. He emphasizes that the Christian life is fundamentally rooted in knowledge and understanding, and the better one comprehends biblical doctrine, the easier it becomes to fulfill Christian duties (Romans 1-11 and Romans 12-16).

Paul's assertion serves as a reminder that knowledge and practice are intrinsically connected in the Christian life. Doctrine informs duty, and theology shapes ethics. Understanding the depths of God's mercies and His divine plan provides the foundation for the outworking of faith through practical Christian living. John Stott states:

> All true worship is a response to the self-revelation of God in Christ and Scripture, and arises from our reflection on Who He is and what He has done. . . . The worship of God is evoked, informed and inspired by the vision of God. Worship without theology is bound to degenerate into idolatry. Hence the indispensable place of Scripture in both public and private devotion. It is the Word of God which calls forth the worship of God. On the other hand, there should be no theology without doxology. There is something fundamentally flawed about a purely academic interest in God. God is not an appropriate object for cool, critical, detached, scientific observation and evaluation. No, the true knowledge of God will always lead us to worship, as it did Paul. Our place is on our faces before him in adoration.[19]

Presenting one's body to God goes beyond mere intellectual assent; it involves a deliberate and decisive commitment. The term “present” (παρίστημι) conveys the idea of placing something at someone's disposal.[20] In this case, believers place their entire being at God's disposal. It is an act

[19] John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World*, ed. J.A. Motyer, John R. W. Stott, and Derek Tidball (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 320-324.

[20] James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 55, Logos Electronic Software.

of unreserved devotion, acknowledging that their lives are now wholly devoted to the service of the Creator.

The "living and holy sacrifice" presented to God starkly contrasts the lifeless and profane sacrifices of the Old Testament. In this New Covenant era, God desires sacrifices not made on an altar of stone but on the altar of the believer's heart. The Christian's sacrifice is living, reflecting the vitality and transformation that come through faith in Christ.

The phrase "spiritual service of worship" underscores the spiritual nature of this offering. It signifies that the devotion presented to God is deeply rooted in the spiritual realm and transcends mere external acts. Worship is not confined to a specific time or place but is interwoven into the fabric of daily living.

Teaching People How to Think

Romans 12:2 encapsulates a pivotal concept in Christian living: the transformation of believers through the renewal of their minds. In contrast to conforming to the patterns of the world, this verse emphasizes the radical change that occurs within the Christian's inner life. The profound meaning of Romans 12:2 highlights this transformative process's theological significance and practical implications.

The Apostle Paul commands believers: "Do not be conformed to this world." The Greek term "conform" (συσχηματίζω) denotes a process of molding or shaping according to an external pattern.[21] It carries the sense of adapting to the world's prevailing culture, mindset, or behavior. Conformity to the world results in a mindset contrary to God's will and righteousness.

[21] Strong, 70.

Paul follows his prohibition of conformity with a positive injunction: "But be transformed by the renewal of your mind." The term "transform" (μεταμορφόω) denotes a profound, qualitative change, as seen in the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly.[22] It signifies a radical transformation of one's inner nature, character, and worldview.

The transformation process is initiated and sustained by the Holy Spirit, who operates from within the believer. It is not a self-effort but a divine work. As believers yield to God and meditate on His Word, the Holy Spirit gradually renews their minds. This renewal involves a profound and fundamental change in thinking, values, and perspectives.

The purpose of the renewed mind is multifaceted. The verse highlights that it enables believers to discern "what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2). A renewed mind equips believers to understand and align with God's perfect plan for their lives.

Again, John Stott explains how transformation takes place, noting that

> although Paul does not here tell us how our mind becomes renewed, we know from his other writings that it is by a combination of the Spirit and the Word of God. Certainly, regeneration by the Holy Spirit involves the renewal of every part of our humanness, which has been tainted and twisted by the fall, and this includes our mind. But in addition, we need the Word of God, which is the Spirit's 'sword,' and which acts as an objective revelation of God's will. Here then are the stages of Christian moral transformation: first our mind is renewed by the Word and Spirit of God; then we are able to discern and desire the will of God; and then we are increasingly transformed by it.[23]

Romans 12:2 underscores the vital connection between the renewal of the mind and discerning God's good, acceptable, and perfect will. This ongoing transformative process marks the path to a life that pleases God. As believers yield to God and engage in mind renewal, they discover the beauty of God's will and grow in their ability to discern His perfect plan for their lives.

[22] Strong, 47.

[23] Stott, 320-324.

Ultimately, obedience to God's will is the key to unlocking spiritual knowledge and experiencing the goodness of His perfect will. As noted above, the state may view the Christian's worship as what may happen within the four walls of the church building, but Paul makes the point in Romans 12:1-2 that the Christian's worship is one's life.

