

Sacrifice, Monotheism and Christology

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Dedication

I dedicate this article to my friend and colleague, Dr. F. Alan Tomlinson, in honor of his faithful and fruitful service at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary since 1995.

Introduction

In recent years a few scholars have proposed that the worship element reserved for YHWH in Second Temple Judaism was sacrifice alone, to the exclusion of other cultic activities.¹ One Christological implication of such a view is that, since the NT never portrays Jesus as a recipient of sacrifice,² one cannot say that the NT describes Jesus as divine in the same sense as the God of Israel and that NT Christology reflects a notable development or difference from the Judaism of its time. Lionel North was the first to espouse this approach, which was then echoed by James McGrath and James Dunn.³ In the following, I will summarize the position of North and evaluate it. While my interaction with North will

¹ J. Lionel North, "Jesus and Worship, God and Sacrifice," in L. Stuckenbruck and W. North, eds., *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism* (JSNTS 263; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 186-202. North's view is shared by J. McGrath, *The Only True God* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), chapter 2, and by J. Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?* (London: SPCK, 2010), 52-56.

² This specific point made by North ("Jesus and Worship," 198-200), however, has to be qualified in light of Rev 14:4 and 20:6. See my discussion of these two verses below.

³ See n. 1 above. McGrath, *John's Apologetic Christology* (SNTSMS 111; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 24-25, distinguishes "worship" in a general sense from sacrifice. However, he does not develop the discussion further.

mainly appear in the evaluation section, some brief comments will be incorporated into the summary section as well.

Summary of Lionel North's View

In his contribution to *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism* (2004), Lionel North argues that only sacrifice, and not other worship activities, was reserved for the God of Israel in early Judaism, that sacrifice was never offered to Jesus according to the NT, and thus that the worship offered to Jesus in the NT does not establish his divinity.⁴

North's essay consists of six sections. Following the first section (pp. 186-87), which functions as an introduction to his essay, the second section examines the occurrence of proskynesis (worship/prostration/obedience) in the NT (pp. 187-89). North notes passages like Matt 18:26 and Rev 3:9, where the posture of proskynesis serves to show homage to human beings.⁵ North also looks at NT passages where proskynesis is offered to Jesus (Matt 2:2, 8, 11; 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; 28:9, 17; Mark 5:6; 15:19; Luke 24:52; John 9:38; Heb 1:6) and claims that in all these passages the prostration before Jesus expresses "the profoundest respect and ... no more."⁶ Without demonstrating much exegetical effort in dealing with these NT passages—to my surprise—North quickly determines that there is no evidence in the NT that "requires us to conclude that Jesus is regarded as divine because he is worshipped."⁷

⁴ North, "Jesus and Worship," 186-202. North's essay is in a way a response to L. W. Hurtado. On page 202, n.32, North notes, "In *One God, One Lord* ... L. W. Hurtado provides an excellent introduction and contribution to the debate [on the worship of Jesus], but does not a full-blown 'binitarianism' stumble at the fence of *sacrifice only to God?*"

⁵ North, "Jesus and Worship," 188.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 188-189.

⁷ North, "Jesus and Worship," p. 189. North uses only a single paragraph in discussing the listed NT passages (188-189). In that paragraph, there is only one footnote (189, n. 7), which refers to North's later discussion concerning the Iconoclast Controversy in the Eastern Church (194-195). As a result, North's treatment of the pertinent NT texts appears to be almost a list of his projected conclusions without any substantial argument or interpretive work. North fails to note, for instance, that (1) the disciples' act of proskynesis before Jesus in

Here, North appears to throw the baby out with the bath water. The fact that the προσκυν- word group was used broadly and, at times, in the context of offering homage to human beings (e.g., Matt 18:26 and Rev 3:9, both of which North himself notes) does not necessitate that the various acts of bowing down before Jesus in the NT fall collectively short of a response to divinity. Without making further efforts to discern when the acts of proskynesis before Jesus have significance for his divinity and when not, North appears to give a blanket judgment, thus dismissing entirely the value of proskynesis offered to Jesus in discussing the divinity of Jesus. In view of the fact that interpretation of NT data is foundational for North's conclusion, it is astonishing that this section does not reflect much exegetical rigor in dealing with pertinent NT passages.

