

1.102 The Prophets / 3.632-1 Pneumatology: Word and Spirit

Prophetic Ecstasy in Ezekiel 8

Introduction

This paper has three parts and will attempt to accomplish three different goals therein. In the first part I will do an exegesis of the eighth chapter of Ezekiel. First I will translate and make text critical commentary on the passage. Then I will comment on its content and significance, starting with the individual verses and expanding in increasing scope from verse to chapter to book to canon and beyond.

In the second part, I will examine the pneumatological work of two theologians on ecstasy. Then I will compare them to see how they agree and disagree

The third part of this paper will combine the work of the first two and look at Ezekiel 8 as an example of prophetic ecstasy. There I will demonstrate how this vision is an instance of prophetic ecstasy and present some ways in which it is an example of the concepts presented in part two.

Part I: Prophets Exegetical Project on Ezekiel 8

This translation is uses as sources both the Hebrew Masoretic¹ (MT) and Greek Septuagint² (LXX) The Masoretic text is preferred unless evidence for the Septuagint is clearly compelling. Unless otherwise stated, for the sake of consistency with a single translation, all scriptural references in this paper will be from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)³.

Verse

8.1 It was the fifth of the sixth month in the sixth year. I was sitting in my house, the elders of Judah were before me, and the hand of the Lord GOD^a fell upon me there.

8.2 And behold, I saw a figure appearing like a man^a. From the waist down it was like fire, and from the waist up like brightly shining metal.

Translation & Text Critical Comments

^a I translate “יהוה” as “LORD“ and “יהוה אדני” as “Lord GOD“. This preserves respect for the ineffability of the tetragramaton and at the same time avoids the awkwardness of pronouncing the more literal “Lord LORD“ for “יהוה אדני”.

^aLXX “a man” is probably the Greek translation of the original Hebrew אִישׁ (man). MT’s אֵשׁ (fire) is likely a late euphemism to avoid implying the figure might be God. Since in 8.1 the LXX does sanitize the Hebrew יהוה (YHWH) into (LORD), I conclude the LXX’s choice of “man” over “fire” is informed and not a scribal edit or error.

¹A Alt et al, eds. *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1990)

²Alfred Rahlf, ed, *Septuaginta Id est Vertus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes*, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979)

³New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America

Verse

8.3 He stretched out what looked like a hand and took me by the hair on my head. The spirit^a lifted up into the sky^b and took me to Jerusalem in a divine vision to the entrance of the inner gate, the one the idol of jealousy, the one provoking jealous anger^c, was standing north of^d.

8.4 And behold, there was the glory of the God of Israel, like in the vision I saw in the plain^a.

8.5 Then he said to me, “Human^a, now lift your eyes toward the north.” So I lifted my eyes toward the north and behold, at the north gate of the altar was an idol of jealousy in that entrance.

8.6 And he said to me, “Human, do you see what they are doing? The house of Israel is committing great abominations here to force me far from^a my sanctuary^b. But you will see even greater abominations.

Translation & Text Critical Comments

^aor “A wind”; Both the MT רוח and LXX can be either “wind” or “spirit”. I choose “spirit” as it is consistent with the “divine” aspect of the vision, though image of the wind blowing the prophet to Jerusalem is also appropriate here.

^blit, “between the earth and the heavens”
^cMT סמל הקנאה המקנה “idol / image of jealousy / anger, the one possessing”; LXX: “the idol / pillar of mastery / possession”. Ie, a stone idol which possesses by virtue of provoking, even demanding, passionate jealousy.

^dLiterally, this reads closer to “the entrance of the inner gate facing north”, but there is no inner gate. However, הפנה could mean either “facing” or “in front of”. The actual entrance faced east, and the altar was north of the area immediately outside the entrance. Hence, I take this to mean the idol was north of the entrance area.

^aThat is, the valley or plain in the vision of Eze 3.23.

^alit “son of human” in both MT & LXX. This is less confusing than “son of man” and more literal than “mortal”.

^aMT לרחקה “to put far away”, ie, to alienate YHWH from the temple.

^blit “holy place”, ie, YHWH’s temple in Jerusalem

Verse

Translation & Text Critical Comments

8.7 Then he brought me to the entrance of the court and I looked, and behold—there was a hole^a in the wall!

^aThe hole or opening in the wall is somewhat problematic—why dig the hole in 8.8 if there is one already there? LXX leaves out the second half of 8.7, but I retain it as it is the more difficult reading.

8.8 He said to me, “Human, dig into the wall now!” So I dug into the wall and saw a doorway.

(no comments)

8.9 And he said to me, “Go in and see the evil^a abominations that they are doing here!”

^aMT, not in LXX; However as it is only redundant, I attribute the LXX text as scribal editing, and retain it.

8.10 So I went in and I looked, and behold, there were all kinds of crawling things, and detestable animals, and^a all the idols of the house of Israel were carved all over^b the walls^c.

^aMT; LXX omits the animals and has only “abominations”;

^b“all over” is repeated in MT (סביב סביב), but not in LXX;

^cMT lit “around around”; LXX , “there”;

^{a,b,c}In cases ^a & ^b, LXX is shorter than MT, and in ^c, it is simpler (“there” versus “the walls”). In general, LXX 8.7, 9, & 10 is simplified compared to MT, so I retain the MT in all cases, but ^b where it is redundant.

