Cognitive Perspectives on Early Christology

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Abstract

Central to all christological models are concepts of agency, identity, and divinity, but few scholars have directly addressed these frameworks within their ancient West Asian contexts. Rather, the proclivity has been to retroject modern, Eurocentric, and binary frameworks onto the ancient texts, resulting in christological models that inevitably reflect modern orthodoxies and ontological categories. The future of christological research will depend on moving beyond this tendentiousness. In an effort to begin this process, this paper will apply findings from the cognitive sciences – which examine the way the human brain structures its perception of the world around it – to the reconstruction of ancient frameworks of agency, identity, and divinity. Applying these findings to early Jewish literature reveals the intuitive conceptualization of God's agency, reified as the divine name, as a communicable vehicle of divine presence and authority. These observations support the conclusion that early Jewish conceptualizations of divine agency provided a conceptual template for the development of early christology.

Keywords

Introduction

The cognitive science of religion is a relatively new interdisciplinary approach that applies a variety of methodologies from the several disciplines of the

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cognitive sciences to the examination of the development, function, and transmission of concepts and practices associated with traditions typically labeled "religious."[1] As a result of the contemporary Western conceptualization of "religion" as fundamentally centered on (1) beliefs related to (2) supernatural agents,[2] one of the primary emphases of the cognitive science of religion (hereafter CSR) since its inception has been understanding the mental representation of deities. The last two decades of research and theorizing on this topic have led to a number of important insights regarding ways that humanity's evolved cognitive architecture constrains and influences the production and salience of the interrelated concepts of agency, identity, and divinity.[3] While the empirical research within this field has been conducted with living informants, a sub-discipline has developed – cognitive historiography – which has argued that cognitive models, in concert with socio-cultural models, have much to contribute to the evaluation of historical texts and material remains.[4]

The contributions of these approaches to the future of biblical studies are difficult to overestimate, but because of the nascence of the CSR discipline, little has been produced to this point at the intersection of biblical studies and the cognitive sciences.[5] The goal of this article is to take a small step into the

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1   Some introductions to the field are the following: Ilkka Pyysiäinen and Veikko Anttonen (eds.), *Current Approaches in the Cognitive Science of Religion* (London: Continuum, 2002); Justin L. Barrett, "Cognitive Science of Religion: What Is It and Why Is It?" *RC* 1.6 (2007), pp. 768-86; Ilkka Pyysiäinen, "Cognitive Science of Religion: State-of-the-Art," *JCSR* 1.1 (2012), pp. 5-28.

2   This essentialist definition of religion has come under intense scrutiny within the broader study of religion (Kocku von Stuckrad, "Discursive Study of Religion: Approaches, Definitions, Implications," *MTSR* 25.1 [2013], pp. 5-25; Jonathan Jong, "On (Not) Defining (Non)Religion," *SR&C* 2.3 [2015]: pp. 15-24), but it is not without its defenders (Caroline Schaffalitzky de Muckadell, "On Essentialism and Real Definitions of Religion," *JAAR* 82.2 [2014], pp. 495-520; Juraj Franek, "Has the Cognitive Science of Religion (Re)defined 'Religion'?" *Religio* 22.1 [2014], pp. 3-27).

3   Todd Tremlin, *Minds and Gods: The Cognitive Foundations of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Jesse M. Bering, "The Cognitive Psychology of Belief in the Supernatural," *AmSci* 94.2 (2006), pp. 142-49; Ilkka Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents: Why We Believe in Souls, Gods, and Buddhas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

4   Jesper Sørensen, "Past Minds: Present Historiography and Cognitive Science," in Luther H. Martin and Jesper Sørensen (eds.), *Past Minds: Studies in Cognitive Historiography* (London: Equinox, 2011), pp. 179-96; Dimitris Xygalatas, "On the Way Towards a Cognitive Historiography: Are We There Yet?" *JCH* 1.2 (2014), pp. 193-200.

5   Some exceptions include Petri Luomanen, Ilkka Pyysiäinen, and Risto Uro (eds.), *Explaining Christian Origins and Early Judaism: Contributions from Cognitive and Social Science* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); István Czachesz, "The Promise of the Cognitive Sciences for Biblical Studies," *CSSR Bulletin* 37.4 (2008), pp. 102-105; István Czachesz and Risto Uro (eds.), *Mind, Morality and*

future of christological research by applying some central principles from CSR to the reconstruction of ancient conceptualizations of agency,[6] identity, and divinity, and to examine how such reconstructions might inform the study of early christology. In the interest of space, I will engage only the "divine identity" christological model, and I will take as representative of that model Richard Bauckham's iteration as found in his 2008 publication *Jesus and the God of Israel*.[7]

