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The Art of Divination

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The art of divination has its roots in the Ancient Near East. Because this area of the world was also the world in which the Bible was written, much is said in the Scriptures about divination witchcraft. Prohibitions against such practices are found throughout the Old Testament. The author asserts that "The Church cannot ignore the issue because it is as alive today as it was in ancient times."

The art of divination is as old as civilization itself. Throughout the history of humanity, various societies have practiced the phenomenon in question. For the most part, divination is more complex than it appears on the surface. Thus, "the divination procedures do not typically give solutions to problems on a random or chance basis (like merely flipping a coin)...Commonly the situation really allows only one answer, and the role of divination is to declare that answer and, in the process, provide both reassurance to the client and public (divine) legitimation of the plan of action proposed" (Huffman, 1983, 335).

Given the centrality of the issue in human societies, a more detailed analysis is in order. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the topic of divination from three angles. First, we will examine the issue from the Ancient Near Eastern point of view (particularly the different forms of divination). Second, key biblical references on divination will be dealt with. Third, the issue will be analysed from the African context.

Ancient Near Eastern divination

Our knowledge of the practice of divination in the Ancient Near East is based on astrological omen texts. Scholars have unearthed a vast divination literature which does back to the old Babylonian period. According to Greenfield and Sokoloff (1989), the omens in question are known from two types of texts,

namely, the so called canonical texts and reports gathered from letters sent to the Neo-Assyrian court by professional astrologers.

In this section, we will deal with the various forms or types of divination in the Ancient Near Eastern context. Before delving into the issue, however, it is important to offer a definition of divination. Leo Oppenheim's definition is especially significant,

Basically, divination represents a technique of communication with the supernatural forces that are supposed to shape the history of the individual as well as that of the group. It presupposes the belief that these powers are able and, at times, willing to communicate their intentions and that they are interested in the well being of the individual or the group - in other words, that if evil is predicted or threatened, it can be averted through appropriate means (Oppenheim 1977, 207).

According to Winick (1968) divination is the process of reaching a judgment of the unknown or future through the study of incomplete evidence as found in various signs.

Smith (1986, 79) pointed out that divination is an important element in magical systems. It has been analysed anthropologically both "for its revelation about social structure and for the way it constructs cosmological and symbol systems" (Smith 1986). Accordingly, divinatory practices offer important insights into ideas of the nature and origin of truth, as well as the intervention or influence of supernatural forces in daily human experience.

Steyne (1989, 137) defined divination as "the art or practice that seeks to discover hidden knowledge by deciphering or interpreting phenomena of nature in whatever form these may occur and/or by consulting spirit-beings." Divination fills man with unknown information and offers him a well organized picture of his environment. According to Hiebert (1991, 139), "divination is a way of discovering what transempirical beings and forces will do or what they want us to do."

Mbiti (1975) defined divination as a method of finding out the unknown, by means of pebbles, numbers, water, animal entrails, reading the palms, and throwing dice. According to Koch (1983, 7), divination or manticism means "clairvoyance or sooth saying, the private or professional inquiry into the future against the background of a religious or magic view of the world."

Having attempted to define the phenomenon in question, we will now deal with the forms or types of divination in the Ancient Near Eastern context. We shall examine five types of divination. The first type of divination is known as extispicy. This phenomenon was the most prevalent in Mesopotamia (Hoffner 1987, 258). It was done by way of examining the entrails of a sacrificial sheep by an expert called barû (Oppenheim 1977, 212; Hoffner 1987, 258).

The specialist in question first addressed the oracle gods, Samas and Adad with prayers and benedictions. He requested them to write their message on the entrails of the sacrificial lamb. Further, he examined the organs of the animal such as the windpipe, the lungs, the liver, the gall bladder, and the coils of the intestines (Oppenheim 1977). The purpose of such investigation by the diviner was to see if there were any deviations of the organs from the normal state, shape, and coloring. If there were abnormal features found on the organs in question, the barû would interpret the phenomenon and communicate the message as coming from the gods.