8.11 And seventy men from the elders of the house of Israel, including Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, were standing^a in front of the idols. Each of them held a censer in his hand and the fragrance of the cloud of incense was rising.

^alit “. . . Israel, and Jaazaniah son of Shaphan standing among them, were standing . . .” in MT; LXX: “. . . Israel, and Jaazaniah (son) of Shaphan had stood in the midst of them.” The MT is a bit awkward and the LXX, consistent with previous verses here, seems to have attempted to simplify it. However, I find no problem with MT and prefer to keep it as the more difficult reading.

Verse

Translation & Text Critical Comments

8.12 And he said to me, “Do you see, human, what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the darkness, each in the secret shrines of their (own) idol?^a Indeed, they are saying, “The LORD does not see us; the LORD forsook the land.”

^aMT: “in their inner chamber of idols”; LXX: “in their secret chambers”; The content of both witnesses points to inner, secret places for forbidden worship, ie, “secret shrines”⁴

8.13 And he said again to me, you will see them commit even greater abominations.

(no comments)

8.14 Then he brought me to the north entrance gate of the LORD’s house. And behold, the women were sitting there and mourning (the) Tammuz.

(no comments)

8.15 And he said to me, “Do you see this human? Again, you will see even greater abominations than these.”

(no comments)

8.16 Then he brought me into the inner court of the LORD’s house, and I saw at the entrance to the LORD’s temple, between the portico and the altar, about twenty five^a men, with their backs toward the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east. And moreover, they were bowing down to the east^b to the sun!

^aMT כעשרים וחמשה “about 20 and 5”; LXX: “about twenty”; While 20 and 25 are about the same as groups of people, Ezekiel has a strong preference for the number 25 (16 times in the rest of this book, versus only 14 for the rest of the old testament) and it is likely he would have opted for it here when possible. I retain the MT’s 25.

^bMT only; “to the east” not in LXX; If you have your face to the east, it is unnecessary to specify bowing to the east also. I retain the MT as the more difficult, ie, redundant, reading.

⁴Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20 A New translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, vol 22 (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc 1983), 172

Verse

8.17 And he said to me, “Do you see human? Is it a light thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations they do here? Indeed must they fill the land (with) injustice^a b? And now, look—they are putting the branch to their nose^c!

8.18 Therefore I will deal with them in anger. My eye will not show pity and I will not spare them. Though they cry to my ears and shout loudly, I will not hear them.^a

Translation & Text Critical Comments

^aMT **וּמַחַד** “violence, injustice”; LXX “abominations”; However, can also mean “lawlessness, injustice”, so I translate it “injustice”

^bMT inserts here “and must they continue to provoke great anger in me”; Zimmerli argues that the syntax is awkward for this portion and that it does not belong. Also, that this use of **וַיִּזְעַק** for “provoke” is present elsewhere in Ezekiel in chapter 16 and after⁵. I therefore choose to stay with the shorter wording of the LXX.

“putting the branch to their nose”; While the words themselves are not a problem, the meaning of this expression is unclear. It is possible this alludes to pagan rites or some obscene gesture; either way, it is clearly a reference to a great offense, as is expressed by the LXX “to sneer, stick up their noses”, ie, to scorn YHWH.

^aMT only “Though . . . them.”, though some LXX manuscripts have all or part of this, including Alexandris and Vaticanus, and also a footnote in Origen. Note that Eze 9.1 starts with “Then he cried in my ears”; it is likely well meaning LXX scribes assumed this to be an error and not having a copy of MT before them incorrectly took it out as an error.

⁵Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1 A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, ed Frank Moor Cross et al, trans Ronald E Clements, *Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 221

Part I.A Verse by Verse Exegesis

8.1 The chapter begins with a dating of the vision as "In the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month,"⁶ Taking this to mean the sixth year of the conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadzzar in Addaru 2, 597 BCE⁷ we have the sixth year as 592, the sixth month as Elul (or August/September⁸) and the fifth day as the fourth. Ie, the vision was in late summer of 592 BCE.

8.2 While 8.2 says "the hand of the Lord GOD fell upon me", verse 2 introduces "a figure that looked like a human being". (See text critical notes above re "human" vs "fire".) While one might expect this human to be an incarnation of the LORD, it must be remembered that at this point God is understood to live in the temple only, so the being must be an agent (ie, "the hand") of God, not God God's self.

8.3 In verse 3, there is an "image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy". It is not clear just what this idol is, though it has been speculated it may have been of Asherah, YHWH's supposed "consort". However it is clear that this image greatly angers YHWH, as the nearly identical Hebrew roots קנאה and קנה are juxtaposed to amplify each other into a "consuming jealousy".

8.4 "glory of the God of Israel" The "glory" of God is God's כבוד, a derivative of כבוד "to

⁶Eze 8.1a

⁷Greenberg, 9

⁸Harper's Bible Dictionary, ed Paul J Achtemeier (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1985), 1073

weigh heavily” or “make heavy”, hence to be honored or revered. God’s glory is the manifestation of God’s presence, which at this point in Israel’s history is principally witnessed in the temple at Jerusalem.