Divine Identity Christology

The foundation of the divine identity model of christology is a view of early Judaism as "strictly monotheistic," meaning, for Bauckham, early Jewish people widely agreed on a clear dichotomy absolutely distinguishing the identity of YHWH from "all other reality," which was the deity's creation. Because Christ exercised multiple divine prerogatives in the New Testament – most significantly the creation of the earth (John 1:10) – Bauckham argues he must have been understood to have been located on the divine side of that dichotomy, meaning he must have been "included in the unique divine identity."[8] Thus Jesus's divinity constituted no violation of the existing Jewish worldview. According to this model, the many intermediary figures of early Judaism that ostensibly straddled the divine/human divide did not violate that strict dichotomy because they were either (1) "included in the unique divine identity," as was Christ, or (2) created and contingent beings that were clearly distinguished

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Magic: Cognitive Science Approaches in Biblical Studies (Durham: Acumen, 2013); Risto Uro, *Ritual and Christian Beginnings: A Socio-Cognitive Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

6 I use "agency" to refer broadly to a capacity to effect change. On intentionality as a necessary feature of agency, see Marcia-Anne Dobres and John E. Robb, "Agency in Archaeology: Paradigm or Platitude?" in Marcia-Anne Dobres and John E. Robb (eds.), *Agency in Archaeology* (Abingdon, Oxford: Routledge, 2000), pp. 3-17.

7 Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009). The divine identity model has been challenged by several scholars over the years, often on the grounds that a framework of agency makes better use of the evidence. See James F. McGrath, *The Only True God: Early Christian Monotheism in Its Jewish Context* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), pp. 13-14, 74-75; James D.G. Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus? The New Testament Evidence* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), pp. 60-62; Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of the Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2014), p. 61.

8 Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, pp. 24, 45.

from the divine identity.[9] Bauckham asserts that "observant Jews of the late Second Temple period were highly self-conscious monotheists in this sense."[10]

Apart from being an inference that Bauckham must himself draw from the texts,[11] his christological model stands or falls on the imposition onto the texts of a small number of conceptual frameworks that are assumed with little or no argument. One of these frameworks is the notion that Jewish people viewed the God of Israel as exhausting the category of divinity. If God was considered coterminous with divinity, as Bauckham seems to me to assume,[12] the question of a divine being existing apart from God is a non-starter.[13] This is why his central concern is whether or not an entity is part of God's identity – divinity is limited to God alone. Another framework is creation *ex nihilo*, which must be presupposed if all that is not God/divinity is ontologically distinct and is God's own proprietary creation. This conflicts with the consensus among critical scholars of early Judaism and Christianity, which places the first clear articulation of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* in the second century CE.[14]

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9   Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, pp. 14-17.

10   Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, p. 5.

11   Bauckham cannot show an explicit articulation of this philosophical framework, but he asserts that observant Jews were "highly self-conscious" of it (Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, p. 3).

12   For instance, Bauckham writes, "Identity concerns *who* God is; nature concerns *what* God is or what divinity is" (Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, p. 7, emphasis in original). "What divinity is" seems to stand in apposition to "*what* God is."

13   Bauckham does provide a more detailed case for his concept of monotheism in *Jesus and the God of Israel*, but his assertion of ontological exclusivity derives still from the notion that God's status as creator separates the deity ontologically from all else. That the exaltation of God as creator of "all" necessarily leads to "transcendent uniqueness" (Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, p. 109) is problematic in light of the ubiquity of the rhetoric of incomparability in the ancient world. Numerous texts from other ancient Near Eastern cultures praise this or that deity as the source of all existence. See, for instance, the Great Cairo Hymn to Amun-Re, which praises Amun-Re as "Sole One, who made all that exists." It continues: "One, alone, who made that which is / From whose two eyes mankind came forth / On whose mouth the gods came into being ... / The gods bowing to Your Majesty / Exalting the might of Him (*sic*) who created them" ("Great Cairo Hymn of Praise to Amun-Re," trans. Robert K. Ritner [*COS* 1.25.i, iii]).

14   Gerhard May, *Shöpfung aus dem Nichts: Die Entstehung der Lehre von der creatio ex nihilo* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1978); David Winston, "Creation *Ex Nihilo* Revisited: A Reply to Jonathan Goldstein," *JJS* 37.1 (1986), pp. 88-91; James Noel Hubler, "*Creatio ex Nihilo*: Matter, Creation, and the Body in Classical and Christian Philosophy through Aquinas" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1995); Markus Bockmuehl, "*Creatio ex nihilo* in Palestinian Judaism and Early Christianity," *SJT* 65.3 (2012), pp. 253-70.