Conclusion

While regulating counseling services aims to protect clients, it is essential to recognize the potential consequences of licensing biblical counselors. Imposing state licensure on these practitioners raises concerns about religious freedom, ethical dilemmas, and the potential for overregulation and discrimination. A balanced approach, striking a balance between the protection of the public and the preservation of religious freedom, is necessary to respect the diversity of counseling approaches and ensure that individuals can seek guidance that aligns with their deeply held beliefs. Any consideration of state licensure for biblical counselors should be considered carefully, weighing the rights and liberties of both counselors and clients.

Wilde's statement sheds light on the enduring importance of freedom of religion in the United States and the evolution of this concept to include an array of beliefs, doctrines, and liturgical practices.[24] The nation's commitment to state neutrality in religious matters has allowed for a rich tapestry of religious diversity and expression. However, it is essential to recognize that the practical application of religious freedom is not devoid of challenges, and legal debates persist about the boundaries and intersections of religious freedom with other societal values.

Romans 12:1 serves as a clarion call to all believers, urging them to offer their bodies as living sacrifices to God. In the context of God's incredible mercies—His saving, sanctifying, and

[24] Johnson and Wilde, 42-44.

glorifying work—this surrender is not a compulsory act but a heartfelt response to the love and grace of the Creator. It is the ultimate key to living a victorious Christian life, where faith in Christ transforms every aspect of daily living. While additional steps of surrender may follow, this initial presentation of the body is essential, setting believers on a path of deepening fellowship and devotion to the One who beseeches them with unfathomable love.

This living and holy sacrifice represents a radical transformation, reflecting the vitality and holiness that come through faith in Christ. The concept of worship extends beyond formal rituals, encompassing every facet of the believer's life. In the end, Romans 12:1 calls for a holistic approach to worship, where every moment and every action becomes an act of devotion to the Creator, responding to His immense love and grace.

Romans 12:2 calls believers to embrace the transformative process of renewing their minds. This process, initiated and empowered by the Holy Spirit, sets believers on a journey to discern God's will, experience His goodness, align with His moral standards, and embrace His perfect plan for their lives.

Resisting conformity to the world is a conscious decision to yield to God's transformative work. A renewed mind enables believers to navigate life with wisdom, integrity, and purpose, consistently making choices that reflect God's desires. Romans 12:2 serves as a blueprint for living a life distinct from the world and deeply connected to the divine will. It is the biblical counselor's duty to disciple individuals with this spiritual living as their goal, and the state must protect the biblical counselor's right to do so without undue regulation or licensing.

What Is Next?

Based on the conclusions above, the next steps for research in this area could focus on several key aspects:

1. **Impact Assessment of State Licensure on Biblical Counseling**: Further research could conduct empirical studies to assess the impact of state licensure on the practice of biblical counseling. This research could explore how licensure affects the availability, accessibility, and quality of biblical counseling services. It would be particularly useful to study the experiences of states that have already implemented such licensure requirements, comparing them with states that have not.
2. **Balancing Religious Freedom and Public Protection**: In addition, future research could investigate the legal and ethical dimensions of balancing religious freedom with the need to protect the public in the context of counseling services. This research could involve analyzing existing legal frameworks and court cases that have addressed similar issues. It could also explore potential models for regulation that respect religious freedom while ensuring client safety and ethical practice.
3. **Comparative Studies of Counseling Approaches**: Another focus could be to conduct comparative studies between biblical counseling and other forms of counseling (e.g., secular, spiritual but non-Christian). This research could aim to understand the unique benefits and challenges of each approach, as well as their effectiveness in different contexts.
4. **Policy Development and Recommendations**: Finally, future research could develop policy recommendations based on research findings that address the concerns raised

about religious freedom, ethical dilemmas, and the potential for overregulation and discrimination in the licensure of biblical counselors.

In summary, the next steps for research in this area should aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the implications of state licensure for biblical counselors, exploring legal, ethical, social, and religious dimensions, and should aim to develop balanced solutions that respect both religious freedom and the need for public protection in the counseling domain.

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Birmingham Theological Journal
A Journal of Birmingham Theological Seminary
Volume 2 | Issue 1 | Book Review 1 | Dec. 2024

Review of Martin Karrer, et al., eds., *Novum Testamentum Graecum, Editio Critica Maior VI: Revelation*

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Recommended Citation

Hicks, Dalton. Review of *Novum Testamentum Graecum, Editio Critica Maior VI: Revelation* by Martin Karrer et al., eds. *Birmingham Theological Journal* 2, no. 1 (Dec. 2024): 72–83.