8.6 “committing great abominations here to force me far from my sanctuary” The detestable (Heb) or lawless (Gk) acts being committed here are driving YHWH out of the temple. The implication is that God’s glory is manifest through the obedience of God’s people. Their disobedience has both misrepresented God’s true nature and weakened, if not severed, their relationship to God. Therefore, God’s glory is no longer manifest and is therefore no longer present.

8.7–8 “there was a hole in the wall! . . . so I dug into the wall and saw a doorway.” This is of course strange—why would you dig a hole when there is already an opening? Zimmerli suggests that the prophet saw the hole in anticipation of digging it.⁹ Whatever the logistics involved, it is clear the prophet entered the room through some kind of a dug opening. This amplifies the secret nature of these shrines in 8.12.

8.10 “all kinds of creeping things, and loathsome animals, and all the idols of the house of Israel”
The point here is that this room is full of images of forbidden things, eg, non-kosher animals and idols of any kind.

8.11 “seventy of the elders of the house of Israel . . . Jaazaniah son of Shaphan” That is, the

⁹Zimmerli, 219

abominations are committed by a significant portion of the leadership of Israel. “Jaazaniah son of Shaphan” is apparently a well known person.

8.12 “in the dark, each in his room of images” This tells us that these rooms are secret chapels to gods other than YHWH. While the image of jealousy in the first abomination is open, in the court, here we have leaders sinning in secret. This implies that they know better, or are at least aware enough of the controversial nature of their practices to want to avoid public scrutiny.

“The LORD does not see us . . .” Not only do the leaders turn to pagan gods, but they have in effect given up on YHWH, seeing him as having already deserted them. The concept of God’s **אֱמוּנָה** or “faithfulness” is no longer meaningful to them. They have lost faith in the LORD.

8.14 “weeping for Tammuz” Tammuz was a Babylonian god responsible for the cyclical seasons, hence for the crops. The weeping was one aspect of that worship, of Tammuz’ seasonal departure. The significance of this act is that now the common people (Women would certainly not have been part of the religious establishment at this time.) have moved from the formal worship of a god in addition to YHWH, as in the image of jealousy, to a practical reliance on another god instead of YHWH. The religious idolatry of the previous abominations has now become a practical way of life.

8.16 “the inner court of the house of the LORD . . . with their backs to the temple of the LORD

and their faces to the sun toward the east.” The final and culminating abomination is that in the inner court, where the fullness of YHWH’s presence should be most evident and accessible, the leaders of Israel have not only turned away from their god, but they have turned toward not a god, but an object of nature.

8.17 The monotheism of Israel has regressed into an implied monolatry in Eze 8.1 “the glory of the God of Israel” to a polytheism with the first two abominations where the idol of jealousy and the secret chapels imply a recognition of competing deities. Further regression occurs with not a competition, but with YHWH’s losing on at least the popular front to Tammuz in the third abomination. In the fourth abomination, we see a full regression of not merely turning on YHWH and toward other gods, but a pantheistic worship of nature, ie, the sun.

This final insult is characterized as “putting the branch to their nose”. It is unclear exactly what this is (see translation note above). However, all indications point to it being an extreme insult, perhaps like giving someone “the finger”.

8.18 YHWH’s response is equally extreme. He will, as have they to him, ignore them and their pleas. If one person turns on a relationship, the other can pursue. However, it will be in vain until the first person returns in some way on their own. YHWH can woo Israel, but repeated and progressive deterioration of the relationship from Israel’s end cannot be overcome by YHWH alone. As in 8.6, under the self-imposed constraints of God’s relationship, God’s faithfulness cannot be effective without Israel’s response. God has not so much turned in anger as God is left to an anger created, or at least permitted, by Israel’s

unfaithfulness.

Part I.B Structure

The following is an outline of this chapter:

1. Introduction 8.1–4
 - a. date & location 8.1a
 - b. beginning of vision 8.1b–4
 - i. hand of LORD and introduction of the figure like a human / fire
 - ii. Ezekiel taken by the wind / spirit to Jerusalem 8.3–4
2. Abominations in the Jerusalem Temple 8.5–16
 - a. Image of Jealousy 8.5–6
 - i. Driving YHWH far from his sanctuary
 - ii. “Mortal, do you see what they are doing, . . . Yet you will see greater abominations.” 8.6
 - b. Secret Chambers of Idols 8.7–13
 - i. creeping things, loathsome animals
 - ii. idols of house of Israel
 - iii. 70 elders with censers
 - (1) “LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land”
 - iv. “Mortal, have you seen what the elders . . . You will see still greater abominations that they are committing.” 8.12
 - c. Woman Weeping for Tammuz 8.14–15
 - i. “Have you seen this O mortal? You will see still greater abominations than these.” 8.15
 - d. Sun Worship in Inner Court 8.16
 - i. “Have you seen this, O mortal? Is it not bad enough that the house of Judah commits the abominations here? Must they . . . provoke my anger still further?” 8.17
3. Concluding Declaration of God’s Anger 8.17–18

Part I.C General Commentary

This vision progresses through the four abominations. It begins with the public display of an “image of jealousy” in 8.5 and moves on to the secret idolatry in the leaders’ secret chambers, indicating a greater involvement with the idols, but also an embarrassment of it requiring it to be in secret. This embarrassment is before the people, not YHWH, for 8.12b indicates the leaders consider YHWH to have ignored or even abandoned them. Ironically, the people don’t object to this. Rather, the idolatry moves on to the open worship of Tammuz by lay women. The worship of the leaders has turned to a practical reliance of the people on a god other than YHWH. The final abomination is radically different. It is not a movement toward another god or idol, it is a literal and symbolic turning away from YHWH in his temple and turning not toward another god or a god involved with nature (as was Tammuz), but toward an object of nature itself—the sun. Note that at this point the figure says not, “You will see even greater abominations”, but rather “is it not enough that . . .”. This is the last straw.