One example of the value of extispicy is found in an Ancient Sumerian practice of determining who was to be the priestess for the city god. It was always done by way of examining the entrails of the sacrificial animal. The practice in question was especially crucial during the time of Nabonidus, the Babylonian King. He ordered an extispicy in connection with determining who was going to be the priestess for the moon god (Reiner 1985, 591). Accordingly, Nabonidus asked whether he ought to dedicate the Princess of the royal family as priestess of the lunar god, and the omen said no. He further inquired whether his own daughter was fitted for the office and the answer was positive. Consequently, Nabonidus dedicated his daughter in the temple of the moon god at Ur.

The second type of divination practices in Mesopotamia was astrology. According to Oppenheim (1977, 224), "the royal art of astrology is the method of divination for which Mesopotamia is famed." Scholars are agreed on the evidence of diversified astrological tradition in the Old Babylonian period (Oppenheim 1977; Hoffner 1987). Astrological literature from the Old Babylonian Period spread throughout the Ancient Near East. It has been discovered in Hittite Asia Minor, Qatna and Mari in Syria, and Elam in the East (Hoffner 1987).

The astrological texts mentioned above were written in Akkadian. Greenfield and Sokoloff (1989) examined some of these texts in detail. Their findings have confirmed that a major concern of these omens was decision making on the basis of solar and lunar phenomena (Hoffner 1987; Oppenheim 1977). For instance, a

solar eclipse took place during the reign of King Mursili II of Hatti land (cc 1339-1306 BC.). At this time, the King was away on military expedition. Since his stepmother disliked the queen, she interpreted the eclipse to point to her death (the queen). This was a serious issue because the eclipse was interpreted to be caused by the gods. In order to avoid the predicted disaster, the King would appoint a prisoner of war in his place (Hoffner 1987). The intent was that the newly appointed person would be struck dead by the gods.

In the case of Mursili II, the queen died following the stepmother's prediction. The King accused his stepmother of sorcery and removed her from all her offices, and forced her into seclusion (Hoffner 1983, 187-190). Thus, the centrality of solar and lunar phenomena was evident in the Ancient world. For the most part, events occurring on these phenomena affected the total world view of the ancients. The following text from Greenfield and Sokoloff illustrates the issue in question:

1. (If) when it rises, its horns are equal, the world is in danger.
2. If you saw the moon upright towards the south and its other horn towards the north, let it be a sign for you: be careful of evil; trouble will go out from the north.
3. If you saw the moon pointing towards the north and its other horn inclined toward the south (there will be) great joy for the entire royal court; cheap prices and plenty will be in the world.
4. (If the moon) is inclined toward the south, the sign is good. The year will be fat, and there will be plenty in the world.
5. (If) its face was yellow/green on the north, high prices and famine will be in the world.
6. When the moon is eclipsed in the middle of Nisan, a great man will go out of the Sanhedrin. This will always be a trustworthy sign, for in it, a clean animal is eaten.
7. If (the moon) was red like blood in Iyyar, a king from the north will defeat his counterpart, a strong fire will fall upon the people, and all human beings will be struck because of (?) sin.
8. If (the moon) was red and eclipsed in Sivan, there will be confusion in he...of the sea a command to be killed was issued against the donkeys and the non-domestic animals.
9. If (the moon's) face was yellow/green in Tammuz, there will be a storm on the high sea, a great outcry among all pregnant women, for death will be theirs from the destroyer.
10. If (the moon) is upright and eclipsed in the month of Ab there will be murder in Egypt and famine in the south. The Nile will be low and will not rise, and all the ravens will want for food.