If this book review is accessed online, please add the URL to the citation.

 ISSN: 2998-7164 (online)

Karrer, Martin, et al., eds. *Novum Testamentum Graecum, Editio Critica Maior VI: Revelation.* 4 vols. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2024. 1,889 pages. Hardcover, €329.00.

The long awaited *Editio Critica Maior* on the book of Revelation (ECM; ECM Rev) is now available, published as a four-volume set.[1] Significantly, ECM Rev includes over one hundred and seventy changes from the 28th edition of the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (NA28) text, a subset of which will be analyzed for theological impact at the end of this review. The project began in 2011 under the leadership of Martin Karrer at the Kirchliche Hochschule Wuppertal, Germany with an editorial team including Darius Müller, Marcus Sigismund, Holger Strutwolf, Annette Hüffmeier, Gregory S. Paulson, and additional collaboration with Matthias Geigenfeind, Peter Malik, Oliver Humberg, Edmund Gerke, Nicola Seliger, and Juan Hernández Jr. ECM Rev is the fourth volume in the ECM project series edited by the Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung (INTF) at the University of Münster, Germany. The goal of this long-term project is easily deduced from its title—to produce a major critical edition of the New Testament (NT) in light of the many recent methodological and technological advances in NT textual criticism. In this respect, ECM Rev does not disappoint; the exceeding quantity and quality of research included in these four volumes are difficult to overstate. This review will cover each volume of ECM Rev with a specific focus on new developments and the ways ECM Rev is likely to affect future editions of the Greek NT and, consequently, English translations.

Volume 1 (*PART 1 Text* [*TEIL 1 Text*]) includes a relatively brief yet detailed introduction followed by the actual text of Revelation and critical apparatus. The introduction orients readers

[1] The text and apparatus of all currently published ECM installments (Catholic Epistles, Acts, Mark, and Revelation) are available for free access through the INTF's New Testament Virtual Manuscript Room (NTVMR), https://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/ecm. However, all introductory and supplementary material is available only in the printed volumes.

 ISSN: 2998-7164 (online)

to the ECM project overall and the unique contributions of ECM Rev. The ECM occupies a unique position among critical editions of the NT in terms of both purpose and method. Concerning the former, the stated purpose of the ECM is to reconstruct the *Ausgangstext* ("earliest attainable text" or "initial text") of the NT manuscript tradition. That is, the earliest text that is possible to reconstruct from the manuscript and textual tradition as it currently exists. Since the resultant text cannot be definitively dated earlier than the second to fourth centuries (in most places), the ECM editors find the term *Ausgangstext* to be the most accurate. This stands in contrast to critical editions whose editors' aim is to reconstruct the "original" or "authorial" NT text. The ECM is also unique in its employment of the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method (CBGM) as one of the tools that can assist with textual decisions. Based on full transcriptions, the CBGM calculates pre-genealogical coherence (the percentage agreement between two witnesses without showing the direction of the relationship) and genealogical coherence (the relationship between witnesses based on the priority of readings).[2] Although still limited in some ways and by no means eliminating human judgment, the technological advances underlying the CBGM allow for an unprecedented amount of textual data to be analyzed and accounted for when making textual decisions. This method stands in contrast to other critical editions, many of which employ some form of reasoned eclecticism and analyze textual data based on the theory of text-types (e.g., Alexandrian, Western, Byzantine).

In addition to providing an explanation for how to interpret the text and apparatus, volume 1 contains a discussion about ways ECM Rev differs from previous installments in the ECM series, as well as how it differs from the text of Revelation in the leading critical hand

[2] For an accessible and thorough introduction to the CBGM, see Wasserman, Tommy, and Peter J. Gurry. *A New Approach to Textual Criticism: An Introduction to the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2017.

edition—the NA28. The former is elaborated further in subsequent volumes (discussed below); concerning changes from the NA28, the editors highlighted three major areas: (1) a list of 85 "new initial readings" (NIRs) introduced by ECM Rev as opposed to the NA28; (2) a list of 95 instances of "new initial orthography" (NIO) where the spelling differs from NA28; (3) a list of 106 split guiding lines—places where the ECM Rev editors were unable to determine the initial text and, thus, listed two readings as equally viable options (47*–58*). Eight of the NIR and NIO entries overlap; in total, ECM Rev introduces 171 new readings from the NA28. Questions about how these readings will impact future editions of the Greek NT and English translations are discussed below.