As a unit, Ezekiel 8 illustrates how Israel has committed sins so great they in effect drive YHWH away. The glory of God (כבוד) is present in the temple at the beginning of this passage, but the acts of Israel progress in indication of a successively deteriorating relationship of the people to YHWH, to the point that in the end they have turned away from YHWH and driven him out so that he is no longer able to hear or see them.

An implication of this is that YHWH’s glory is present in his people’s worship and obedience of him. The Hebrew כבוד carries connotations of “weight”, “heaviness” and hence “greatness”,

and the Greek equivalent *doxa*, coming from *dokein*, has connotations of “reputation” or “esteem”. The glory of God is to be found in his greatness being experienced and witnessed by others. If YHWH’s people cease to have a relationship with him, God’s “glory” will cease to exist, or at the very least lose its strong focal point within his people. God may still be present, but his glory is not.

Chapter 8 is the beginning of the temple vision in Ezekiel 8–11. Here Ezekiel is carried to Jerusalem by the spirit and back again to Chaldea at the end of Ezekiel 11.¹⁰ Once in Jerusalem, Ezekiel is shown four abominations, to explain why YHWH is being driven from his sanctuary. It is noteworthy that the final and decisive abomination is when the people turn their backs to the temple and face east, the direction of the exile. YHWH then leaves the city in the same direction, implying that while YHWH’s glory may no longer be able to reside in the city, it is still linked with the location of his people, as it has been throughout Old Testament history. While YHWH was angry at injustice and idolatry, it was only when his people left that he did. YHWH’s reputation (ie, his glory) may change, but its location is always within his people Israel. Thus, YHWH’s glory and faithfulness (כבוד & חסד) are closely linked.

Likewise, as YHWH’s presence in the temple of Jerusalem is dependent on his people’s faithfulness, so is the existence of the Israel as a nation dependent on YHWH’s faithfulness. As the vision comes to a close, in Eze 11.17–20 YHWH says he will reassemble his people and enable a remnant to worship him rightly. As the vision opens with Israel’s abominations to YHWH, he angers and deals with the intolerable. But, once events have been allowed to run

¹⁰Eze 8.3 & 11.24 respectively.

their course in the Exile, the vision closes with his loving reconciliation with those of his people whose hearts are able to return.

Ezekiel 8 plays a key role in the context of the entire book. Chapters 1–24 are oracles of warning prior to the fall of Jerusalem and contain only two visions. The first is the Chariot Vision in which the prophet is called and the general situation described. The second is the Temple Vision of chapters 8–11. Chapter 8 as the introduction to the Temple Vision is the most pointed accusation of Israel's sins, as it lists not merely the social injustices, but the disregard for the ground of Israel's existence itself. Out of this flows the listing in the oracles of Ezekiel 12–24 of injustices committed by Israel.

Also, out of Ezekiel 8 comes the seed for the return from exile promised in the closing chapters of Eze 40–48. In Chapter 8 the prophet recognized that Israel abandoned YHWH, though the people may not have seen it that way. Since God left freely, he is also free to return, as he describes in the end.

Within the prophetic corpus, Ezekiel gives the Jewish people the means to survive as a people in exile, and in later diaspora. Thru Ezekiel we learn that YHWH is not confined to a single location, such as the temple in Jerusalem. YHWH may still speak to his people through a prophet such as Ezekiel in any location, in this case a home in Chaldea, even though his glory is still resident in the temple in Jerusalem, a considerable distance away. This is a crucial development for a Jewish people who will eventually be scattered throughout the known world so that temple worship will become impossible for most people.

In the context of the entire Bible, note that the prophet in this chapter focuses in on the prime, intolerable sin being not one of social injustice, but of deep rooted disbelief. As the chapter ends with the leaders worshiping the sun and YHWH's final wrath being evoked, one is reminded of the unforgivable sin in the Gospels. Murder, adultery, and social chaos can be forgiven, but blasphemy of the holy spirit cannot.¹¹ While injustice is never condoned, the deeper roots leading to a discounting and dismissal of God are much more serious.

This purging of sin from Israel is consistent with the general Biblical pattern. As in the Fall in the Garden, the Flood, the Exile in general, and in warnings by Jesus about the fall of the temple and his second coming, there is always a warning and always a remnant chosen to remain to be God's people, be they worthy or not. God's wrath is never for the sole purpose of destruction, but rather to cleanse his people. The irony is that even though YHWH says, "though they cry in my hearing with a loud voice, I will not listen to them,"¹² he still does listen to them and tells the prophet to listen to and respond to them. Again, whatever YHWH's other attributes, his faithfulness always predominates—even over truthfulness.