In section 3 (189-193) and section 4 (193-195), North discusses Rabbinic texts and the Iconoclast Controversy in the 8th – 9th centuries, respectively. These two sections include interesting discussions. Nevertheless, both sections lack direct temporal relevance to the discussion of early Christian worship of Jesus in the first-century setting and will thus not receive much attention in the following. North, however, turns briefly to some pertinent data in the LXX toward the end of section 3, noting that “the semantic spectrum of προσκυν- [in the LXX] is broad.”⁸ Toward the end of section 4, North summarizes these two sections, commenting that the act of proskynesis “suggests a variety of physical postures adopted for any one of several reasons and directed to any number of possible recipients. It connotes homage, respect,

Matt 14:33 is given as a response to Jesus' unique authority to calm the waters of the sea, i.e., the authority seen as a divine prerogative in the OT and Second Temple Judaism (see Job 26:12; Ps 65:7; 89:9-10; 107:29; Jonah 1:15; Sirach 43:23); (2) the demoniac's bowing before Jesus in Mark 5:6 is linked with the interchange between “the Lord” (referring to Israel's God in this context) and “Jesus” in the concluding verses of the same pericope (vv. 19-20); [and] (3) the angels' prostration before the “Firstborn” in Heb 1:6 is in connection to v. 3, which describes him as “the exact representation of [God's] nature” and to v. 8, which appropriates the “God” language of Ps 45:6 to Jesus. The common error North commits in these three examples is that he does not seriously consider the immediate literary context in which the action of proskynesis occurs.

⁸ Ibid., 193.

honour, reverence. It can be offered to God or human beings or even the inanimate.”⁹

The fifth and penultimate section (196-198) finally introduces the issue of “sacrifice,” the core topic of North’s essay. By overviewing some select OT, Philonic, NT and early Christian passages, North proposes that “sacrifice is appropriate only to God”¹⁰ and that “the most significant part of one’s approach to God was sacrifice.”¹¹ North notes particularly from 2 Kgs 5:15-19 that while Naaman declares he will not sacrifice to any gods but YHWH (v. 17), he still appears to seek YHWH’s understanding concerning his bowing before a pagan deity, namely, his prostration in the temple of Rimmon for assisting the Syrian king (v. 18). North notes that Elisha responds to Naaman, “Go in peace” (v. 19), thus implying YHWH’s approval for Naaman’s action of proskynesis toward a pagan god.¹² North claims, “The difference between ‘worship’ [by which he seems to mean proskynesis, in particular] and sacrifice could hardly be more clearly made.”¹³

A few things need to be mentioned briefly regarding North’s reading of 2 Kgs 5:15-19, which plays a substantial role in his case: (1) Naaman appears to do the act of proskynesis in the temple of Rimmon in order to achieve his required civil and professional role as an adjunct of the Syrian king, especially in the context of assisting his aged king (v. 18). That is, the act of bowing down in this case does not signify a meaningful religious devotion. Relatedly, the reason why the distinction between proskynesis and sacrifice is made very clearly in this particular passage is that Naaman’s act of prostration does not essentially contain a cultic connotation, not that these two actions have two easily distinguishable referents. (2) The fact that Naaman sought YHWH’s understanding about his bowing in the temple of a pagan deity implies that proskynesis itself needs to be taken more seriously than what North suggests. Prostration itself, at least in some contexts, could signify the divinity of the recipient of such action. That is probably the reason why Naaman appears to clarify that his proskynesis is something to be understood in a civil and professional context. (3) Elisha’s response to

⁹ Ibid., 195.

¹⁰ Ibid., 197.

¹¹ Ibid., 198.

¹² Ibid., 197.

¹³ Ibid.

Naaman's request does not necessarily mean a full endorsement of this Syrian's prostration in a pagan temple. It is possible to read Elisha's "Go in peace" as an expression of the prophet's approval. However, it seems equally possible to view it as a verbal irony or as an indication of Elisha's indifference.¹⁴ In any case, the prophet's response to Naaman's request seems to be too brief to establish a firm position about this matter.¹⁵ When these three points are considered collectively, it is doubtful whether one can put forward a case for a clear distinction between worship (proskynesis) and sacrifice from this passage.