The most critical framework undergirding Bauckham's christological model, however, is his concept of "identity," which he describes as "the personal identity of self-continuity,"[15] and which explicitly borrows from modern theological exegesis.[16] The main deliverable of his concept of identity is its clear boundaries, which facilitate the assertion of an ontological dichotomy that divides God from all other reality. For early Judaism to have innovated this philosophically complex concept of two persons occupying one clearly delineated identity without ever explicitly articulating it, however – and to the degree that it is "clear and consistent"[17] throughout the writings of early Judaism – we would need to demonstrate the widespread yet tacit circulation of a thoroughly philosophical and largely modern conceptualization of personhood and identity. Not only is this not demonstrated by Bauckham, the problem is not even acknowledged. The uncritical application of these conceptual frameworks betrays a marked presentism in Bauckham's analysis.[18]

Dual-Process Cognition

Before addressing theories regarding the development and function of concepts of identity, agency, and divinity within CSR, it will be necessary to address an important principle that informs a great deal of research conducted within the field, namely, the dual-process model of cognition. According to this model, human minds process information on two levels, one intuitive and the other reflective. The intuitive level of processing is rapid and subconscious and is based on the human brain's "default settings" regarding its perception of the world around it. The reflective level is slower and conscious and based on reasoning, evidence, or even authority.[19] While it is probably best to think of

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15   Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, p. 6.

16   Bauckham borrows his concept of identity from Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Does the Trinity Belong in a Theology of Religions? On Angling in the Rubicon and the 'Identity' of God," in Kevin J. Vanhoozer (ed.), *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 41-71.

17   Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, p. ix.

18   Crispin Fletcher-Louis incorporates divine identity christology into his articulation of his own christological model, but describes Bauckham's model as asserting "a decidedly modern notion of identity" (Crispin Fletcher-Louis, *Jesus Monotheism.* Volume 1: *Christological Origins: The Emerging Consensus and Beyond* [Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015], p. 305).

19   Jonathan St. B.T. Evans, "In Two Minds: Dual Process Accounts of Reasoning," *TCS* 7.10 (2003), pp. 454-59; Wim De Neys, "Dual Processing in Reasoning: Two Systems but One

these two processes as mutually influential and as inhabiting a continuum rather than a dichotomy, they can and often do directly conflict with each other. For example, humans intuitively tend toward a teleological worldview, which means we tend to interpret events as being caused by intentional agents, up to and including the creation of things like mountains and the earth.[20] Certain studies conducted with educated Westerners have shown that even physical scientists and firmly atheistic individuals will attribute intentional agency to the creation of the earth and other natural events and processes when deprived of adequate time for cognitive processing.[21]

Identifying widespread patterns in those points of conflict helps us to better understand the types of knowledge to which the human brain defaults before the logical and reflective processes take over. Such research can help to reveal the types of knowledge and beliefs inherent in the brain's cognitive architecture. Understanding that distinction is critical to any attempt to understand the development of ideas about deity, and in no small part because – as will be discussed below – those ideas originate on the intuitive level of cognition. The current trend in christological scholarship, however, is precisely to use contemporary and reflective exegetical methods to explain ancient expressions of deity concepts. Such reasoning, however, may not have had anything to do with the actual origins of the belief.[22] Until reflective explanations become salient, deity concepts tend to develop on the "folk" level and operate independent of conscious or consistent explanation. To uncritically assign the most salient reflective explanations responsible for production of the belief is to put the cart firmly before the horse.

Reasoner," *PsychSci* 17.5 (2006), pp. 428-33; Jonathan St. B.T. Evans and Keith E. Stanovich, "Dual-Process Theories of Higher Cognition: Advancing the Debate," *PerspectPsychSci* 8.3 (2013), pp. 223-41.

20   Deborah Kelemen and Evelyn Rosset, "The Human Function Compunction: Teleological Explanation in Adults," *Cognition* 111.1 (2009), pp. 138-43.

21   Elisa Järnefelt, Caitlin F. Canfield, and Deborah Kelemen, "The Divided Mind of a Disbeliever: Intuitive Beliefs about Nature as Purposefully Created among Different Groups of Non-Religious Adults," *Cognition* 140.1 (2015), pp. 72-88; Deborah Kelemen, Joshua Rottman, and Rebecca Seston, "Professional Physical Scientists Display Tenacious Teleological Tendencies: Purpose-Based Reasoning as a Cognitive Default," *JExpPsych-Gen* 142.4 (2013), pp. 1074-1083.

22   Pascal Boyer, "Cognitive Predispositions and Cultural Transmission," in Pascal Boyer and James V. Wertsch (eds.), *Memory in Mind and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 288-319.

Agency, Identity, and Divinity

The cognitive sciences suggest that the concepts of agency, identity, and divinity are rooted in humanity's evolved ability to identify and draw conclusions about the presence and function of other minds – an intuitive cognitive process called "mentalization." The origins of this process are found in our evolutionary predecessors for whom survival and procreation were heavily contingent upon the efficiency with which they could perceive agents and their intentions in the world around them. The early primate that understood the rustling in the bushes to indicate a mental agent with intentions that might be focused on it was more likely to pass on their genes than the one that always thought it was the wind. The negligible cost of false positives in agency detection compared to the high cost of failure to detect an agent resulted in an evolutionary adaptation toward teleological reasoning – the assumption that events happen because of intentional agency – and a heightened sensitivity on the intuitive level to the presence of mental agents.[23]