11. If (the moon) is ... like snow in the month of Elul, you should know that it (the land) will be smitten with snow. There will be a great dissension in the world between Israel and the government.
12. The moon is never eclipsed in Tishri. But if it is eclipsed, it is a bad sign for the "enemies of the Jews." Religious persecution will issue from the kingdom and woeful destruction will be upon the Jews.
13. If the wind struck the moon and caused it to be eclipsed in Marheshwan, do not be distressed. A voice from heaven suddenly goes out that the enemy ... from the kingdom.
14. (If you) observe it in Kislev red like fire, there will be death among the children. Trembling will be among the young ones, and pregnant women will fear death.
15. If it is hazy like smoke in Tevet, the king will go into exile from his place. The locust will come down upon the grain crops. High prices and famine will be in the world.
16. If its light is like spilled blood in the month of Shevat, there will be a plague, and the mice will multiply. A king from the east will be killed in the north, and the locust will go out, and there will be nothing left.
17. If (the moon) is eclipsed in the month of Adar, there will be famine, and mice will multiply.

Analysis of the Omens

All of the omens in this text are lunar and deal with types of phenomena well known in the Akkadian series *En ma Anu Enlil*. From a structural point of view, the omens may be divided in the following ways.

A. *Type of Occurrence*. (1) General occurrences: the first five omens may occur on any day of the year. (2) Specific occurrences: the remaining twelve omens are each noted as being specific for a particular month of the year, beginning with Nisan and ending with Adar. This order is to be expected, since the text was composed to be recited at the sanctification of the month of Nisan.

B. *Type of Phenomena*. This division is according to the types of lunar phenomena mentioned in the text, all of which may be paralleled in other sources. (1) Position of the cusps at first sighting (omens 1-4); the cusps may either be of equal length (no. 1) or point either north or south (nos. 2-4). (2) Color: the colors given are those which we would expect, viz, red (nos. 7, 8, and 16), yellow/green (no. 9), or white (no. 11). In one instance, the color is stated to be hazy like smoke (no. 15). (3) Eclipse: this lunar phenomenon is a well-known sign and is mentioned here in four omens (no. 6, 8, 12, and 13). In most of the cases, the portent is negative. Only in one case does the text state

specifically that the eclipse takes place in the middle of the month (no. 6), although this is obviously the case for all eclipses.

A third form of divination is known as augury. It was mainly practiced by the Hittites. The main feature of this type of divination was the observation of the movement and behavior of birds. According to Oppenheim (1977), the bird observer (dugil iss ri) as a divination specialist is indisputably attested in Assyria. Most of these experts were native Assyrians as well as Egyptian prisoners of war (Oppenheim 1977, 209).

The phenomenon in question involved both the direction and manner of the flight of birds. Hoffner (1987) pointed out that while the observation of birds' flight among the Hittites was significant, the details of the praxis is rudimentary. Moreover, the available texts do not make clear whether the observed birds were in a controlled environment or not. What is clear about the issue in question, however, is the fact that the Hittites were serious about the phenomenon. They would consult bird omens before embarking on an important journey. In the vassal/suzerain treaties, the King (Hittite) would warn: "If you hear about a threat against me, act immediately! Don't even pause to take a bird oracle" (Hoffner 1987, 260).

The fourth form of divination practiced in the Ancient Near East was kleromancy. This type of divination was done by way of casting lots. It involved "marked sticks of wood or stones and was to establish a sequence among persons of equal status that would be acceptable, as divinely ordained to all participants" (Oppenheim 1977, 208). Accordingly, casting of lots the Hittites had practiced divination by lots denoted by the Sumerogram KIN. Each lot observed during inquiry had a symbolic name. According to Hoffner (1987, 261), each of the symbolic objects had a significance which contributed to the outcome of the oracle. Normally, the answer was binary (i.e. yes or no answer).

The fifth type of divination in the Ancient Near East was oneiromancy or the art of interpreting dreams. Hoffner (1987) pointed out that sometimes a dream consisted of a straightforward verbal message from a god. Such type of divination required no specially trained interpreter. At the same time, most dreams were nonverbal and they called for skillfully trained interpreters. The interpreters in question were familiar with the rules to be used in interpreting of symbolic elements in dreams (Hoffner 1987; Oppenheim 1956).