Volume 2 (*PART 2 Supplementary Material* [*TEIL 2 Begleitende Materialien*]) provides a host of material useful for further studies on the text of Revelation such as a list of singular readings from all witnesses included in the ECM Rev apparatus (16–66), and the percentage of agreement each witness had with one another (67–93). This volume also contains an extensive section on orthographic decisions. Unlike other critical editions, which follow so-called "standardized" spelling conventions of the Greek text, ECM Rev based orthographic decisions on "the main strand in the manuscripts of the first millennium" (111). The vast array of orthographic decisions included everything from minor itacisms and vowel changes to numerals and pictograms (111–189). The next major section provided a list of references in Revelation of the NT or LXX (191–192), as well as lists of extrabiblical sources that cite any portion of Revelation, such as Church Fathers and early Christian literature (197–235). Volume 2 also included an extensive discussion on the early versions and their unique place within the textual history of Revelation, including a commentary for when and how the versions impacted textual decisions in ECM Rev (308–389). The final major aspect of this volume was the discussion on

the paratextual project (393–426). This project began in 2019 and, although incomplete and technically separate from ECM Rev, sheds great light on textual matters. Thus, in an attempt to foster the relationship between text and paratext, the editors included some of the preliminary findings from this project into the apparatus of ECM Rev (volume 1). The discussion in volume 2 details the process of selecting witnesses to include in the apparatus, which paratextual features are highlighted in the apparatus, a guide for interpreting the apparatus, and additional related information. The inclusion of paratextual study is unprecedented in a critical edition and a most welcome contribution. Its inclusion is sure to enhance study in both domains.

Volume 3 (*PART 3.1 Studies on the Text* [*TEIL 3.1 Studien zum Text*]) functions like an in-depth discussion about method and related aspects underlying this edition. It begins with a lengthy editorial report from Karrer where he clarifies the bipartite goal of the ECM: to reconstruct the earliest attainable text (*den ältest erreichbaren Text*) and provide users with materials related to textual history with a specific emphasis on the first millennium (3). He then launches into a history of research on the text of Revelation beginning with Erasmus' 1516 edition through the modern period. This leads Karrer to clarify the goal of ECM Rev, namely, to provide researchers with necessary tools and evidence to study and understand the development of Revelation's textual history by tracing its major textual lines (*Hauptlinien)* from their initial development to the beginning of printing (16). Of the over 320 extant Greek witnesses for Revelation, 110 are used in ECM Rev to reconstruct the text including all the witnesses from the first millennium.[3] Karrer then provided an in-depth discussion for some unique aspects of ECM Rev, most notably the use of lower-case Greek letters throughout the text except at the beginning

[3] This naturally includes all papyri and majuscules. Further, as with all ECM projects, the selection of witnesses is based on the previously conducted *Text und Textwert* project, which (for Revelation) compared the manuscripts at 123 test points (*Testellen*). For a list of the 110 witnesses chosen for ECM Rev, see 17–18.

of new sections (26–27) and the use of abbreviations (including nomina sacra) for select words throughout the edition (29–35). Concerning the latter, the full word is still spelled out with parentheses to emphasize its abbreviated nature (e.g., θ(εο)ς; ι(ησου)ς; κ(υριο)ς).

Following the editorial report, Darius Müller wrote a section that details the groundbreaking work the CBGM has done for tracing the textual history of Revelation. Previous critical editions of the NT utilized the theory of Josef Schmid, who identified four textual streams in Revelation: two older streams that he deemed most reliable for reconstructing the text (based on manuscripts 02/04 and P47/01, respectively) and two younger streams that, together, make up the majority of extant witnesses (Andreas; Koine); although, strictly speaking, no monolithic "byzantine" or "majority text" stream exists for Revelation.[4] The application of the CBGM brought some surprising revisions to this long-held theory. First, while manuscripts 02, 04, P47, and 01 were all verified as generally reliable tradents of the initial text, the groupings Schmid identified are not clear enough to continue maintaining. Second, 025 was identified as the closest extant witness to the initial text. Additional witnesses in this older group include several minuscules such as 2846 and 1611 (133ff). Third, with help from the CBGM, the editors identified four other major streams that developed later due to various degrees of mixture between the Andreas and Koine traditions: the Arethas text (so named due to its connection with Arethas' commentary), Family 104, Family 172, and the Complutensian text (a younger group that developed around the twelfth century and whose text is similar to the printed Complutensian Polyglot).[5] The editors are not clear about terminology for these new textual groupings, using a

[4] Josef Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte des Griechischen Apokalypse-Textes*, 2 vols., *Münchener Theologische Studie* (München: Karl Zink, 1955).