This sensitivity is thought to begin in infancy and it results in a host of cognitive byproducts. Mental agents are intuitively perceived as fundamentally different from physical objects, and while infants develop an understanding quite early of the physical constraints of objects (such as cohesion, solidity, continuity), research suggests that they do not apply all of these constraints to human persons. In other words, they do not think of mental agents as material objects.[24] This early perception may contribute to the fact that 25% of preschool-aged children have an imaginary companion (IC), with almost 2/3 of children reporting an IC at some point in childhood.[25] The distinction between a mental agent and a material body continues into adulthood and finds expression in a variety of ways, such as the ubiquitous concepts of souls, spirits, ghosts, life forces, and other elements that can inhabit and/or interact with our

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23   Stewart Elliott Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Justin L. Barrett, "Exploring the Natural Foundations of Religion," *TCS* 4.1 (2000): pp. 29-34; Jesse M. Bering, "The Existential Theory of Mind," *RevGenPsych* 6.1 (2002), pp. 3-24.

24   Valerie A. Kuhlmeier, Paul Bloom, and Karen Wynn, "Do 5-Month-Old Infants See Humans as Material Objects?" *Cognition* 94 (2004), pp. 95-103. See also Carl Nils Johnson and Henry M. Wellman, "Children's Developing Conceptions of the Mind and Brain," *ChildDev* 53 (1982), pp. 222-34.

25   Tracy Gleason, Anne Sebanc, and Willard Hartup, "Imaginary Companions of Preschool Children," *DevPsych* 36.4 (2000), pp. 419-28; Marta Giménez-Dasí, Francisco Pons, and Patrick K. Bender, "Imaginary Companions, Theory of Mind and Emotion Understanding in Young Children," *EECERJ* (2016), pp. 186-97.

bodies but are not coterminous with them, are not bound by them, and can outlive them.[26] Cultures produce and structure their knowledge about these intuitions in different ways, but the general underlying intuitive concept is that an agent and a physical body are separate entities.[27] These findings are supported by research within anthropology which shows that – in contradistinction to the Western philosophical concept of the bounded individual – many cultures understand the person as partible and/or permeable.[28] Such considerations must factor into our reconstruction of ancient and even modern concepts of personhood and identity.

Another cognitive byproduct of these intuitions is the production of supernatural entities.[29] As long as we do not have reflective knowledge to otherwise account for initially unexplained phenomena in the world around us, we intuitively default to positing some kind of intentional agency. The transition from some unknown mental agent "out there" effecting large and powerful events like thunderstorms or earthquakes to an agent with a mythology and a cult constitutes a transition from the intuitive to the reflective, and involves the sociocultural transmission of mental representations about these agents and their semiotic anchoring in material media.[30] According to most cognitivists, the salience of these supernatural agents is determined in large part by their "minimal counter-intuitiveness," or their possession of a minimal num-

26   Jesse Bering, "The Folk Psychology of Souls," *BehavBrainSci* 29 (2006), pp. 453-98; Vera
      Pereira, Luís Faísca, and Rodrigo de Sá-Saraiva, "Immortality of the Soul as an Intuitive
      Idea: Towards a Psychological Explanation of the Origins of Afterlife Beliefs," *JCogCult* 12
      (2012), pp. 101-127.

27   Maira Roazzi, Melanie Nyhof, and Carl Johnson, "Mind, Soul and Spirit: Conceptions of
      Immaterial Identity in Different Cultures," *IJPR* 23.1 (2013), pp. 75-86.

28   See, for instance, Cecilia Busby, "Permeable and Partible Persons: A Comparative Analysis
      of Gender and Body in South India and Melanesia," *JRAnthropolInst* 3.2 (1997), pp. 261-78;
      Chris Fowler, *The Archaeology of Personhood: An Anthropological Approach* (London:
      Routledge, 2004); Mark S. Mosko, "Unbecoming Individuals: The Partible Character of
      The Christian Person," *JEthnogrTheory* 5.1 (2015), pp. 361-93.

29   Tommaso Bertolotti and Lorenzo Magnani, "The Role of Agency Detection in the Invention of Supernatural Beings: An Abductive Approach," in Lorenza Magnani, Walter Carnielli, and Claudio Pizzi (eds.), *Model-Based Reasoning in Science and Technology* (Berlin:
      Springer, 2010), pp. 239-62; Azriel Grysman and Judith A. Hudson, "Agency Detection in
      God Concepts: Essential, Situational, and Individual Factors," *JCogCult* 12 (2012), pp. 129-
      46; Will M. Gervais, "Perceiving Minds and Gods: How Mind Perception Enables, Constrains, and Is Triggered by Belief in Gods," *PerspectPsychSci* 8.4 (2013), pp. 380-94.