¹¹Mt 12.31

¹²Eze 8.18

Part II: Pneumatology Paper on Prophetic Ecstasy

This portion of this paper will look at the phenomenon of prophetic ecstasy from the perspectives of Paul Tillich and Michael Welker. The primary sources for these perspectives will be Tillich's *Systematic Theology*, vol III, part IV¹³ and Welker's *God the Spirit*¹⁴. While the end goal of this paper is to examine the events described in Ezekiel chapter 8 in light of this prophetic ecstasy, for now I will focus on ecstasy in general, what it is, what it is not, and how these two theologians' views of ecstasy are similar and dissimilar.

It will be shown that in general Tillich and Welker have similar views of what constitutes ecstasy coming from the Holy Spirit. The one significant difference is that Tillich insists on a complete lack of disruption of structure in the realities affected by the ecstatic experience. Welker in his emphasis on community is willing to allow some disruption of structure, particularly in individuals, but still observes that such disruptions are rare and never to be seen as the norm.

¹³Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology: Vol III: Life and the Spirit*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963)

¹⁴Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, trans John F Hoffmeyer, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994)

Tillich defines ecstasy in the following paragraph:

The spirit, a dimension of finite life, is driven into a successful self-transcendence; it is grasped by something ultimate and unconditional. It is still the human spirit; it remains what it is, but at the same time, it goes out of itself under the impact of the divine Spirit. "Ecstasy" is the classical term for this state of being grasped by the Spiritual Presence. It describes the human situation under the Spiritual Presence exactly.¹⁵

Thus In Tillich's definition of ecstasy there are three essential elements:

- 1 The subject is the Spiritual Presence (aka, "Divine Spirit" or "Holy Spirit") which is ultimate, infinite, and unconditional.
- 2 The object is a human spirit, which is finite and conditional.
- 3 An action in which the Spiritual Presence takes the human spirit beyond its usual finite existence into a transcendent, infinite existence but at the same time preserves the human spirit's finite and conditional identity and integrity.

The spiritual Presence is "the presence of the Divine Life within creaturely life." It is "God present" in our created realm of existence.¹⁶ There are several marks of the Spiritual Presence. First, the Spiritual Presence must always be accompanied by humanity and justice¹⁷. If the Spiritual Presence is to preserve the human spirit, which is the essential element of humanity, there must be justice so that humanity is not compromised but rather preserved and advanced.

¹⁵Tillich, 122

¹⁶Tillich, 107

¹⁷Tillich, 144

While in a finite and fallen creation full justice seldom occurs, the Spiritual Presence always contributes to further justice and a more nearly complete attainment of the ultimate goal.

Second, the Spiritual Presence will always be accompanied by a new creativity. The nature of a union of the Divine and the human is such that a connection with existence beyond our created existence is made and a new perspective of both the finite and infinite and their interaction is gained. That new perspective will inevitably result in creative action. On the other hand, a presence of a spirit other than the Divine will result not in genuine creativity, but rather in mere rearrangement of existing structures.¹⁸

With this new creativity, it is inevitable that a mythology will develop out of an attempt to explain in concrete and finite terms what is inherently extraordinary and undescribable. This mythology can be dangerous if it is left to develop a life of its own as a literal description of reality. Mythology cannot be prevented, but it can be deliteralized, ie, we can keep it in its proper metamorphical context.¹⁹

Third, the Spiritual Presence will always preserve existing structures. Since we live within a created existence, communication is possible only within the context of our existence. Hence, those structures must be preserved in order to further communication, and any weakening of those structures works counter to the achievement of such communication.²⁰

¹⁸Tillich, 119–120

¹⁹Tillich, 142

²⁰Tillich, 116

In particular, since the function of ecstasy is communication of the Divine with the human, the structure of the human object of that communication must be preserved. True Spiritual Presence will never destroy or weaken the human self, but will rather create an unambiguous life not otherwise possible. The Spiritual Presence bridges the gap between the potential and ideal aspects of human existence and the unfulfilled and actual elements.²¹

In addition to describing the marks of the Spiritual Presence in general, Tillich also gives two marks of the Spiritual Presence in historical groups. First the group has symbols with which to experience and express the Spiritual Presence. Second, the group has persons who guard against the profane and demonic distortions of the spirit.²² An example of such persons would be the prophets of the Old Testament.

According to Tillich the profane and demonic stand in opposition to the true Spiritual Presence. The profane occurs when the self resists self-transcendence.²³ While Spiritual Presence takes the self out of itself and into contact with the Divine, the profane declines this movement and insists on remaining within itself. In terms of the three elements of ecstasy above, the Spirit may grasp the human, but it is not allowed to take the human spirit out of the self.

On the other hand, the demonic occurs when the self “distorts self-transcendence by identifying a particular bearer of holiness with the holy itself.”²⁴ The clearest mark of the demonic is that structure is disrupted, especially the structure and integrity of the self. The self is not so much

²¹Tillich, 112–115, 129

²²Tillich, 139

²³Tillich, 87.2

²⁴Tillich, 102

touched or grasped by the Spirit as “possessed” by a spirit. The self experiences not unambiguity, but even more ambiguity than it already had. The self becomes split as it grasps for the infinite, but reaches only a finite fraud.

That finite fraud is the other clear mark of the demonic, the existence of more than one claim to ultimacy.²⁵ God is one and the elevation of anything else to ultimacy is false. The demonic leads not to a genuine experience with the infinite, but away from it to a false and finite imposter.