[5] Müller provides a rough theoretical sketch of how these traditions developed on 149. While Schmid had previously identified these mixed traditions, the ECM editors significantly refined his findings.

variety of terms such as "textual traditions" (*Texttraditionen*), "text forms" (*Textformen*), and "main texts" (*Haupttexten*) seemingly interchangeably. Regardless of terminology, these discoveries will cause textual critics to rethink most of what they believed regarding the textual history of Revelation. Two additional contributions of this section are by Markus Lembke, who provided a list of all extant Greek witnesses for Revelation grouped into one of the newly-identified textual traditions (164). He also produced a four-columned table that depicted the text of the Koine, Andreas, and Complutensian groups (the three largest "majority" groups in Rev) alongside the NA28/ECM Rev text for the entire book of Revelation (180–216). The utility of this table for further studies must not be overlooked. Such hidden gems are characteristic of the work overall.

Among the most valuable and practical contributions of volume 3 is the textual commentary by Karrer and Müller, which provides detailed discussion on all major textual decisions (225–400). The textual commentary (like virtually all of volume 3) is in German, which limits its readership to those proficient in German. Given the fact that the editors chose to translate the punctuation commentary (volume 4) into English, the decision to leave the text commentary untranslated is surprising. Regardless, it remains invaluable and includes a thorough discussion on every relevant item. Volume 3 concludes with various additional studies such as Jan Krans' in-depth discussion on conjectures in Revelation (417ff) and several minor essays such as Ulrich Huttner's on the spelling of city names in Rev (479ff).

Volume 4 (*PART 3.2 Studies on Punctuation and Textual Structure* [*TEIL 3.2 Studien zu Interpunktion und Textstruktur*]) details perhaps the most innovative addition of ECM Rev, namely, its complete revision of punctuation and segmentation. Three major aspects stand out from this volume, the first being an editorial report by Karrer on the segmentation project, which

is unique even among previous ECM publications. Compared to NA28, ECM Rev introduces 710 changes to punctuation and segmentation (3). Karrer traced the history of segmentation in the NT Greek text, which is most heavily influenced by printed editions beginning with the *Textus Receptus* (TR, based largely on later Greek manuscripts). With the advent of eclectic texts based on critical methods, punctuation decisions took a more hybrid approach—partially influenced by previous printed editions and partially influenced by modern linguistic conventions. Karrer pointed out how such approaches rely largely on the interpretive (subjective) decisions of editors (27ff). Instead, a critical edition should strive to reconstruct the earliest attainable segmentation features from the mainline of the most ancient manuscripts. Such an approach relativizes interpretive decisions on the part of the editorial team and leaves them in the hands of translators. Thus, the punctuation in ECM Rev is largely based on the mainline (*Hauptlinie*) segmentation of manuscripts from the first millennium.

In addition to the revised punctuation throughout the text of ECM Rev, the editors included an apparatus in volume 1 with punctuation variation among the manuscripts, which leads to the second major aspect of volume 4—a commentary on the segmentation decisions made throughout ECM Rev. Karrer wrote the segmentation commentary, which is then translated into English in its entirety by Hernández. The commentary begins with an explanation of the segmentation features as they appear in the text, as well as the textual apparatus. In order to accurately represent the variety of the segmentation traditions in the manuscripts, which developed gradually and were by no means monolithic within the first millennium, the editorial team introduced a number of new punctuation marks to ECM Rev (81ff; 233ff). The topic of segmentation includes aspects beyond the sentence level to that of paragraphs and major sections (comparable to modern chapter divisions). ECM Rev also reconstructs these more “macro”

segmentation features (e.g., Logoi, Kephalaia), which are based largely on the tradition from Andrew of Caesarea's text and commentary.

The third and final major feature of volume 4 is a reader's version of the entire text of Revelation reconstructed according to the mainline segmentation of manuscripts within the first millennium. This feature is quite a treat for users, as it pulls all aspects of the study together. While it could arguably function more accessibly at the end of volume 1, its current placement aptly summarizes the study. One aspect that readers must keep in mind is that the reconstructed *segmentation* of ECM Rev is not necessarily an accurate reflection of the segmentation as it appeared in the reconstructed *text* of ECM Rev. In other words, let us assume that the reconstructed text of ECM Rev reflects a text that existed anywhere between the second and fourth centuries, although it may be later in some places. The reconstructed segmentation, while based on witnesses from the first millennium, generally represents a period much later—more like the mid- to late-Byzantine period. (In fact, some decisions on segmentation required the consultation of witnesses later than the first millennium, 81; 233). Thus, ECM Rev produces (oversimplifying, of course) a second-fourth century *text* with eighth-tenth century *segmentation*. This is not necessarily negative; readers must simply be aware that the segmentation of ECM Rev represents a later period in the tradition than the text. Furthermore, the segmentation is still the result of later interpreters and users of the text. ECM Rev reproduces the *earliest* segmentation, not necessarily the most *accurate*; interpretive decisions remain. These cautions, however, apply to the users of ECM Rev. Both translators and editors of Greek NTs must clarify their goals before *de facto* accepting the segmentation of ECM Rev. Gratefully, the ECM Rev team provided all necessary information for users to easily and accessibly make such critical judgments, simultaneously setting a new standard for future ECM installments.