30   Bertolotti and Magnani, "The Role of Agency Detection in the Invention of Supernatural
      Beings," p. 257.

ber of counter-intuitive features that help them to stand out and be memorable without becoming prohibitively nonsensical.[31]

Christology Through a Cognitive Lens

It remains to address the contribution to be made by a cognitive approach to the critique of the divine identity christological model and to the interrogation of early christology as a whole. I start with prototype theory, which is a framework cultivated within the cognitive sciences for understanding how the human mind develops and uses conceptual categories. Contrary to the classical Aristotelian approach of binary categories developing around necessary and sufficient features, research within cognitive psychology and cognitive linguistics has shown that conceptual categories are internally graded, or have better and worse members.[32] This is a product of categorization being predicated upon some perception of similarity to a prototype or cognitive exemplar. Members with less similarity to the prototype occupy the periphery of the category and have debatable membership in it. Importantly, because the development and use of categories is focused intrinsically on the exemplars or prototypes, category boundaries are not intrinsic or necessary for effective communication. They remain rather ambiguous until a rhetorical need arises for them – at which point they are often rather arbitrarily established.

Bauckham's assumption of binary thinking on the part of early Jewish people as well as his notion of a strict dichotomy separating divinity and all other reality are both undermined by prototype theory. Because boundaries are not naturally occurring in the production and use of conceptual categories, we are in no position to assert, in the case of deity, that early Jewish people were

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31   This is one of the more debated aspects of the CSR accounts of the development of supernatural agents. See Pascal Boyer and Charles Ramble, "Cognitive Templates for Religious Concepts: Cross-Cultural Evidence for Recall of Counter-Intuitive Representations," *CogSci* 25.1 (2001), pp. 535-64; Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents*, pp. 22-30; Russell T. McCutcheon, "Will Your Cognitive Anchor Hold in the Storms of Culture?" *JAAR* 78.4 (2010), pp. 1182-93; Steven Horst, "Notions of Intuition in the Cognitive Science of Religion," *The Monist* 96.2 (2013), pp. 377-98.

32   See Eleanor Rosch, "On the Internal Structure of Perceptual and Semantic Categories," in Timothy E. Moore (ed.) *Cognitive Development and the Acquisition of Language* (New York: Academic Press, 1973), pp. 111-44; Eleanor Rosch, "Cognitive Representations of Semantic Categories," *JExpPsych* 104.3 (1975), pp. 192-233; Eleanor Rosch, "'Slow Lettuce': Categories, Concepts, Fuzzy Sets, and Logical Deduction," in Radim Belohlavek and George J. Klir (eds.), *Concepts and Fuzzy Logic* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), pp. 89-120.

"highly self-conscious" of a strict conceptual dichotomy they cannot be shown to have articulated. Prototype theory suggests the early Jewish conceptualization of the divine would have developed around a cognitive exemplar and its prototypical features, with less prototypical members of the category inhabiting the fuzzy periphery where their membership was debatable, and this is precisely what we find in the early Jewish texts.[33]

The Hebrew words for "deity/ies" (אלהים, אל, and אלים) appear repeatedly in the Hebrew Bible and in Second Temple Jewish literature in reference to subordinate deities, angels, and, in certain circumstances, even to living and dead humans, suggesting the category was internally graded and shared overlapping boundaries with other categories.[34] Regarding worship as an identity marker of divinity,[35] while the consensus in the literature is clearly that angels are not Yhwh (more on this confusion below), clearly there was disagreement about whether or not – or more accurately, to what degree[36] – they were to be worshipped, and nowhere does the consensus actually suggest a rejection of their divinity.[37] Their lack of sovereignty and the inappropriateness of their worship establish purely functional/relational subordination, not ontological distinction. We find exceptions to the rule, as well. According to the *Parables of Enoch*, the "Son of man" will sit on God's throne, exercise divine rule, and receive wor-

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33   Philo, for instance – who perhaps comes the closest to advocating for a strictly dichotomous understanding of deity – still acknowledges the Logos is neither created nor uncreated, but "between the two extremities" (Philo, *Who Is the Heir of Divine Things?* 206; cited in McGrath, *The Only True God*, p. 13).

34   Drawing from Itai Gradel's work in Greco-Roman religion (Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion* [Oxford: Clarendon, 2002]), Michael Peppard suggests a similar framework that best informs our analysis of the earliest Christian conceptualizations of the divine (Peppard, *The Son of God in the Roman World: Divine Sonship in its Social and Political Context* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], pp. 31-36).

35   Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, pp. 9-13.

36   We have several examples of prayers and other apotropaic rituals aimed at angels from around this time period. See Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995); and Shaul Shaked, J.N. Ford, and Siam Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls. Volume One* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

37   See John J. Collins, "Powers in Heaven: God, Gods, and Angels in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in John J. Collins and Robert A. Kugler (eds.), *Religion in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, mi: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 9-28; Loren T. Stuckenbruck, "'Angels' and 'God': Exploring the Limits of Early Jewish Monotheism," in Loren T. Stuckenbruck and Wendy E.S. North (eds.), *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), pp. 45-70.

ship.[38] Although Bauckham frames this figure as being "included in the divine identity," he still must qualify that inclusion as "partial" and "equivocal."[39] We should also consider the Old Greek of Dan. 7:13-14, which states that all people, nations, and languages would give cultic worship (λατρεύω) to the "one like a son of man." The assumption of a strict and firm dichotomy simply cannot hold.

