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Divinely Furnishing Christ's Office: Exegetical and Theological Reflections on the Trinity

in Isaiah 48:16

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Introduction

We can see the Trinity in the Old Testament. This is a controversial statement, even among evangelical scholars.[1] Yet a verse such as Isaiah 48:16 forces us to consider this issue. After Yahweh speaks to Israel of their sin, exile, and return from exile by the hand of Cyrus, an unusual verse appears: "'Draw near to me, hear this: from the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time it came to be I have been there.' And now the Lord GOD has sent me, and his Spirit" (Isa 48:16, ESV).[2] What is going on in this final clause? Who are these three figures: "the Lord GOD," the speaker, and "his Spirit"? In my exegetical reflections on Isaiah 48:16, I argue that we can responsibly interpret the speaker to be Yahweh, the speaker of this entire verse. Yet here Yahweh is differentiated from "the Lord GOD": He is the Son, who speaks of being sent by the Father and the Spirit. In the remainder of my essay, I show that through the Church Fathers, Medieval Scholastics, and Reformation, two topics of theological reflection emerge as Christians interact with this text: (1) the deity of the Holy Spirit, and (2) the sending of the Son. We conclude by reasserting the validity of a trinitarian reading of Isaiah 48:16 and the OT in general, in light of the NT revelation of God's triune nature.

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[1] Charles A Gieschen, "The Real Presence of the Son before Christ: Revisiting an Old Approach to Old Testament Christology," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (April 2004): 106, observes that pastors cannot "look to most biblical scholars for help, be they practitioners of traditional historical criticism or conservative evangelical exegesis. The former condemns and the latter cautions against christocentric exegesis of the Old Testament as unwarranted or undue "Christianizing" of the Old Testament."

[2] In our interpretation we will not follow the ESV's use of quotation marks.

Exegetical Reflections

Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor, Prophet, Servant, Son—Who Speaks in Isaiah 48:16?

Old Testament scholars seem to enjoy removing potential trinitarian references from the Old Testament.[3] The attitude seems to be that if it does not have to be trinitarian, it is not trinitarian.[4] Our verse is no exception. Phoenix Seminary Professor Paul D. Wegner, after examining this passage, claims he has "negate[d] the possibility that this verse refers to the Trinity." Not only does he believe the Son is absent from this passage, but regarding the Spirit, he argues that it is God's power "emanating from himself to empower people to do a job."[5] This attitude towards the Spirit as a distinct person, and towards the Trinity in general, lies in many scholars preferences "in terms of exegesis to interpret the OT passages as their authors would have intended and not through the lens of their subsequent development in the NT."[6] While we need responsible exegesis, this line of thought assumes (1) that the authors did not truly intend to reflect a multiplicity of persons in God, though they did not perfectly understand how to reflect this in their writings, and (2) that scholars today ought not to interpret the OT in light of the

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[3] I focus my attention more on Evangelical scholars in this essay. Critical and mainline scholars have it easy when it comes to removing the Trinity from the OT. For example, when it comes to the divine voice in Isaiah (or "Second Isaiah"), "we must remind ourselves that what we encounter here is not God as such but as depicted by one prophet in a particular time and circumstance" since "contesting prophetic voices and depictions of the divine that may have existed in Second Isaiah's context have been silenced by time, mortality, and the loses of written witnesses," (Patricia K. Tull, "Who Says What to Whom: Speakers, Hearers, and Overhearers in Second Isaiah," in *Partners with God: Theological and Critical Readings of the Bible in Honor of Marvin A. Sweeney*, ed. Shelley L. Birdson and Serge Frolov (Claremont, CA: Claremont Press, 2017), 164–5.).

[4] So when discussing divine plurals in the OT, and especially in Isa. 6:8, David T. Williams, "Who Will Go for Us?' (Is 6:8): The 'divine Plurals' and the Image of God," *Old Testament Essays* 12, no. 1 (1999): 187–8. puts OT scholars at ease when he concludes "It has been seen to be possible to understand the Old Testament plurals in terms which do not necessitate a plurality in God himself." While he acknowledges that "It must remain a possibility that the plurals do reflect plurality in God," we now can rest easy, confident that "the use of these plurals to prove plurality and so a Trinity in God" is "most definitely excluded."