As North himself states, the overall thrust of Sections 1-5 (186-198) is to argue that "there is evidence in the religious environment of the New Testament that προσκύνησις of the deity is only complete when it includes or is followed by sacrifice to the deity."¹⁶ In that sense, the first five sections of this essay prepare the sixth and culminating section (198-202), where North argues that "sacrifice in any sense is never said in the New Testament and the first centuries to be offered to Christ"¹⁷ and, therefore, "we cannot infer that the references to the 'worship' of Christ imply that he was thought to be divine."¹⁸ North specifies that according to the NT, there is no mention of sacrifice literally offered to Christ. He then goes on to note that whereas there are references to (metaphoric) sacrifices dedicated to God in a number of NT passages (Rom 12:1; Phil 2:17; 4:18; Hebrews 13:15-16; 1 Peter 2:5), there is no NT occasion where such a sacrifice is offered to Christ. The sacrifice in the NT "is offered through Christ, not to Christ."¹⁹ Christ "is the one *through* whom the believer comes to God and shares God's life, not God himself."²⁰ North

¹⁴ For different interpretations of 2 Kgs 5:18-19, see Stuart Lasine, "'Go in peace' or 'Go to Hell'? Elisha, Naaman and the Meaning of Monotheism in 2 Kings 5," *SJOT* 25:1 (2011), 3-28 (esp. 5-6).

¹⁵ Lasine, "'Go in peace' or 'Go to Hell?'," suggests, rightly in my view: "The way in which the narrator has told the story of Naaman and Elisha does not force readers to accept one of these possible interpretations of Elisha's reply [in v. 19]" (24).

¹⁶ North, "Jesus and Worship," 198.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 198-199

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 199.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 200.

²⁰ *Ibid.* (emphasis original). North also attempts to draw a quasi-parallel "between the veneration of Jesus but unaccompanied by sacrifice to him in

here seems to impose a dichotomist scheme, assuming that if Jesus is a mediator/agent, he cannot be fully divine himself.²¹

I have so far summarized North's position while adding some brief comments where relevant. Now I turn to the main interaction with North's approach.

Evaluation of Lionel North's View

North appears to advance the conversation on the nature of Jewish monotheism of the Second Temple era—especially in relation to the Christology of the NT—by looking at the exclusive stance that first-century Jews held concerning the recipient of sacrifice. North is correct in that sacrifice is a key worship element in first-century Judaism and that Jewish reservation of sacrifice for YHWH reflects their commitment to the uniqueness of their God. However, North's approach to early Jewish monotheism and to NT Christology appears to be problematic in the following ways.

Firstly, the Shema passage of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 itself—which first-century Jews regarded as a key representation of their monotheistic devotion to the unique God of Israel as illustrated by the Nash Papyrus²² and Qumran Tefillin and Mezuzot²³—appears to locate the recitation of the Shema in a familial environment and not in a sacrificial setting. If so,

earliest Christianity ... and the veneration of Augustus but no sacrifices to him in contemporary Judaism" (200). Nevertheless, as North himself clearly admits, "There are too many differences for the similarity to be called a parallel" (200).

²¹ For the concurrence of these two notions (i.e., Jesus himself as divine and Jesus as God's ultimate agent) in the NT, see, e.g., John 14:7-9 (Jesus' divine identity emphasized) in conjunction with v. 6 (Jesus' unique agency highlighted). It is noteworthy that these two parts are juxtaposed and thus immediately linked with each other in the fourteenth chapter of John's Gospel. For further discussion of Jesus' unique divine agency, see L. W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), chap. 5 and sources cited there.

²² The so-called Nash Papyrus (probably from 2c BC) integrates the two core confessions of the uniqueness of Israel's God—the Decalogue and the Shema—perhaps for instructional and/or liturgical purposes.

²³ The Qumran *tefillin* ("phylacteries") and *mezuzot* contain passages from Exodus and Deuteronomy (not least Deut 6:4-9), reflecting a literal rendering of the practice prescribed in Deut 6:8-9 and indicating a prominent place given to the affirmation of singularity of Israel's God in late Second Temple Judaism.