The insights of CSR also better inform our reconstruction of early Jewish concepts of agency, identity, and divinity. Almost twenty years ago, Robert A. Di Vito argued from an anthropological perspective that the "person" in the Hebrew Bible "is more radically decentered, 'dividual,' and undefined with respect to personal boundaries ... [and] in sharp contrast to modernity, it is identified more closely with, and by, its social roles."[40] Personhood was divisible and permeable in the Hebrew Bible, and while there was diachronic and synchronic variation in certain details, the same is evident in the literature of Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity. This is most clear in the widespread understanding of the spirit (רוח) and the soul (נפש) – often used interchangeably – as the primary loci of a person's agency or capacity to act.[41] Both entities were usually considered primarily constitutive of a person's identity, but also distinct from their physical body and capable of existence apart from it.[42] The physical body could also be penetrated or overcome by external "spirits," and

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38   I retain the gendered christological title "Son of man" simply to avoid confusion in light of its long history in the scholarship and in translations of the Bible and other cognate literature.

39   Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, p. 16. Note that in the third chapter of the Christian book of Revelation, Jesus insists that those Christians who "conquer" will be worshipped (Rev. 3:9; Bauckham dismisses this as a mere gesture) and Jesus will give them "a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father (*sic*) on his throne" (Rev. 3:21 [NRSV]).

40   Robert A. Di Vito, "Old Testament Anthropology and the Construction of Personal Identity," *CBQ* 61.2 (1999), pp. 217-38 (237). Di Vito highlights, among other things, the independence of bodily organs as autonomous centers of activity.

41   See Roazzi, Nyhof, and Johnson, "Mind, Soul and Spirit."

42   Richard C. Steiner, *Disembodied Souls: The Nefesh in Israel and Kindred Spirits in the Ancient Near East, with an Appendix on the Katumuwa Inscription* (Atlanta; SBL, 2015); Mladen Popović, "Anthropology, Pneumatology and Demonology in Early Judaism: The Two Spirits Treatise (1QS 3:13-4:26) and Other Texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls," in Jacques T.A.G.M. van Ruiten and George H. van Kooten (eds.), *Dust of the Ground and Breath of Life (Gen 2:7) – The Problem of a Dualistic Anthropology in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 58-98.

such possession imposed the agency and capacities of the possessor.[43] The God of Israel was largely patterned after this concept of personhood,[44] and was similarly partible, with God's glory (Hebrew: כבוד; Greek: δόξα), wisdom (חכמה/σοφία), spirit (רוח/πνεῦμα), word (דבר/λόγος), presence (שכינה), and name (שם/ὄνομα) operating as autonomous and sometimes personified loci of agency that could presence the deity and also possess persons (or cultic objects[45]) and/or endow them with special status or powers.[46]

The most important of these entities for the purposes of this paper is Yhwh's name,[47] which is credited with some of God's most salient acts. For instance, *Jubilees* 36:7 and *1 Enoch* 69:14-27 attribute the creation of the heavens and the earth to the activity of the divine name. Exodus 23:20-21 represents a striking example of God's name inhabiting another entity and endowing it with a unique divine prerogative:

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43   See P.S. Alexander, "The Demonology of the Dead Sea Scrolls," in Peter W. Flint and James C. VanderKam (eds.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), vol. 2, pp. 331-53; John R. Levison, *The Spirit in First-Century Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Archie T. Wright, *The Origin of Evil Spirits: The Reception of Genesis 6.1-4 in Early Jewish Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005); John R. Levison, *Filled with the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).

44   One of the most common counter-intuitive features of deity, according to CSR, is full access to strategic information (Tremlin, *Minds and Gods*, p. 120), which is supported by the biblical texts. Isaiah 41:23a challenges the ostensible gods of the nations to prove their deity by demonstrating full access to strategic knowledge: "Tell us what is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods." The Eden pericope describes the humans as being "like the gods" after gaining knowledge of "good and evil" (Gen. 3:5, 22), a likely merism approximating the concept of full-access to strategic knowledge. Samuel, the deceased prophet, is called an אלהים in 1 Sam. 28:11-19 and is sought after for his access to strategic knowledge.

45   Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 44-57.

46   God's spirit was the primary means of possession. See, for example, 1 Sam. 10:6: "Then the spirit of Yhwh will possess you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another person." Philo insists that during prophesying, a prophet's "reason withdraws and surrenders the citadel of the soul to a new visitor and tenant, the Divine Spirit" (Philo, *The Special Laws*, 4.49 [Colson, LCL]).

47   G.H. Parke-Taylor, *Yahweh: The Divine Name in the Bible* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1975); Michael Hundley, "To Be or Not to Be: A Reexamination of Name Language in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History," *VT* 59.4 (2009), pp. 533-55. Many of the other entities would later be identified with the name, as well. See Jarl E. Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1985); Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents & Early Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 70-123.