Certain colors, animals, or activities were often connected with the predicted misfortune, while others indicated happiness and success (Hoffner 1987). Thus dreams were used in addition to many other forms of divination in order to

determine what messages the gods were communicating. Having looked at divination from the Ancient Near East background, it is important to deal with the issue from the Old Testament standpoint.

Old Testament References to Divination

The Scriptures have numerous references to divination. Most of these references are found in the Old Testament. In this section we will concentrate on key Old Testament texts with respect to what they say on divination in Israel and the relationship between prophecy and divination.

Priestly Divination in Israel. The phenomenon in question was different from Mesopotamian technical divination (Huffmon 1983). Accordingly, this type of divination involved the simple method of designated lots. It should be emphasized that although the lots were cast down, as far as the evidence goes, by priests or comparable persons, the biblical texts provide no information about the conditions of purity or place that presumably were prerequisite for successful divination (Huffmon 1983, 355).

The commonest method used in priestly divination was Urim and Thummim. It was intended to obtain oracles which declared the divine 'yes' or 'no' response to the inquiry. Several examples will illustrate the point in question. First, in Joshua 7, Achan violated the ban on the devoted things. The method followed to diagnose the case was parallel to witchcraft accusations in which a diviner is the medium for the expression of the community sense with respect to the suspected violator. The diviner uses the method of careful interrogation, the identity of the chief suspect and lets that judgment express itself through the divination results. The discovery is attributed to divine guidance (Park 1963; Wilson 1980; Huffmon 1983).

Second, Judges 20 provides another illustration of the way divination was used in Israel. All the Israelite tribes united against Benjamin. They inquired of the Lord as they said, "Who shall go up first to fight with Benjamin?" God gave the answer that Judah was to go first and all the tribes were satisfied with the answer. Due to the resistance the Israelites encountered from the Benjaminites, they inquired further whether or not they should continue the battle. God gave an affirmative response several times and the Israelites acted accordingly.

Third, the process of selecting Saul as King in Israel (I Samuel 10:17-24) is yet another example of priestly divination. All the Israelites were assembled in the presence of the Lord at Mizpah. Though the text does not clearly say it,

priestly divination by Urim and Thummim or lot was probably used. The selection process was carried out through the tribes to Benjamin, to the clan of Matrites, to the house of Qish and then to Saul.

Fourth, the method of Urim and Thummim was employed in one of the bloodiest battles in Ancient Israel (I Sam 14:23-46). In the course of the prolonged battle with the Philistines, Saul put the entire people of Israel under oath not to eat anything that day. Being ignorant of the situation, Saul's son Jonathan violated the ban. In such context, Saul and Jonathan were chosen by lot but the second lot specified Jonathan. Unlike its Mesopotamian counterpart, this type of divination was divinely directed, although the outcome was controlled by the priest (Huffmon 1983, 356).

Finally, King David used priestly divination as a means of ascertaining the will of God (I Sam 23). He sought God's guidance with respect to going to battle with the Philistines. Abiathar the priest was the medium through which David sought God's will and the answer was in the affirmative.

Relationship between Divination and Prophecy. Biblical scholars have noted a general relationship between divination and prophecy in the Old Testament. For example, VanderKam (1986, 170) argued that although the two may be generally distinguished, their practitioners appear to have operated in much the same sphere, to have used similar media at times, and to have performed analogous functions. Accordingly, two kinds of biblical texts underscore the issue in question (texts which juxtapose prophecy and divination, and those which say that prophets divine and diviners prophesy).

Two passages have been used with regard to the first category, namely, Deuteronomy 18 and Isaiah 44:25-26. In Deut. 18:15-22, a prophet like Moses is mentioned side by side with the diviner. On the one hand, the prophet was chosen by Yahweh while on the other hand, the diviner practiced abominable mantic arts. Israel was strongly warned not to imitate the divination practiced by the Canaanites who were only devising messages from omens.