North's approach that focuses exclusively on sacrifice appears to be unnecessarily minimalistic. Moreover, the Shema of Deut 6:4-5 itself requires a holistic commitment and totalistic loyalty to the God of Israel²⁴ and not simply the cultic matters nor sacrifice.²⁵ Bauckham puts this understanding aptly in a negative form, "More than idolatry or sacrificial worship of other gods is excluded by the *Shema*."²⁶

Secondly, it is dubious whether one can employ sacrifice as *the* determining factor in deciding whether or not Jesus was worshipped as divine in the NT. According to the NT, earliest believers in Jesus offered animal sacrifice neither to Jesus nor to God; at least, there is no notable NT evidence for such an activity.²⁷ The fact that earliest believers in Jesus did not offer animal sacrifice to Israel's God, however, does not by necessity entail that they did not embrace the divinity of the biblical God.²⁸

It is true, as North mentions in the last section of his essay,²⁹ that God is frequently portrayed as the recipient of metaphoric or spiritualized sacrifice in the NT (Rom 12:1; Phil 2:17; 4:18; Heb 13:15-16; 1 Pet 2:5)—while there is no NT evidence that animal sacrifice was dedicated to God by earliest followers of Jesus. However, such metaphoric sacrifice is offered not only to God, but also to Jesus in the

²⁴ For related Second Temple Jewish texts, see the passages discussed in Erik Waaler, *The Shema and the First Commandment in First Corinthians* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 181-194 (especially 181-188).

²⁵ Richard Bauckham, "Devotion to Jesus Christ in Earliest Christianity: An Appraisal and Discussion of the Work of Larry Hurtado," in Chris Keith and Dieter T. Roth, eds., *Mark, Manuscript, and Monotheism: Essays in Honor of Larry W. Hurtado* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 191-192.

²⁶ Bauckham, "Devotion to Jesus Christ," 191.

²⁷ Rather, NT passages like Mark 2:1-10 and Luke 7:47-49 address the forgiveness of sins *without* any reference to the temple cultus. The temple cleansing by Jesus (Mark 11:15-19) may also suggest the invalidity of the temple cultus.

²⁸ L. W. Hurtado, "Early Christian Monotheism," *ExpT* 122:8 (2011), 383-386 (esp. 385). Here, Hurtado responds critically to McGrath, *The Only True God*, who argues that sacrifice was *the* criterion for the test of divinity in Second Temple Judaism.

²⁹ See especially North, "Jesus and Worship," 198-200.

NT. Revelation 14:4 and 20:6, in particular, show that Christ is a co-recipient (along with God) of spiritualized offering/sacrificial acts.³⁰

These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These *are* the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as *first fruits*³¹ to God and to the Lamb (*ἀπαρχὴ τῶ θεῷ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ*³²). (Rev 14:4)³³ (emphasis added)

Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be *priests of God and of Christ* (*ἱερεῖς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ*) and will reign with Him for a thousand years. (Rev 20:6) (emphasis added)

Both of the above passages describe the Lamb/Christ as a co-recipient of metaphoric offering/sacrifice (along with God). It is not only God but also Jesus who receives spiritualized offering and sacrificial acts according to these verses.

Moreover, since the NT portrays God not only as receiving sacrifice (e.g., Rom 12:1; Phil 2:17; 4:18; Hebrews 13:15-16; 1 Peter 2:5) but also as offering Jesus as the ultimate sacrifice (e.g., Rom 3:25; 5:8; cf. John 3:16), the dichotomy between the agent and recipient of sacrificial acts does not seem to be essentially helpful.³⁴ The overlap of these two roles (i.e., agent and recipient) is seen from Christ as well, not least in

³⁰ McGrath, *The Only True God*, 73-74, notes these two references but underestimates their significance.

³¹ Concerning the offering of the first fruits to YHWH in the OT, see Exod 23:19; 34:26; Lev 23:9-14; Num 28:26; Neh 10:35. For a metaphoric use, see Jer 2:3a, which portrays Israel as the first fruits of YHWH's harvest. When one reads Rev 14:4 against the background of these OT passages, it is clear that the Lamb is included in the unique place that belongs to Israel's God.

³² Greek texts in this essay are taken from *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Nestle-Aland 27th Edition.

³³ Scriptural quotations in this essay are taken from *New American Standard Bible* (1995).

³⁴ See Dunn, "Did the First Christians," 56. Overall, Dunn supports North's position, with which I am interacting in this essay. Dunn, however, appears to be a bit more cautious than North in light of his comments here.

Rev 14:4 (see above), which describes Christ as “the Lamb” (cf. Exod 12:23; 29:38; Lev 3:7-9; 5:6)³⁵ and yet portrays that Lamb as a co-recipient of the offering of first fruits.

Thirdly, and closely related to the second point above, one has to question why North pays exclusive attention to a specific type of worship (i.e., sacrifice) in considering early Jewish monotheism while neglecting other cultic activities. Although an exclusivist stance on the recipient of sacrifice is an important aspect of Second Temple Judaism, other cultic activities also express meaningful monotheistic devotion to Israel’s God during this period. Scruples on prayers and hymns to be offered to Israel’s God alone and the so-called “refusal” traditions, for instance, are significant cultic indicators for the exclusivist nature of Second Temple Jewish monotheism.