How will ECM Rev likely affect future English translations of Revelation? Based on my own analysis, of the 171 NIR units, only 15 (13 verses total) will impact English translations. Of these 15, I deem only 6 theologically significant.[6] Of the 106 split line readings, 16 will potentially affect English translations, only 4 of which I deem theologically significant.[7] Thus, by my judgment, the following 10 readings could impact English translations in a theologically significant manner: (1) 6:17/18 changes αυτων ("their") to αυτου ("his"), which depicts the wrath as belonging to God alone rather than to both the Lamb and God. This change lowers the Christological and Trinitarian emphasis in the NA28 reading. (2) 20:5/1 omits the phrase οι λοιποι των νεκρων ουκ εζησαν αχρι τελεσθη τα χιλια ετη ("the rest of the dead ones did not live until the thousand years were complete"). This phrase is significant due to its chiliastic subject matter, and its omission leaves the question open about who all will participate in the "first resurrection" depicted in the passage. (3) 21:6/8–10 changes γεγοναν. εγω ("Then he said to me, 'it is done. I am the alpha and the omega'") to γεγονα εγω ("Then he said to me, 'I have become the alpha and the omega'"). While the ECM reading can be variously interpreted, it can suggest that God's title of alpha and omega/beginning and end is the result of His activity in transpiring events rather than something inherently His. (4) 22:12/30–32 changes εστιν αυτου ("his [work] is") to εσται αυτου ("his [work] will be"). The shift here is subtle, but the future tense of the ECM reading conveys a vague nature for when the depicted judgment occurs, which could have eschatological implications. (5) 22:21/14–18 changes παντων ("[with] all") to παντων των αγιων ("[with] all the saints"). The ECM reading limits the final doxological blessing to followers of

[6] Minor NIR units: 5:9/40–44; 12:8/6; 13:10/6–10; 13:10/20–30; 16:18/34–36; 17:8/40; 18:2/32–54; 18:3/6–20; 20:9/44–54. Major: 6:17/18; 20:5/1; 21:6/8–10; 22:12/30–32; 22:21/14–18; 22:21/20.

[7] Minor Split lines: 2:16/4; 2:27/24; 3:7/56–60; 5:13/40; 10:1/6–8; 10:8/36; 11:12/4; 12:18/4; 14:6/6–8; 14:8/4–8; 16:5/18–32; 21:3/10–14; 21:3/66–68; 22:21/11. Major: 2:7/52–54; 2:13/48; 5:10/14–18; 16:5/18–32.

Christ rather than all readers in general. (6) 22:21/20 adds the word αμην ("amen") to the end of the book, which may seem minor, but it emphasizes the epistolary genre of the book and adds a liturgical element. (7) 2:7/52–54 is a split reading between του θεου ("of God," NA28) to του θεου μου ("of my God"). The fact that Jesus is the speaker makes the Christological emphasis in the latter reading lower than the former. While Jesus does occasionally refer to God as "my God," it usually seems to be accompanied with intentional echo to the Old Testament (e.g., Mk 15:34; Rev 3:12). (8) 2:13/48 is a split reading between αντιπας ("Antipas," NA28) and αντειπας (either the aorist participle, "the contradictor" or aorist indicative verb "you [did not deny my faithfulness and] contradict [me]"). In the first reading, a specific martyr named Antipas is identified. In the second reading, the substantive participle "contradictor" functions as an honorary appellation given to a faithful martyr who "contradicted" opposing authorities. The verbal option alters the syntactical construction to connect αντειπας with the preceding clause.[8] (9) 5:10/14–18 is a split reading between βασιλειαν και ιερεις ("a kingdom and priests," NA28) and βασιλεις και ιεριες ("kings and priests"). In the former reading, the followers of the Lamb are depicted as priests within a single kingdom. In the latter, the followers are identified more individually as both kings and priests. (10) 16:5/18–32 is a split reading between ει ο ων και ο ην ο οσιος ("you are the one who is and was, the holy one," NA28) and ει ο ων και ο ην οσιος ("you are the one who is and was holy"). The former reading emphasizes the eternal nature of God along with His holiness; the latter only emphasizes His holiness.