> Look, I am sending a messenger before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I prepared. Pay attention to him and listen to his voice. Do not rebel against him, because he will not pardon your transgression,[48] for my name is in him (בקרבו).

This text suggests the messenger not only bears the name of Yhwh, but exercises divine prerogatives by virtue of bearing that name. This endowment likely sought to make sense of the occasional confusion in early biblical narrative of God's identity with that of the angel (e.g., Gen. 21:17-19; Exod. 3:2-6; Judg. 6:11-23),[49] but it would become central to early Judaism and early Christianity's understanding of theophany and divine mediation.[50] The messenger Yahoel (יהוה + אל) from the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, for instance, is described as "the namesake of the mediation of God's ineffable name," which has reference to Exod. 23:21.[51] In the thirteenth chapter of *3 Enoch* (a segment likely composed between the second and fifth centuries CE), the angel Metatron is endowed with "the letters by which heaven and earth were created." In the previous chapter, the angel is called "the lesser Yhwh" (יהוה הקטן), and Exod. 23:21 is quoted. Significantly, the angels then fall prostrate before Metatron, suggesting the possession of the vehicle for God's agency was understood to facilitate worship even within late antique Judaism.[52]

This concept of communicable agency and its facilitation of worship is found in multiple ancient Near Eastern cultures. In Mesopotamia and Egypt, the endowment of the cult statue with the deity's agency rendered it a recipient of

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48 The exact same Hebrew phrase is used to describe Yhwh's prerogative to not forgive sins in Josh. 24:19. Exodus 23:21 represents one of the only known examples of an entity apart from God having the prerogative to (not) forgive sins (Daniel Johansson, "'Who Can Forgive Sins but God Alone?' Human and Angelic Agents, and Divine Forgiveness in Early Judaism," *JSNT* 33.4 [2011], pp. 351-74).

49 That confusion was originally the product of textual interpolation. See Dorothy Irvin, *Mytharion: The Comparison of Tales from the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East* (Kevelaer : Butzon und Bercker, 1978), pp. 91-104; Samuel A. Meier, "Angel of Yahweh מלאך יהוה," in Karel Van Der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. Van Der Horst (eds.), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 53-59.

50 *1 Enoch* 48:2-10; Philo, *Conf.* 146; Rom. 10:12; Gos. Phil. 11; Odes Sol. 39:7-8; see also Hekhalot Zutarti 342, 348, 367; Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, pp. 95-112; Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, pp. 71-78.

51 Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, p. 318; Charles A. Gieschen, "The Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology," *VC* 57.2 (2003), pp. 115-58 (126); Andrei A. Orlov, "Praxis of the Voice: The Divine Name Traditions in the Apocalypse of Abraham," *JBL* 127.1 (2008), pp. 53-70.

52 This tradition is also referenced in Sanh. 38b, which suggests it predates the fifth century.

worship in its own right.[53] For this reason, we have offering lists that prescribe offerings for Šamaš-the-cult-statue and then for Šamaš.[54] Elsewhere prayers, worship, and offerings were given to various cult objects endowed by appropriate rituals with divine agency.[55] In many cases, the king's function as the earthly agent for deity is what facilitated his worship or his conceptualization as divine.[56] In ancient Israel, we see worship offered "to Yhwh and to his (*sic*) *asherah*" at Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qôm.[57] The *asherah* there is most likely the goddess's cult statue, appropriated by Yhwh and now functioning as an agent through whom blessings may be sought.[58] Even in the Bible, worship appears to be offered to the ark of the covenant,[59] to the "Son of man" in Daniel 7 (see above), to the king (who is worshipped alongside Yhwh in 1 Chronicles 29 and is elsewhere called "god"[60]), and to other humans, like the Philadelphians of Revelation 3 who will have God's name written upon them.[61] Some

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53 Karen Sonik, "Divine (Re-)Presentation: Authoritative Images and a Pictorial Stream of Tradition in Mesopotamia," in Beate Pongratz-Leisten and Karen Sonik (eds.), *The Materiality of Divine Agency* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), pp. 142-93; Catherine L. McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden: The Creation of Humankind in Genesis 2:5-3:24 in Light of* mīs pî pīt pî *and* wpt-r *Rituals of Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015).

54 Spencer L. Allen, *The Splintered Divine: A Study of Ištar, Baal, and Yahweh Divine Names and Divine Multiplicity in the Ancient Near East* (SANER 5; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), pp. 38-39 and n. 88.

55 Jeffrey Tigay, "A Second Temple Parallel to the Blessing from Kuntillet 'Ajrud," *IEJ* 40 (1986), pp. 11; Barbara Nevling Porter, "Blessings from a Crown, Offerings to a Drum: Were There Non-Anthropomorphic Deities in Ancient Mesopotamia?" in Barbara Nevling Porter (ed.), *What is a God? Anthropomorphic and Non-Anthropomorphic Aspects of Deity in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns; 2009), pp. 153-94.