Wicks examines prayer in non-canonical Second Temple literature and shows that prayer either by human or angelic beings is directed to the God of Israel—although angels can serve by bearing prayers and interceding for men.³⁶ While the legitimacy of the government of the Jerusalem temple (i.e., the sacrificial center) was questioned by Qumran communities, they still held firm monotheistic worship scruples as seen from the fact that they prayed and hymned to the God of Israel alone. For instance, while *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* (4Q405 Frags. xxi-xxii, 7-14) portrays a scene of heavenly worship, there is no hint at worshipping angels there; angelic figures appear not as the recipients of worship (alongside God) but as worshippers. In this sense it is Christologically significant that the NT contains a number of passages where hymns are offered to Christ (Eph 5:19; Rev 5:8-10, vv. 13-14; 7:9-12) and other passages where prayers are directed to Christ (Acts 7:59-60; 2 Cor 12:8-10; 1 Thess 3:11-13; cf. various Pauline greetings and benedictions containing the name of Christ [e.g., Rom 1:7; 16:20b]).³⁷

³⁵ See also Rev 5:6 (“Lamb ... as if slain”); 5:12 (“the Lamb that was slain”); 7:14 (“the blood of the Lamb”); 12:11 (“the blood of the Lamb”); 13:8 (“the Lamb who has been slain”).

³⁶ H. J. Wicks, *The Doctrine of God in the Jewish Apocryphal and Apocalyptic Literature* (London: Hunter & Longhurst, 1915), 122-129; Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 26-27.

³⁷ Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 101-108. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 100-114, also views “use of the name of Christ,” “the Lord’s Supper,” “confession of faith

Besides, one needs to pay attention to the so-called refusal motif. In refusal traditions (see, e.g., *Apoc. Zeph.* 6.15; *Tob* 12.16-22; *3 En.* 16.1-5; *Ascen. Isa.* 7.18-23; 8.1-10), often a human being who receives a revelation mistakes an angelic figure for God and then begins to worship him, but the angel prohibits the wrongly directed worship as such.³⁸ The prohibitions of worshipping angels in these wide-spread traditions imply Jewish cultic exclusivism. The refusal motif is, in fact, found also in the NT. In *Rev* 19:10 and 22:8-9, in particular, an angelic figure rejects John's proskynesis and directs him to "worship God" (19:10; 22:9).³⁹

North is correct that the posture of proskynesis is used in the context of simply paying homage in non-cultic settings (*Matt* 18:26; *Rev* 3:9; *Gen* 37:9-10 LXX; *Esth* 3:2 LXX). In light of such instances, one needs to be reminded that the meaning of a word (not least the προσκυν- word group) should be determined within its given contexts. Nevertheless, such non-cultic uses of the proskynesis language do not dismiss the weight of the refusal passages like *Rev* 19:10 and 22:8-9, which indicate that there are other worship actions restricted for the God of Israel than sacrifice, and, at least in some contexts, that is the case. Just as it is excessive to say that all proskynesis posture signifies the divinity of the recipient(s) of that prostration act, it is equally excessive to suggest that unless accompanied by a sacrifice, no proskynesis occasion in the NT implies the divinity of the recipient/co-recipient of that action (i.e.,

in Jesus," and "prophetic pronouncements of the risen Christ" as remarkable devotional practices among earliest Christians (100).

³⁸ See L. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 75-102, for the discussion of refusal motif; cf. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 28-35.

³⁹ Somewhat similarly, Peter the Apostle refuses the same action of prostration in *Acts* 10:25-26, saying "I too am just a man" (v. 26). Here, Peter's rejection of proskynesis is not an example of refusal traditions. It is unnecessary to think Cornelius mistakenly regarded Peter to be divine in this scene. Rather, the apostle's refusal reflects his/Luke's intention to distance early Christian devotion from its contemporary pagan practices of bowing before gods and rulers, an action signifying divine honors dedicated to the recipients in that context. For further discussion of this passage, see C. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), II: 1780-1782 and sources cited there.