A particular case of the demonic is “intoxication”. In intoxication, there is “an attempt to escape from the dimension of spirit with its burden of personal centeredness and responsibility and cultural rationality.”²⁶ There is an attempt to self-transcend, but it is with the intention of fragmenting the self, of leaving behind the centeredness, responsibility, and rationality which characterize a healthy integrated self. The very nature of such an escape precludes the responsibility necessary for the Spiritual Presence to have an agent to carry out justice and creativity. Structure has not only been compromised, it has been deliberately cast aside.

To Tillich, faith and love of God are closely related to the Spiritual Presence. Faith is “the state of being grasped by the transcendent unity of unambiguous life” and love is “the state of being taken into that transcendent unity.”²⁷ While faith precedes love logically, they occur simultaneously. Being tied to the transcendent unity of the Spiritual Presence, both faith and

²⁵Tillich, 148

²⁶Tillich, 119

²⁷Tillich, 129

love involve the whole unfragmented person (not just the emotions or intellect) and are initiated by the Spirit, not the self. Since both involve the self being grasped by the Spiritual Presence and being taken out of self and into a transcendent unity with the Divine, they are both forms of ecstasy.

Part II.B Ecstasy in Michael Welker's *God the Spirit*

Welker never actually defines prophetic ecstasy. However he does use the phrase “prophetic ecstasy” as his translation for what the NRSV calls “prophesying” in his exegesis of several passages in 1 Samuel describing the Spirit’s influence on Saul.²⁸ For example, in 1 Samuel 10.10 the Hebrew וַיִּתְנַבֵּא can be translated as “and he prophesied” or “and he was in prophetic ecstasy”²⁹, or as Welker chooses “and he fell into prophetic ecstasy”. Note Welker generally likes the vertical concept of the Spirit, as seen in his use of “fell into” ecstasy. He also refers to the “descent of the Spirit” and the “pouring out” of the spirit³⁰

Welker’s primary concept related to his view of the Spirit’s work is of relationship and community.

According to Welker, when the spirit descends on a person, it does not normally disempower them, but rather enhances their public influence. A tension is set up in which the integrity of the person is respected in that they are not weakened, but at the same time the person is not left free to choose the Spirit or not. Welker even goes so far as to call it an “experience of being driven and handed over”.³¹ Since the spirit’s influence on the prophet is always manifest publicly, it would appear that the good of the community supersedes the desires of the individual in at least some cases.

²⁸Welker, 75–77

²⁹William L Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 224

³⁰Welker, 64, 71, 72, etc for “descend”; 147, 229 for “pouring out”

³¹Welker, 74–75

Under the spirit's influence the prophet becomes a mediator for knowledge from God. To check this power, Welker gives three criteria for discerning true versus false spirits.³²:

- 1 A true spirit will give the prophet a critical attitude toward the prevailing opinion of his community. That is, the prophet will question and test the conventional wisdom rather than accept it readily.
- 2 The prophet's prophecy will always correlate well with facts. The prophet will be well connected to reality.
- 3 Third, the prophet will be able to explain and apply the content of the prophecy. That is, the prophecy will be coherent and relevant to the prophet's community and context.

Welker also points out that the Bible generally discourages "anomalous action of the spirit" and prefers "sober and realistic perception".³³ While the extraordinary and spectacular is not unknown in the work of the spirit, it is not to be expected as the norm.

To Welker the spirit is intimately related to the community. It is not numinous, but rather is known through its effects on "real life relations"³⁴, coming to communities in crisis and assisting them in moving beyond helplessness and fragmentation and into a new state of empowered unity not possible without God.³⁵

³²Welker, 88

³³Welker, 15

³⁴Welker, 108

³⁵Welker. 56, 271

In contrast to this are the evil and lying spirits which destroy unity and give a false sense of community.³⁶ In the neutral ground between good and evil spirits, Welker places “tongues” since they are neither true nor false, but have value only as they are interpreted.³⁷ There is of course an implied caveat here, as anything which can be both good and bad must be used with caution. While tongues might be impressive, they are no more guaranteed to pass the above tests for spirits than any other ecstatic phenomenon.

The spirit’s influence is not merely an enhancement of day to day temporal life. It is also a means by which reality can be known from God’s perspective. Through this new perspective of reality, the spirit enables us to experience “heaven” or the “domain of reality inaccessible to us, but which influences, even defines, us here and now”.³⁸ However, as even extraordinary knowledge can sometimes be understood by natural means, it is again important to test the spirits.

As a bridge between our domain of reality and another, it should not be surprising that the spirit is not predictable and cannot be controlled. Rather, it is an emergent process, bringing us into “a new reality”.³⁹ This new reality is characterized by “nature and culture becoming permeable to each other”, that is, an existence in which we are able to move past our normal limits of humanity and participate in the emergent elements introduced to our domain, but also to return to our domain and remain intact in it.⁴⁰ Several major consequences of this follow.

³⁶Welker, 84–85

³⁷Welker, 271

³⁸Welker, 139

³⁹Welker, 99, 64

⁴⁰Welker, 143

First, people's experience of and commitment to God is increased. Second, there will normally be a general increase in righteousness, peace, justice, and mercy. Third, this will lead to a redefining of and commitment to the community.⁴¹ And fourth, the pouring out of the spirit makes God's power known in new ways which are no longer limited by previous situations, times, and cultures. This may lead to the spirit making present to individuals that which is "physically absent" or even "as good as dead".⁴² We will see more of this when we consider Ezekiel 8 pneumatologically below.