56 See Ezekiel the Tragedian's *Exagōgē* 79-80; Irene J. Winter, "'Idols of the King': Royal Images as Recipients of Ritual Action in Ancient Mesopotamia," *JRS* 6.1 (1992): pp. 13-42.

57 The texts both have לאשרתה, which is thought by most to reflect the name "Asherah" with the third masculine singular possessive suffix. See the references in n. 58 below for discussion.

58 André Lemaire, "Les inscriptions de Khirbet El-Qom et l'Ashérah de Yhwh," *RB* 84 (1977), pp. 597-608; Judith Hadley, "Some Drawings and Inscriptions on Two Pithoi from Kuntillet 'Ajrud," *VT* 37.2 (1987), 180-213 (185-86).

59 David H. Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities: Metaphor, Semantics and Divine Imagery* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 170-79.

60 For example, Ps. 45:6-7.

61 Bauckham dismisses this as a mere gesture (*Jesus and the God of Israel*, p. 131).

scholars even understand the creation account in Gen. 2:5-3:24 to identify humanity as the "divine image," endowed with God's own agency.[62]

Regarding the conceptualization of Christ, the centrality of the possession of God's name to Christ's divinity is reflected in Phil. 2:9: "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed upon him the name that is above every name, in order that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow." The bowing of every knee appears contingent upon the bestowal of the divine name, which would make him the possessor of the primary vehicle of God's agency, rendering him God's authorized agent and, at least in this case, worthy of worship. The New Testament's frequent allusion to Exod. 3:14 (LXX) with the Greek ἐγώ εἰμι also suggests the possession of, or association with, the divine name. There is no need to posit some kind of overlap in identities if God's name and presence are communicable.

Conclusion

The insights of CSR reveal significant methodological problems with the frameworks that undergird the current consensus regarding the form and function of early christology. The presumptions of binary thinking, of a modern notion of identity, and of modern theological perspectives about monotheism and the relationship of deity to the rest of reality on the part of early Jewish people are highly problematic retrojections of contemporary philosophical models – reflective orthodoxies – into ancient worldviews. The future of this field will be dependent on overcoming these problems, and the cognitive sciences provide a much better framework for reconstructing the more salient early Jewish conceptualizations of agency, identity, and divinity. As this very brief analysis has shown, the biblical and early Jewish and Christian texts witness to an understanding of the God of Israel that is not far removed from our cognitive intuitions about supernatural agents and agency.

One of the more significant insights of this cognitive perspective is the communicability of agency; an entity's capacity to effect change is often associated with their mind, is not restricted to their physical body, and can be transferred to other bodies and/or operate independently. The intuitive nature of this framework renders unnecessary the endless philosophical speculations about hypostases, avatars, emanations, and other extensions of God's identity. Such

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62   Stephen L. Herring, *Divine Substitution: Humanity as the Manifestation of Deity in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013); McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden*.

concepts were alien to the worldview of early Jewish people for whom the agency principle would have been both culturally and cognitively natural. The episode in Exod. 23:21 sets an important precedent regarding communicable divine agency that can be shown to have informed and facilitated the later development of a complex tradition within early Judaism regarding endowment with the divine name and the resulting presencing of the deity and exercising of divine prerogatives. Several different figures identified with the messenger of Exod. 23:21 (Michael, Yahoel, Metatron, Israel/Jacob, the word, Moses)[63] were linked with the creation of the earth and other divine privileges.

The New Testament and other early Christian texts repeatedly appeal to Christ's possession of the divine name and to traditions associated with it (e.g., Exod. 23:21 and the "Son of man" tradition) as foundational to his authority and mission.[64] Because Christ was represented as the authorized possessor of the divine name, no concept of shared "divine identity" is necessary to account for Christ's implied or explicit associations with the name Yhwh or with divine prerogatives. This is not to argue that Christ was originally an angel, but simply that the relationship of the patron deity to the agent via the indwelling of the name became a foundational interpretive lens that converged within the Christ tradition with a number of other lenses related to divine sonship, presencing, and mediation. As certain philosophical frameworks became more and more salient within Christianity in the second century CE, a reflective and authoritative accounting of Christ's relationship to God was required, which began the philosophical trajectory toward the expression of God's consubstantiality with Jesus in the early fourth century CE. Until that concept of consubstantiality could be articulated, however, it could not be communicated or shared, and therefore cannot have had circulation, much less salience, within the early Christian community. Until the second century CE, it was the intuitive understanding of Christ's possession of the divine name, the vehicle of God's agency, that fundamentally rendered him one with God.

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63   Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, p. 77.

64   John 1:12; 5:43; 12:28; 17:6; Acts 4:12; Heb. 1:3-4; Phil. 2:6-11; Rev. 3:12; 19:12-13; 1 Clem. 45:7; Herm. Vis. 4.2.4; Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 1.7; Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 75. See also Michael D. Harris, "Christological Name Theology in Three Second Century Communities" (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 2013).