With respect to the Isaiah passage, the functions of diviners and prophets are contrasted. Emphasis was placed on the hollowness of the diviners who were not chosen by the Lord nor did they speak on His behalf. Yahweh "nullified the omens to which they attached so much importance, made their authors appear as fools, refuted the wise and made all their knowledge appear to be folly" (Leupold 1971, 155). For the most part, the pseudo-science of the diviners were merely futile in contradistinction to Yahweh's effective work. The Lord made it clear through Isaiah that He had His "servant the Prophet himself, through whom He

had repeatedly made His purposes and the future outcome of things known” (Leupold 1971).

Concerning the second category of texts, a number of passages have been isolated. The first passage in which prophets are said to divine and diviners as prophesying is Micah 3:5-7. The text reads as follows: “Therefore night will come over you, without visions, and darkness, without divination. The sun will set for the prophets, and the day will go dark for them. The seers will be ashamed and the diviners disgraced. They will cover their faces because there is no answer from God.” In verse 11 of the same chapter, prophets are said to be engaged in divination (fortune telling).

The second passage is Jeremiah 14:14 where the Lord responded to Jeremiah’s report about the prophets who had told their people that they would enjoy peace...“The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds.” The same sentiment is echoed in Jer. 26:9-10 “So do not listen to your prophets, your diviners. Your interpreters of dreams, your mediums or your sorcerers...They prophesy lies to you that will only serve to remove you from your lands...”

A third passage in which prophecy and divination are mentioned together in Ezekiel 13:1-9. Accordingly, Ezekiel opposed Israel’s prophets and, in the name of Yahweh, condemned their falsehood. Verse 9 reads, “my hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations.”

In addition to the two issues dealt with above (the priestly divination and relationship between divination and prophecy), other forms of divination may be mentioned. For instance, Necromancy is mentioned in Isa 8:19-20. According to these verses, Judah had forsaken the Lord and resorted to consulting mediums for divine guidance. The testimony or word of the Lord was no longer their sure guide. Leupold (1968, 177) summarized the Lord’s challenge to Judah in the following words, “let the nation turn back to the basic instruction which has come to it from God in the past; to do so is their only hope.”

Second, the art of astrology (as defined in section one of this paper) is mentioned in Isa 47:13. This was a method of interpreting the future “by gazing on the stars.” Concerning the biblical view on astrology, Leupold (1968, 157) summed it well as he wrote “astrology is in fact the epitome of futility.” Third, dreams as a form of divination are recorded in Genesis 37:5:11; 40:5-19 and in Daniel 2-4. Both Joseph and Daniel were the masters of a biblical view of

dreams. The phenomena in question were a means of ascertaining divine guidance.

Divination in African Context

In Africa divination is an important means of explaining space-time events, particularly with respect to their cause and how they affect human beings. The phenomenon in question carries the same innuendo, whether one looks at it from the Ancient Near Eastern perspective or from the perspective of contemporary societies (Adelowo 1987). As has already been pointed out, divination tries to get behind the reasons for certain events. It “is a way of discovering hidden treasures. It is roughly the attempt to discern events that are distant time or space, and that consequently cannot be perceived by normal means for the purpose of guidance, planning and execution” (Adelowo 1987, 73).

In African perspective, diviners are as important as medical doctors and lawyers are for Western societies. They are like psychologists who are thought to be “capable (through mental agility) of gaining an exceptional insight into the private lives of the people who seek their aid” (Ekechukwu 1982, 159). According to Mbiti (1975, 156) African diviners deal with the issue of finding out why something has gone wrong. They in turn try to prescribe the remedy or course of action.

Ekechukwu (1982) pointed out that diviners may prescribe that their clients use amulets in addition to the assistance provided by the gods. Accordingly, the physical features of the diviner are significant to his/her effectiveness. Normally, a serious look, unkempt hair, and a dusty bag containing a whole collection of assorted objects - greatly enhance his credibility. For the most part, diviners are reluctant to admit that their art has failed. As a result, they resort to laying the blame on their clients by charging that he/she failed to observe the recommended taboos (Horton 1967, 167; Ekechukwu 1982, 159).