Jesus).⁴⁰ In fact, the Lamb is portrayed as a legitimate recipient of proskynesis offered in a corporate cultic scene in the fifth chapter of Revelation (see especially 5:8-14), the book where prostration before an angel was repeatedly prohibited in line with the refusal traditions (Rev 19:10, 22:8-9) and the worship of the beast and dragon are continuously forbidden (13:4-18; 14:9-12; 19:20-21).⁴¹

Further, in Add Esth 13:14, Mordecai refuses to prostrate before Haman and confesses that he will not offer the act of proskynesis to anyone except Israel's God. It is entirely unnecessary here to assume that Mordecai had been pressured to give a sacrifice to Haman! Similarly, Dan 3:1-18 implies the act of bowing in a worship setting could connote the recipient's divinity. There is no indication that sacrifice was involved or expected in this Danielic passage.

In fact, the two Philonic texts that North himself directly quotes seem to contain a similar force. These passages juxtapose other worship activities (such as prostration and prayer) with sacrifice, signifying not only sacrifice but also proskynesis/prayer as something to be reserved only for the God of Israel.

Philo makes God say to Moses, "The people have run after lawlessness. They have fashioned a god, the work of their hands, in the form of a bull, and to this god, who is no god, they offer *worship* (*προσκυνοῦσι*) and *sacrifice*, and have forgotten all the influences to piety they have seen and heard" (*Vit. Mos.* 2.165). And again, though now seasoned with the salt of sarcasm and based on personal observation in Alexandria and Egypt, "We have known some of the image-makers offer *prayers and sacrifices* to their own creations though they would have done much better to worship (*προσκυνεῖν*) each of their two hands, or if they were disinclined for that because they shrank from appearing egotistical, to pay their homage to the hammers and anvils and

⁴⁰ Regarding the two verses in Revelation that portray Jesus as a co-recipient (along with God) of offering/sacrificial acts (14:4 and 20:6), see my discussion above.

⁴¹ Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 101-104.

pencils and pincers and the other tools by which their materials were shaped!” (Decal. 72: cf. 76-80).⁴²

These texts do not separate worship (prostration)/prayer from sacrifice but rather link them with each other. What is additionally noteworthy is that in Decal. 72, in particular, προσκυεῖν is interchangeable with prayers and sacrifices as the author mentions “prayers and sacrifices” first and then rewords them with worship (προσκυεῖν). Προσκυεῖν is not separate from sacrifices. Rather, those two terms overlap with each other in a meaningful way in this particular passage.

Overall, while sacrifice is a significant expression of exclusive commitment to Israel’s God in Second Temple Judaism, there are clearly *other* important worship elements that could contain the equivalent monotheistic (and consequently Christological) significance; however, North neglects them regretfully.

Fourthly and lastly, North overlooks monotheistic rhetoric in considering the nature of Second Temple Jewish monotheism. North’s essay concludes with the statement, “If divine Jesus be, we look elsewhere [i.e., other than the worship of Jesus in the NT]” (202). However, to North, that “elsewhere” is clearly not the Christological appropriation of Jewish monotheistic rhetoric in the NT. Rather, in light of his final footnote, North seems to suggest cautiously to look at Jesus’ exceptional moral model and his altruistic self-sacrifice as a potential cause for his divinization: “Was the acknowledgement of the special status of Jesus inspired by Jesus’ reversal of the traditional understanding of privilege and sacrifice, perceived no more in *others* sacrificing to you but in *your* sacrificing yourself to God for others?”⁴³

While various worship activities noted above deserve special attention, monotheistic rhetoric employed often in linkage to the portrayal of Israel’s God as the sole creator and ruler of the universe also appears to be a vital part of Second Temple Jewish monotheism.⁴⁴ In fact,

⁴² North, “Jesus and Worship,” 197. Emphasis added.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, n.33. Emphasis original. Cf. 202, n.32, where North hints at his doubt about the “binitarian” devotional pattern advocated in Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, chap. 5.