⁴¹Welker, 123

⁴²Welker, 171, 147

Part II.C Tillich's and Welker's Views on Ecstasy Compared

In comparing Tillich's and Welker's views on ecstasy, it must first be noted that the works discussed here are organized differently and written for different purposes. Paul Tillich's *Systematic Theology* is a three-volume presentation of a system of theology. It is tightly and explicitly structured with great attention to consistency of definitions and details. On the other hand, Michael Welker's *God the Spirit* is a single-volume work which examines the spirit's involvement in life's experiences. While it is presented as the first of an anticipated series of "lengthier publications on the most important themes of Christian theology"⁴³, it is not a segment of a tightly organized system. There is of course only one reality and one God, and while it is at times frustrating that these two theologians do not always think in identical categories, it is also important to allow both to deal with the spirit in their own way.

In regard to the nature ecstasy, both Tillich and Welker describe the spirit working to enable a human to come in contact the divine. However, Tillich describes this as the Spiritual Presence taking the self outside the self and into the infinite while Welker describes it as "heaven" coming to the self and acting there. Also, Tillich is emphatic throughout his work that the true Spiritual Presence does not disrupt existing structures, whereas Welker states that the object of ecstasy's identity is preserved, but allows that it may be disrupted in the process.

For example, Tillich describes "intoxication" as an effort to transcend the self and escape one or more forms of personal responsibility in the process. This is a disruption of the human structure

⁴³Welker, ix

and therefore demonic. Welker cites the spirit imposing itself on Saul and producing a similar result and sees no problem with the disruption of structure. While the motivation is different in these two cases, human for intoxication and the spirit for Saul, they reveal different attitudes toward the disruption of structure.

One must note that Welker clearly says anomalous action by the spirit is not the norm. Also, Welker places an emphasis on community throughout his book. In cases like Saul and other times of crisis, Welker would appear to allow for subordinating the individual to the community's needs, even violating the individual. Tillich would call this demonic as the disruption increases life's ambiguities.

Tillich and Welker agree on the marks of the spirit, though they use slightly different terms. Tillich's first mark is that humanity and justice are always present. Welker expresses this as an attitude in the prophet which questions and tests the prevailing attitudes of the culture, a large part of this being for the purpose of preserving justice in the culture.

Likewise, Tillich states that a new creativity is always present with the spirit. Welker is not so precise, but this is similar to his stating that the prophet can explain and apply the content of his ecstatic revelation to his community and its context. I see this as describing the way Tillich's creativity is expressed and applied.

Tillich's third mark is that existing structures, especially that of the self, are always preserved and never compromised. Here Welker differs, as was noted above, but it must also be noted that

Welker prefers “sober and realistic perception” to “anomalous” activity and that he does call for a true prophet to be well connected to reality. If we keep in mind that Tillich is mathematically precise in his definitions and boundaries and that Welker is more flexible and practical, I think that we see an underlying concern in both that the spirit respects and largely preserves our created realm. Tillich disallows the spirit disrupting the created order because it is necessary for communication. Welker says the spirit seldom disrupts the created order, and then only for special cases where communication is still preserved. They see the need for order differently, but not radically so.

Both authors recognize a possibility of harmful activity being attributed to the spirit. Tillich states that one mark of the spirit in historical groups is the presence of persons to guard against distortions of the spirit, and Welker warns against uncritical acceptance of tongues without interpretation.

Each author treats some subjects which the other doesn't significantly. Tillich devotes considerable attention to distortions of the spirit, describing the demonic, the profane, and intoxication in some detail. Welker gives very little attention to such matters. Likewise, Tillich describes faith and love as ecstatic experiences which occur together, but Welker says nothing, though in different terms one could see these as fitting into his description of the spirit descending on a prophet.

On the other hand, Welker focuses a lot on community. He sees the spirit as coming to aid a community in crisis, defines the “new reality” of the spirit in terms of community activity, and

is active in relationships of people with each other. Tillich talks very little about community.

Part III Pneumatologically Ecstatic Consideration of Ezekiel 8

It is the purpose of the final section of this paper to examine the events recorded in Ezekiel 8 and determine if what is described is in fact an instance of prophetic ecstasy. That established, I will then examine some specific aspects of this vision. Does the prophet ever cross the line into a demonic state? And what kind of creativity and enhancements to the community are found here?

In determining if Ezekiel 8 is an instance of prophetic ecstasy, I will use Tillich's criteria as described above, noting those points where Tillich and Welker might disagree. The three main points in consideration are the Spiritual Presence as subject, a human spirit as object, and an action in which the human spirit is taken beyond finite existence but is also preserved in its identity and overall integrity.

Regarding the source of this vision, the prophet begins the vision with terms such as "the hand of the Lord GOD fell upon me" and "visions of God", and "do you see what they are doing . . . to drive me far from my sanctuary?", though God is never directly identified as the "figure" in this passage.⁴⁴ The allusions to the glory of God, the sanctity of the temple, and the reluctance to directly attribute this "figure" to be God are all characteristic of Hebrew respect for YHWH and the sanctity, even unspeakableness, of all things closely related to YHWH. It is clear the prophet understands this vision to be caused by God.