[5] Paul D. Wegner, "Isaiah 48:16: A Trinitarian Enigma?," in *Presence Power and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament*, ed. David G. Firth and Paul D. Wegner (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 244. In Wegner's view, Cyrus speaks in this clause.

[6] David G. Firth and Paul D. Wegner, eds., "Introduction," in *Presence Power and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 18.

fuller revelation of God that the NT contains. If carried to its furthest conclusions, this approach to scripture may very well feed a modern day Marcionism that finds functionally different gods in the OT and NT. Instead, I suggest that the OT be read *in light of* the NT. I emphasize these words because light *illumines*; light makes clearer what is more obscure. In *light* of the New, we need not leave the Old in the dark. It is not wrong to see a triune God in scripture through the spectacles of scripture,[7] or to hear God's voice speaking when "the highest proof of Scripture derives … from the fact that God in person speaks in it."[8]

 Returning to our text, I must acknowledge that discovering the speaker in Isa. 48:16d is no easy task. Scholars offer interpretations with "diffidence", "freely admit[ting] that the difficulty is great."[9] Most modern scholars refrain from referring to the "Trinity" in Isa. 48:16, though many see this as the voice of "the Servant" or "the Suffering Servant" breaking through.[10] Among these, E. J. Young is willing to call the transition from 16c to 16d a "contrast between the old dispensation and the new… [in which] A contrast is to be introduced between the

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[7] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1, LCC 20 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967), 70, 160–1. "Not only does he teach the elect to look upon a god, but also shows himself as the God upon whom they are to look" (70).

[8] Ibid., 1:78. On God's speaking, see also 70: "This… is a special gift, where God, to instruct the church, not merely uses mute teachers but also opens his own most hallowed lips."

[9] So H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1971), 169. He takes the speaker to change from God to the Prophet.

[10] Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 377–8; R. Reed Lessing, *Isaiah 40-55*, Concordia Commentaries (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), 446, 456–7; J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 381; Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), 259.

For those who see the prophet speaking here, see Wilf Hildebrandt, *An Old Testament Theology of the Spirit of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 25, 90, 140–1; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament 19b (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 278–9; Willem VanGemeren and Andrew Abernethy, *"The Spirit and the Future: A Canonical Approach,"* in *Presence Power and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament*, ed. David G. Firth and Paul D. Wegner (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 335.

prophets of the Old Testament economy and the Son of the New."[11] I admire Young's willingness to name the Son, and I will suggest that we ought to do the same.

Notes on the Text

The English text of Isa. 48:16

I offer the English text of Isaiah 48:16 (ESV) again to indicate how I will be referring to this verse throughout the paper. Our focus is 16d, but our argument is that all of 16a-d can be read as the same speaker.

16a   Draw near to me, hear this:
16b   from the beginning I have not spoken in secret,
16c   from the time it came to be I have been there.
16d   And now the Lord God has sent me, and his Spirit.

The Hebrew Text of Isa. 48:16d

וְעַתָּה אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה שְׁלָחַנִי וְרוּחוֹ׃

The Hebrew of this section is fairly simple, reading in identical word order to most English translations. The name rendered "The Lord GOD" in many English versions (cf. KJV, NASB) might in more modern parlance be rendered "The Lord Yahweh." This name is found on the Servant's lips, especially in the third servant song (Isa 50), as well as in Isaiah 61:1.[12] Whether one reads "and His Spirit" (וְרוּחוֹ) as a dual subject with "The Lord Yahweh" (יְהוִה אֲדֹנָי) or as an appended dual subject with "me" (marked by the pronominal suffix נִי-), either

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[11] Young, *Book of Isaiah*, 3:259.
[12] Motyer, *Prophecy of Isaiah*, 381; Young, *Book of Isaiah*, 3:259.

reading reflects marked word order.[13] R. Reed Lessing notes that רוּחוֹ is unlikely part of a dual-

subject "because the verb שְׁלָחַנִי is masculine singular," but this is not necessarily so.[14]

Two things ought to be mentioned about the two *waws* in the colon. First, treating the

first *waw* as adversative would yield "but now," leading one to treat Isa 48:16d as a continuation

of the same speech in Isa 48:16a-c. If this is the case, no new speaker is introduced, but instead a

new horizon is introduced: in 16b, the speaker focuses on the distant past, "the beginning" of his

speaking, 16c focuses on his presence at the same time his word came to pass, and then in 16d a

"new thing" (see Isa. 48:6) is happening, with the speaker himself sent by the Lord Yahweh. One

can already see the potential for theological reflection in this single verse of Isaiah.