⁴⁴ Cf. R. Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 5-17.

a Jewish exclusivist stance on worship matters—including sacrifice and other cultic activities discussed above—reveals the very authenticity of their monotheistic rhetoric.⁴⁵ Cultic scruples of Second Temple Jews were a faithful reflection and a reliable indicator of their monotheistic affirmations.⁴⁶

It needs to be noted that “monotheistic” rhetoric (e.g., the “one/only God” language) is also found in pagan contexts of the Greco-Roman era and not merely in their Jewish counterparts.⁴⁷ Monotheistic-sounding language itself, therefore, does not guarantee actual monotheistic worship practices. Most of the pagan uses of the “one/only God” language were compatible with the cultic veneration of plural deities. However, Second Temple Jews were exclusivistic in their worship commitments as discussed above, and such cultic practices of Second Temple Judaism proves that early Jewish monotheistic-sounding rhetoric indeed contains a genuine monotheistic thrust—unlike its

⁴⁵ Although there are a few texts that seem to apply divine or quasi divine rhetoric to a figure other than Israel’s God among Second Temple Jewish literature (see, e.g., an unusual description of Michael in 1QS 3:13–4:8), one must ask how representative those examples are for Jewish religiosity of that time. For the treatment of the above Qumran text, see Bauckham, “Devotion to Jesus Christ,” 190. Bauckham suggests that the unique role of Michael as the “plenipotentiary” in this particular passage can be explained in the context of cosmic battle between the good vs. evil forces, in which Michael’s military role for the good forces is naturally highlighted (190).

⁴⁶ For monotheistic affirmations in Second Temple Judaism, see, e.g., Waaler, *The Shema*, chap. 4. Of course, the religious commitment of Second Temple Jews to the biblical God must have varied. Some activities were not in line with monotheistic-monolatrous commitment. The syncretistic cultic practices at Elephantine (in Egypt), for example, illustrate an exception to Jewish worship scruples. The case of Elephantine, however, is temporally a bit too distant (early, i.e., fifth century BC) from the first century settings. More importantly, it is difficult to say that the syncretism at Elephantine represents the overall characteristics of Second Temple Jewish religiosity. See Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 144 n83, and literature cited there.

⁴⁷ See Waaler, *The Shema*, 9–14, where he discusses E. Peterson, *EIS QEOS* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926).

pagan “parallels.”⁴⁸ Jewish monotheistic worship practices validate the authenticity of their monotheistic affirmations.

Philo, for example, appears to make a clear, inseparable connection between monotheistic rhetoric (especially the emphasis on the uniqueness of Israel’s God as the sole creator) and monotheistic worship in Decalogue 64-65.

64 *Let us, therefore, reject all such impious dishonesty, and not worship those who are our brothers by nature, even though they may have received a purer and more immortal essence than ourselves (for all created things are brothers to one another, inasmuch as they are created; since the Father of them all is one, the Creator of the universe); but let us rather, with our mind and reason, and with all our strength, gird ourselves up vigorously and energetically to the service of that Being who is uncreated and everlasting, and the maker of the universe, never shrinking or turning aside from it, nor yielding to a desire of pleasing the multitude, by which even those who might be saved are often destroyed.*

65 *Let us, therefore, fix deeply in ourselves this first commandment as the most sacred of all commandments, to think that there is but one God, the most highest, and to honor him alone; and let not the polytheistical doctrine ever even touch the ears of any man who is accustomed to seek for the truth, with purity and sincerity of heart.*⁴⁹ (emphasis added)

⁴⁸ One also needs to remember that pagans thought Jews to be distinctive pertaining to their exclusive devotion to YHWH (Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.3-5) and sometimes regarded Jews to be “atheistic” (Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 432 and the footnote there). Earliest Christians appear to have inherited the cultic scruples of Second Temple Judaism—although they attributed a unique place to Christ and in that sense differed from their contemporary Jews. See, e.g., 1 Cor 10:14-22, where Paul urges his gentile converts not to participate in pagan cultic activities (cf. Mark 12:32). See also Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.*, chap. 6.

⁴⁹ Taken from C. D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo Judaeus, the Contemporary of Josephus* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854-1855).

It is clear that, in the above passage, rejection of idolatry is connected inseparably to the notion that there is only one Creator, and the affirmation “there is but one God” is linked organically to the act of “honor[ing] him alone.”

In a similar manner, Nehemiah 9:6 connects the emphases on God’s creatorship/sovereignty with a monolatrous concern: “You alone are the LORD. You have made the heavens, The heaven of heavens with all their host, The earth and all that is on it, The seas and all that is in them. You give life to all of them[.] And the heavenly host bows down before You” (Neh 9:6). The interconnectivity between monotheistic rhetoric and monotheistic worship as such is actually testified in many other passages (see, e.g., Add Esth 13:9-14; *Jub.* 12:2-5; Josephus, *A. J.* 1.155-56; 2 *En.* 66.4-5[J]; *Sib. Or.* 3.8-45 [esp. 3.20-35]; Deut 5.7ff./Exod 20.3ff.; also, Isa 40-55; Wis 13-15) and thus seems to be something inherent (and not coincidental) to Second Temple Judaism.⁵⁰