⁴⁴Eze 8.1, 6

The object of the vision is obviously a specific human, the prophet. This satisfies the second criteria.

Regarding the third criteria, the prophet is clearly experiencing something beyond his usual finite existence. The figure who takes him on this vision is described as like a human but with both fiery and bright “amber-like” appearances. I take this not to be a literal description, but the prophet’s use of metaphors to describe a figure from some other realm of existence as best he can. Similarly, it is hard to believe the prophet was really carried any distance by his hair, but it is a reasonable way to describe an experience of being suddenly transferred to a far place and seeing unusual sights in the process.

Throughout the vision, the prophet is shown different scenes in the temple area. In verses 5 and 9 he is told to see things which would seem obvious to an unobstructed observer. And in verses 7 & 8 he is instructed to dig through a wall that already has a hole in it. In none of the scenes is he seen by the people present. While the scenes all involve ordinary places, objects, and people they are seen from the position of an omniscient observer or narrator of a story. Again, it is clear the prophet is attempting to describe some very unusual, transcendent events in terms of the limited language available. Clearly he has been taken beyond himself into an existence similar to, but also very different from, his usual life.

The second part of this third criterion is that the structures of this existence must remain intact, and particularly that human self involved must maintain its own identity and structure. The prophet clearly stays himself throughout this passage, and the entire book of Ezekiel. While

there is no indication of his being asked for permission to have this vision, I see at least two indications that his will was not violated. First, the vision begins with the elders of Israel seeking an oracle from the prophet in a meeting in his home. There is no indication he declined or resisted, and in light of the vision in chapter 3 and the subsequent prophetic acts it is likely that by this time Ezekiel has accepted his prophetic calling and expects, or even seeks, such visions. Secondly, there is no indication that Ezekiel ever objects to the vision once underway and verses 5, 8, and 10 indicate that he maintained a sense of freedom to control his body and act as he chose.

In light of these three criteria, we do have an instance of prophetic ecstasy here in Ezekiel 8. While much of the vision is unusual, I see no actual disruption of the structure of the prophet's existence in this passage to indicate a demonic presence. Neither is there any profane resistance from the prophet to experience the vision.

Several aspects of the prophet's world are enhanced by this vision. First, the prophet is shown in very specific detail four situations in which YHWH is fully aware of the sins of his people. God is not easily provoked by any one of these abominations, but once all four occur God even restrains God's self until after the vision is over to do anything. Even when four great abominations are presented at once and great anger is expressed, YHWH is demonstrating here his longsuffering patience and faithfulness.

Implicit in giving a prophet a vision such as this is that in some way YHWH still has hope that things might be better at some time in the future or that some kind of a remnant will be saved.

There is no point in communicating such a vision if God intends to completely abandon his people. This of course becomes more clear later in the vision where the righteous are marked to be saved⁴⁵ and YHWH declares that he will reassemble Israel in the future.⁴⁶ While this passage is quite heavy on judgement and law, there are elements of mercy and grace, albeit subtle.

An important “creation” in this vision is the connection made between Babylon and Jerusalem. Prior to the exile, YHWH’s presence was always in one place, usually where the ark and later the temple were located. A problem in the exile was that there was no temple. In this vision the prophet receives not only a clear message from YHWH, but also is taken to the temple and given something of a small tour. YHWH is now known to be present in distant places and still remain connected to the temple. The prophet’s presence in the vision also demonstrates that the spirit’s presence is not limited geographically and that it can enable YHWH’s people to be present in the temple in some way from a distance, at least through a prophet called by the spirit. While YHWH’s glory will leave the temple and Jerusalem, this need not be the end of the world. YHWH’ can still be with his people, and it has been demonstrated in this vision.

While these enhancements to the prophet’s world also apply to the community, this vision also addresses several other aspects of community discussed by Tillich and Welker.

Tillich spoke of the existence of persons in a group to guard against distortions of the spirit. This vision is a case of that. The elders of the community have come to seek an oracle from the prophet. The prophet is recognized as the person for this and is in fact given an oracle warning

⁴⁵Eze 9.4

⁴⁶Eze 11.17

of distortions of the spirit in Israel—idolatry of several forms and an abandoning of YHWH.

Welker is heavily concerned with community, perhaps even primarily. This vision is very much about the communal sins of Israel. The only individual mentioned is “Jaazaniah son of Shaphan”; everything else concerns groups of people representative of the nation. Welker says the spirit comes to a community in crisis and moves it to a new state. Israel is in a political state of crisis, ie, the exile. It is also shown to be in a state of spiritual crisis, and this vision as a whole (Ezekiel 8–11) is an effort to move the nation and give them hope.

Welker also talks of nature and culture becoming permeable in a number of ways. Particularly evident here are a redefining of the community as no longer being strictly limited by physical distance. Even more revealing is YHWH’s ability not only to be present in distant places, but to make the temple present in distant places, in this case Babylon.

In conclusion, this first section of Ezekiel’s Temple Vision is a good example of prophetic ecstasy. While it is too small in scope to show the ultimate justice and reforming of the nation of Israel, it does illustrate the marks of spiritual presence and communal impact by the spirit. It has also been demonstrated on several points, there are no significant indications of demonic or evil spirits involved in the prophet’s experience.

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