Second, it is grammatically viable to treat the second *waw* in the noun phrase "and His

Spirit" conjunctively. With the resumptive pronominal suffix added to רוּחַ to clarify that the

Spirit is "the Lord Yahweh's" Spirit, the וְ may convey a sense of accompaniment or

inclusiveness, so that we might translate the colon in English "the Lord Yahweh, together with

his Spirit, has sent me."[15] This leaves open the possibility that, however irregular this

formulation may be for Isaiah, it is possible to read the Hebrew as it has been read by many

church fathers, including those who only knew the Greek and Latin translation of this verse.

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[13] Joseph Addison Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, ed. John Eadie (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1953), 219: "As a grammatical question, it is hard to be decided from analogy; because, on either supposition [of subject or object], וְרוּחוֹ cannot be considered as holding its regular position in the sentence."

[14] Lessing, *Isaiah 40-55*, 446. Contrary to Lessing, see E. Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, trans. A. E. Cowley, Second English. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1910), sec. 146f. Here Gesenius notes that a Hebrew verb "not infrequently… agrees in gender and number with the first" of two or more subjects.

[15] See Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, Second. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 157. This might also be explained as an example of split coordination; see Christo H.J. van der Merwe, Jacobus A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, Second. (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), sec. 40.23.3.1.e.

The LXX and Vulgate text of Isa. 48:16d

> LXX: καὶ νῦν κύριος ἀπέσταλκέν με καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ.

> Vulgate: *et nunc Dominus Deus misit me et spiritus eius.*

Little needs to be said of these translations. The LXX follows the Hebrew closely. It substitutes "The Lord Yahweh" (אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה) with "the Lord" (κύριος). In a case of linguistic irony, where Greek has the opportunity to clarify through the case system whether the Spirit sends or is sent, Greek has a third declension neuter noun, πνεῦμα, which might be either nominative (subject) or accusative (object).[16] The Church Fathers were split in reading πνεῦμα as an accusative or a nominative, but many Greek Fathers saw καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτου as a dual-subject. Jerome's Vulgate does clarify his understanding of this verse, as both *Dominus Deus* and *spiritus* are nominatives: both the Lord God and His Spirit send the speaker.

Conclusions

I interpret Isaiah 48:16a-d as being the speech of a single figure, who in Isa. 48:12 says "I am he; I am the first and I am the last." This same speaker refers to Yahweh in Isa. 48:14, describes himself as calling Cyrus in Isa. 48:15, and is then sent by the Lord Yahweh and the Spirit in Isa. 48:16. This one may be identified by Biblical scholars as the servant. I prefer to refer explicitly to this speaker as the Son. He speaks of His being sent by Father and Spirit.

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[16] Alexander, *Isaiah*, 219: "the coincidence of the nominative and accusative (τὸ πνεῦμα) makes the Septuagint no less ambiguous than the original."

Theological Reflections

The Church Fathers[17]

A note on their exegesis

As I turn to the Church Fathers, I first note that there is no uniform reading of 48:16d. Most saw the Son speaking here, but Theodoret of Cyrus and Ephrem the Syrian see the prophet speaking,[18] while Eusebius of Caesarea put these words in the mouth of the Spirit.[19] We also see debate about whether "and my Spirit" comprises a dual-object or a dual-subject. Origen prefers the former, while Augustine prefers the latter.[20]

For those who see the Son speaking here, they arrive at their conclusions based on what Matthew W. Bates terms prosopological exegesis.[21] *Prosopopoeia* was a common rhetorical strategy in the ancient world in which speakers or writers would suddenly make a dialogical shift and speak as though they were another person or entity. These shifts were not always announced, and so readers and listeners would need "to identify dialogical shifts—that is, they had to engage in prosopological exegesis."[22] This was not only practiced in Greek and Roman culture, but also

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[17] This list of citations of Isaiah 48:16 is not exhaustive. Aside from those mentioned in the section "A note on their exegesis," all citations were drawn from John Litteral, "Isaiah Patristic Citations," last modified March 9, 2009, http://litteralchristianlibrary.wikifoundry.com/page/Isaiah+Patristic+Citations.

[18] Theodoret of Cyprus and Ephrem of Jerusalem, cited in *Isaiah 40-66*, ed. Mark W. Elliott, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture 11 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 104–5.