Overall, ECM Rev is a tremendous work of scholarship that will effectively alter the landscape of studies on the Apocalypse. I highly recommend acquisition of ECM Rev for all theological libraries. The price of these volumes may make individual purchase difficult,

[8] For an in-depth look at these readings, see the essays by Hans Förster (403–408) and Thomas Paulsen (409–411) in ECM Rev volume 3.

although their value for textual scholarship makes acquisition all but necessary for those within the field of textual criticism, especially any who work with the text of Revelation. The edition does, however, promise to make the Greek text and apparatus freely available on the NTVMR, and the CBGM will also be online as well for anyone to use (both the NTVMR edition of ECM Rev and CBGM Rev are works in progress at the time of writing). I would encourage all NT scholars and theological students to familiarize themselves with the major changes introduced by these volumes. Any student, pastor, or serious lay person interested in the text of Revelation should make extensive use of the ECM text and apparatus on the NTVMR. The tireless labor and expert scholarship evident on every page of these four volumes make it well worth the wait.

Birmingham Theological Journal
A Journal of Birmingham Theological Seminary
Volume 2 | Issue 1 | Book Review 2 | Dec. 2024

Review of J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism: 100th Anniversary Edition*

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Recommended Citation

Stubbs, Olan. Review of *Christianity and Liberalism: 100th Anniversary Edition* by J. Gresham Machen. *Birmingham Theological Journal* 2, no. 1 (Dec. 2024): 84–89.

If this book review is accessed online, please add the URL to the citation.

Machen, J. Gresham. *Christianity and Liberalism: 100th Anniversary Edition.* Foreword by Kevin DeYoung. 1923. Reprint, Glenside: PA, Westminster Seminary Press, 2023. 224 pages. Hardcover, $14.99.

What makes J. Gresham Machen and his work so compelling that Westminster Seminary Press chose to release a special 100-year anniversary edition? Machen was an American theologian, Presbyterian New Testament scholar, and a seminary professor who lived from 1881 to 1937. Machen was ordained in the Presbyterian Church (USA) in 1915, and he taught at Princeton Seminary with other great Presbyterian scholars, such as B. B. Warfield (xvii-xviii). As Machen's denomination began to embrace German liberal theology, he sought to fight back and stand for the clear gospel truth as taught in the Scriptures. This book arose from such fights.

As Princeton and his denomination moved away from orthodoxy as represented in the Westminster Standards, Machen led the charge to form a new seminary in 1929.[1] He served as one of the first professors at the newly formed Westminster Theological Seminary. He also helped organize a new denomination, which is now known as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1936.[2] He wrote many other significant theological works, including *The Virgin Birth of Christ* in 1930.

Through his fights over doctrine with his original denomination and seminary, Machen became a leader in clearly defining the primary Christian doctrines he covers in *Christianity and Liberalism*. Because this book addresses the most basic and foundational doctrines of Christianity in such a clear and concise manner, it is as relevant today as when it was published over one hundred years ago. The difficulties one faces and the battles believers must fight today

[1] "He Took Up Arms against Liberalism: J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)," Desiring God, accessed October 21, 2024, https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/he-took-up-arms-against-liberalism.

[2] Ibid.

in modern culture are not identical to those Machen fought, yet "there is nothing new under the sun" (Eccles. 1:9).[3] Satan continues to attack the truths of Christianity in various ways. Being experts in the one true orthodox religion is the best way to defend against whatever the latest assault may be. For this reason, among others, Westminster Seminary Press has chosen to re-release the book. Other reasons include celebrating Machen's timeless work and the seminary he founded.

Machen proposed that "despite the liberal use of traditional phraseology, modern liberalism not only is a different religion from Christianity but belongs in a totally different class of religions. . . . The liberal attempt at reconciling Christianity with modern science has really relinquished everything distinctive of Christianity, so that what remains is in essentials only that same indefinite type of religious aspiration which was in the world before Christianity came upon the scene" (7). According to Kevin DeYoung,

> By "liberalism" Machen was not thinking about the classic liberalism of John Locke and Adam Smith or the political liberalism of more recent vintage. He was thinking of the well-established tradition of theological liberalism which grew up in German soil and was blossoming in the mainland denominations of America in the early part of the twentieth century. From Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), who argued that the essence of true religion is a feeling of absolute dependence, to Albert Ritschl (1822–1889), who emphasized the kingdom of God as moral progress, to Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) who insisted that the development of doctrine marked the abandonment of true Christianity, to Walter Rauschenbusch (1861–1918) who advocated the social gospel of deeds over creeds, liberalism was its own tradition, with its own heroes, its own core beliefs, and its own ecclesiastical vision" (xviii).