A question has always been asked namely, why do many Africans resort to divination? Various reasons have been given by scholars (Mbiti 1975; Ekechukwu 1982; Adelowo 1987; Whyte 1990). A few of these reasons may be mentioned. First, people may engage in divination in the event of recurrent sickness in a family in which people have died. Second, successive deaths (especially where children are victims) may be another cause. Third, epidemics such as smallpox which may take a toll of lives, may yet be another cause of divination. Fourth, crises of life - birth, marriage, and death are also reasons for

engaging in divinatory practices. Fifth, barrenness of women which Africans in general take seriously, may be another cause of divination. The above list of causes indicates that suffering and misfortune are believed by Africans to go deeper than they may appear on the surface. Divination attempts to provide answers to the issues listed above, at a deeper level of looking at reality (at world view level).

Susan R. Whyte (1990) did a study on divination among the Bunyole county of eastern Uganda. The author's findings indicated that Nyole divination was governed by a number of principles. The first principle is what the author labeled "relative privacy." Accordingly, the client normally came alone or sometimes he/she came with one or two relatives or friends. All the divinatory activities took place in a closed hut, while other people waited outside. According to Whyte, this kind of behavior raises issues of uncertainty, suspicion and conflicts.

The second principle of Nyole divination is that the client did not know the cause of the misfortune being diagnosed. In other words, the client was so ignorant of the situation that he was totally at the mercy of the diviner. The author pointed out, however, that sometimes the consultor refused to accept the initial diagnosis, with respect to the cause of the problem. As a result, the diviner would try to seek the consultor's perspective. However, in spite of the consultor's preconceptions, "they declared their uncertainty and their desire that the divination should help them resolve it" (Whyte 1990, 43).

The third principle of Nyole divination is that the diviner himself did not know the details of the case in advance. The divination was believed to be able to uncover the issue at stake. The writer concurs with the author that in many cases, those who are seeking help through divination will not go the nearby diviner. If they consulted a diviner who is their neighbor, it is believed that he/she would influence the results. Consequently, diviners were usually confronted with people about whose background and current circumstances they were totally ignorant. Thus, the information needed in order to formulate a relevant diagnosis had to be completely supplied by the client.

With respect to the drama of divination (involving a diviner and client), the author narrated a case entitled "the matter of the dry tree." The situation involved the mother and brother of a barren bride (a dry tree) who went to consult a diviner in Bunyole district of Uganda. The case went forth as follows:

Diviner: This one has begun by giving us lies. He is the one to start taking sides here saying, 'I want to argue with them—If I am defeated soon I shall leave, but if I defeat

them, then it is I who have won ... I am the one called the senior relative, I am the one arguing with these people because maybe they gave what is mine to eat ... This relative is called the mother's brother [of the barren woman].

Client: Does he say that they gave nothing to the mother's brother?

Diviner: It is what he says. Perhaps they gave him and he is [still] coming here ...there are those with quick heads who rush into a divination for nothing [without grounds].

(Interval of rattling gourds)

Diviner: These little spirits that are quarreling, perhaps they go on quarreling although you dealt with them and finished with them..

(After more discussion of this possibility, the line of questioning moves back toward a suspected curse and other potential cursers appear.)

Diviner: Do you have a father's sister, she is here quarreling...

Client: Yes, let her also come and we hear her reasons.

(Each agent in turn is rejected by the clients with explanations as to why they do not think that person is cursing: for example, 'I was the one who killed the goat and they divided it among themselves right there.' On several occasions the diviner tried to insist that a particular person must have cursed, because the clients admitted that they had not given that one the rightful share of the bride wealth. But the clients would not accept the interpretation.)

Client: ...it is true we did not give to them, but we also want to look at another place where there are other reasons.

Diviner: So you wanted to ask in every corner to make it clear ... But there is nothing with the father's wives, the grandmothers are refusing, her fathers are refusing.