In light of the above, NT portrayals of Jesus as the creator of heaven and earth (e.g., Heb 1:10-12, quoting Ps 102:25-27 LXX) and as the cosmic ruler (e.g., Mark 12:36 and 14:62, quoting Ps 110:1)⁵¹ are remarkable and have no small implications for the deity of Jesus. In addition, the divine rhetoric applied to Jesus in the NT, especially through the appropriation of the OT YHWH language to Jesus (e.g., “call[ing] on the name of the Lord” in Rom 10:13⁵²; “lov[ing] the Lord” in

⁵⁰ Rainbow observes that more than half of the 200 monotheistic early Jewish/Christian passages he surveyed function either in creedal/confessional formulae or in prayer language (Paul Rainbow, “Monotheism and Christology in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6,” (D.Phil. thesis; Oxford University, 1987), 50-51. Such an observation, too, implies a correlation between monotheistic rhetoric and monotheistic cultic practice. For a related example, see the prayer of 4Q504 5.9, which contains a clear monotheistic affirmation: “For Thou alone art a living God and there is none beside Thee” (Translation taken from Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* [New York: Penguin Books, 1997]).

⁵¹ This example illustrates clearly a Christological exegesis of the OT exercised by a NT author.

⁵² See C. K. Rowe, “Romans 10:13: What Is the Name of the Lord?,” *HBT* 22 (2000), 135-173.

1 Cor 16:22 (cf. Deut 6:5)⁵³; the “way of the Lord” in Mark 1:3 [cf. Isa 40:3]⁵⁴), provides further weight to such Christological implications.⁵⁵

Concluding Remarks

I have summarized North’s position and responded to it above, noting several problems in his proposal and providing corresponding criticisms. Through interacting with North, I have shown that exclusive commitment to Israel’s unique God is seen from both rhetoric and cultic practices of Second Temple Judaism and that NT portrayals of Jesus appear to be genuinely remarkable, especially when they are appreciated against the background of the monotheistic scruples of Second Temple Jews.

North is quite emphatic about his observation that the NT never describes Jesus as a recipient of sacrifice. I have already refuted that conjecture in view of Rev 14:4 and 20:6, which portray Christ as a co-recipient (along with God) of offering/sacrificial acts. The fact that the NT does not very frequently picture Jesus as a recipient of metaphoric sacrifice seems to be related, at least in part, to his unique and climactic priestly/sacrificial ministry for “Israel”/the world. Here, North’s own point concerning Hebrews is, ironically in my view, helpful: “The high priest who offered the sacrifice of himself to God (Heb. 7.27; 9.26; 10.12), both body (10.5, 10) and blood (9.12, 14; 10.19, 29; 12.24; 13.12, 20) could not be its recipient.”⁵⁶ A central NT emphasis that “Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor 15:3) has likely restrained its authors from providing frequent portrayals of him as the recipient of the (metaphoric) sacrifices⁵⁷ while they portrayed the divinity of Christ amply, using various rhetorical and cultic terms and images, as discussed above.

⁵³ Bauckham, “Devotion to Jesus Christ,” 192.

⁵⁴ R. Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus and Mark* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck: 1997).

⁵⁵ See also my discussion of three NT passages in n. 7 above. For further NT evidence, refer to the discussions in Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*; C. Tilling, *Paul’s Divine Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

⁵⁶ North, “Jesus and Worship,” 200. More broadly, see Hebrews 4:14-10:18 as a whole.

⁵⁷ The centrality of the atoning death of Jesus Christ in Paul’s writings is clearly represented by the exclusive formulae like 1 Cor 2:2 and Gal 6:14 as well as the key statements, for example, in Rom 3:25, 8:3 and 2 Cor 5:21. The crucial

Unless one is inclined to adopt a minimalistic understanding of Second Temple Jewish Monotheism that underestimates the significance of various cultic elements (except sacrifice) and monotheistic rhetoric, s/he will likely find abundant indicators for the divinity of Jesus Christ from the NT, in particular, when it is appreciated against the background of Second Temple Jewish monotheism.

importance of the passion of Christ in the NT Gospels is aptly noted by Martin Kähler, who states that Gospels are “passion narratives with extended introductions” (*The So-called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964], 80 n11).