Machen describes his methodology as a comparison between liberalism and Christianity on important teachings of the faith to highlight their differences: "An examination of the teachings of liberalism in comparison with those of Christianity will show that in every point the two movements are in direct opposition" (53). The topics of comparison in each chapter include these: In chapter 3, Machen addresses the doctrine of God and the doctrine of man. Chapter 4

[3] Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced employ the English Standard Version.

addresses the Bible as the Word of God. Chapter 5 is about the person of Christ. In chapter 6, Machen discusses the doctrine of salvation. Machen closes with a discussion of the institution of the church in chapter 7.

Five themes stand out. First, the book was written to address primary doctrines, doctrines of "first importance," as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:3. This is not a book written to address esoteric, secondary doctrines that can become intramural debates between orthodox believers. Rather, this book transcends cultures because it addresses essential, universal truths.

Machen is helpful in explaining how important the word "only" is in Christian doctrine. *Only* Christ is Lord. *Only* Christ is Savior. He goes as far as to say that if the word "only" had been left off of the early church's doctrine that "Christ is Lord," the church likely would have never been persecuted—but neither would it have changed the world (127)! "Christ is Lord" might have fit among the pantheon of pagan gods. "Only Christ is Lord" is offensive and was worthy of death in the Roman empire.

Machen shows the folly of all sin, other world views, and doctrines of salvation apart from Christ alone. Machen asserts, "Emancipation from the blessed will of God always involves bondage to some worse taskmaster" (149). His words carry conviction to snap people out of playing with sin and false doctrine, as though they were merely a game.

Second, Machen's style is a great model for ministers trying to reach the lost today. Although the book is polemic, it is not angry. Machen treats his opponents with kindness and respect. He knows that the doctrines he professes and defends are true, yet he does not carry an attitude of arrogant triumphalism. He seeks to win his readers and not just the argument itself.

Machen is fair minded to the other side. He takes their arguments seriously. Because he has, he is even more insightful about the dangers of liberalism. Likewise, Machen is strong in

addressing the heresy of his opponents. Machen makes it plain that liberalism is not a mere off-shoot of genuine Christianity but a completely different system of thought and belief. Its roots and foundations are fundamentally different (176-177).

Third, the book is applicable. Machen writes as a fellow struggler who has wrestled with some of the tenants of liberalism and felt their appeal. Machen shows the blessings and the curses of free public education. It is a wonderful thing for the government to offer it to those who want or need it. It is a terrible thing once it becomes a tyranny that seeks to enforce its ideals on everyone (14). In some ways his book seems almost prophetic at times for his warnings to the church in many regards and especially with the current system of education in this country (180).

Machen speaks to the tension believers feel between being set free from sin and yet still having to fight the battle daily against indwelling sin (150). He reminds readers there is a danger in only focusing on the large sins of society. He also warns that Satan will often use the seemingly "small" sins to gain a foothold with believers (68).

Machen writes very wisely on how liberalism sought to use Christianity to transform society, but Christianity cannot merely be used or accepted as a means unto the end of social reform (156-157). If this is done, eventually the roots of Christianity are thrown out in hopes of continuing to enjoy its fruits, even while the foundation is gone. History since the Enlightenment has shown that this may seem to work in the short run, but eventually, it is doomed to fail.

Fourth, the book is evangelistic. One of the aims clearly is the conversion of souls. Machen obviously cared about the lost and about getting the gospel in its fullness and clarity to people perishing in their sins. His heart shines through his writing. He makes clear that the church must keep the salvation of souls as the primary focus and see the transformation of society as a secondary, though important, consequence of so many being saved (162).

Fifth, Machen's book is accessible. It is short. It is easy to read, understand, and apply. Some books seem to be written from one academic to other academics. There is a place for that, but this book does not fall into that category. This book can be helpful to the average Christian amid their busy lives. It is not a dry, theological tome.

All five of these themes help Machen's book stand the test of time. Hence, Christians are discussing it and reading it one hundred years later. Machen writes so powerfully about the depths, consequences, and pain of sinfulness. His moving depiction of the utter helplessness of sinners demonstrates the need for the atoning work of Christ (134-136). Machen concludes, "Surely this and this alone is joy. But it is a joy that is akin to fear. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. . . . We, God help us – sinful as we are, we would see Jehovah. Despairing, hoping, trembling, half-doubting and half-believing, trusting all to Jesus, we venture into the presence of the very God. And in His presence, we live" (139). This is the message Christians rejoice to hear, know, experience, and proclaim. This is the message that a dying world is so desperate to hear.