Client: ... No, no, her grandmothers are the ones upon the heart [whom we suspect] ... There, go there in that very place...

Diviner: They are refusing.

Client: They refuse, but no. For us, we are still with them. Just try to find out, I think if you go along those lines, you will bring them back.

(First the maternal grandmother appears and the clients admit that she did not receive her rightful share of the bride wealth. But 'because of her softness' and because she died saying that her son-in-law, the bride's father, had always loved her, they did not believe that she had cursed. At last, a decision is reached; it is established that the father's mother of the barren bride cursed her before she died. The mother of the bride remarks that she suspects this woman, her mother-in-law, because they used to quarrel a lot. The clients want to offer a goat at her grace and have the curse removed by the dead woman's eldest daughter, the bride's father's sister. But before doing so, they want to be sure that this is the real reason for the barrenness. The diviner gives them detailed instructions from the dead woman about how the ceremony is to be carried out and the clients ask her questions which are conveyed by the diviner during intervals of rhythmic beating of the rattles. As the session ends, the clients, having been confronted by so many difference

causes, most of which they refused to accept, say that they do not know the truth—perhaps the ceremony of curse removal will be for naught.)

Client: Ah, there are many matters—again there are her mother's brothers, there is her grandmother, there is her father's sister ... There is the one grandmother and the other grandmother.

Diviner: The fertility is going to be difficult.

Client: Among all those cases, ah, we do not know where the truth is and where there is no truth.

Diviner: You go and do those things [the curse removal ceremony]. There is where God can give you luck. You, when you divine through so many spirits [use different diviners], don't you go on touching this [case], touching that, touching another [i.e. trying different explanations and treatments]?

Earlier in the session, the diviner had made the same point, saying "Let them do the ceremony. And if she does not get any benefit, let them go and divine elsewhere. A single divination does not heal a person."

As the above case indicates, Nyole divination is for the most part conducted by way of dialogue. On the one hand, the client asks questions to the spirit agent through the diviner. In turn, the diviner plays a double role of being human interpreter and agent of misfortune. As a result, Nyole divination appears to be open-ended, rather than the binary type of divination which calls for yes or no type of answers.

Conclusions

The foregoing pages have been an attempt to deal with the issue of divination from three perspectives. First, the topic has been analysed from the Ancient Near Eastern perspective. Second, the biblical perspective of divination has been presented. Third, the issue has been dealt with from the contemporary African perspective.

A number of implications need to be made with respect to the Christian ministry. First, divination is a universal phenomenon. It was practiced in the Ancient Near East. It was practiced in Bible times and it is found in many societies today. The Church cannot ignore the issue because it is as alive today as it was in ancient times. Throughout human history, human beings have been faced with issues for which they would seek guidance. The Church should affirm this human need to find explanation to life's deepest questions (cause and affect). Having affirmed the need in question, the Church should declare the sovereignty

of God. He is the sovereign Lord of the universe who is actively involved in the affairs of humanity.

Second, as has already been pointed out, the Scriptures condemn divination and the practices associated with it. Consequently, a clear and firm theology of divination should be devised in which God is presented as one who should give guidance to His people. Rather than relying on dreams, astrology and other forms of divination, the Bible should be the textbook for all matters of life. The writer is, however, aware that the Bible is not a magic book. For instance, the Bible talks about marriage and the family but does not necessarily tell a person who will be their life partner. In this case, one should rely on prayer, ministry of the Holy Spirit, opening and closing doors, inner conviction and counsel from wise and or mature Christians.

Third, a theology of power encounter should be emphasized. Jesus overcame Satan, sin and death. God is able to demonstrate His power over the forces of evil. We should, however, make sure that we do not try to manipulate God. He is the Creator and has the prerogative to act as He wills. Finally, the art of divination should be viewed not only as a religious phenomenon, but also as a world view issue. It deals with temporal issues as well as those of ultimate reality!

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