[19] Eusebius of Caesarea, *Commentary on Isaiah*, ed. Joel C. Elowsky, trans. Jonathan J. Armstrong, Ancient Christian Texts (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 239. This is a strange turn for Eusebius, who refers to "the Word" as the speaker of large portions of Isaiah as early as Isaiah 1:2. He likely takes καὶ to mean "even," and reads the clause "and now the Lord sent me, even his Spirit."

[20] Robert Louis Wilken, Angela Russell Christman, and Michael J. Hollerich, eds., *Isaiah: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators*, trans. Robert Louis Wilken, Church's Bible (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 358, 360–1.

[21] Matthew W. Bates, *The Hermeneutics of the Apostolic Proclamation: The Center of Paul's Method of Scriptural Interpretation* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 183, succinctly describes prosopological exegesis: "prosopological exegesis explain a text by suggesting that the author of the text identified various persons or characters (*prosopa*) as speakers or addressees in a pre-text, even though it is not clear from the pre-text itself that such persons are in view."

[22] Matthew W. Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity: Jesus, God, and Spirit in New Testament and Early Christian Interpretations of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 31. For example, "Cicero in the midst of a speech might temporarily take on the character of the entire nation of Italy as a way of heightening audience interest and adding emotional appeal."

had its analogues in Jewish exegesis,[23] and was practiced by Jesus,[24] Peter,[25] Paul,[26] the author of

Hebrews,[27] as well as the church fathers.[28] This method of exegesis was particularly fruitful for

identifying trinitarian discourse in the Old Testament. Isaiah, with all of its "enigmatic shifts in

speaker and addressee" was fertile ground for finding such trinitarian discourse.[29] While Bates

does not address Isa.48:16 in his work, it is clear that many church fathers, identifying the

unidentified speaker in Isa. 48:16d as the Son (or, in Eusebius' case, the Spirit) were engaged in

prosopological exegesis.[30] Using these methods, two strands of theological reflection developed.

Two strands of theological reflection

1. Deity of the Spirit. This passage is cited to defend the deity of the Holy Spirit. Cyril of

Jerusalem cites it as he lists scripture testimonies to the Holy Spirit.[31] In his Pentecost Oration,

Gregory Nanzianzen, calls the Holy Spirit, in a long list of titles and attributes, "the Sender,"

referring to our passage. His aim is showing that the Holy Spirit is equally God, "Himself ever

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[23] Madison N. Pierce, *Divine Discourse in the Epistle to the Hebrews: The Recontextualization of Spoken Quotations of Scripture*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 178 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 9–11.

[24] See Bates, *Birth of the Trinity*, 44–49, who argues that Jesus' question regarding Psalm 110 while in the Temple courts during Holy Week centers on identifying the various *prosopa* speaking in the Psalm.

[25] On Pentecost, in his treatment of Psalm 16. See Pierce, *Divine Discourse*, 12–14,

[26] See Bates, *Hermeneutics of Apostolic Proclamation*, 223–328. Bates identifies six passages in Paul's letters containing prosopological exegesis: Romans 10:6-8; 10:16; 11:9-10; 15:3; 15:9; and 2 Corinthians 4:13 (326).

[27] See Pierce, *Divine Discourse*, where she sees the epistle itself as structured around speeches of Father to Son, Son to Father, and the Spirit to the community.

[28] See J David Cassel, "Patristic Interpretation of Isaiah," in *"As Those Who Are Taught": The Interpretation of Isaiah from the LXX to the SBL* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2006), 155–7, who discusses Cyril of Alexandria's explicit references to *prosopopoeia* in his commentary on Isaiah. In his discussion of Isaiah alone, Bates, *Birth of the Trinity*, 96–113, mentions Ps-Barnabas, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Athanasius, and Clement as engaging in prosopological exegesis.

[29] Bates, *Birth of the Trinity*, 96.

[30] Bates outlines three preconditions for identifying prosopological exegesis: (1) The true identity of the speaker and/or addressee in the pre-text is not self-evident, (2) The interpreter resolves the uncertainty in the identity of the speaker and/or addressee in the pretext by assigning a suitable prosopon to them to explain the text, and (3) The interpreter must consider his pre-text as inspired or otherwise divinely authored. This is exactly what is going on in many Church Father's approach to Isaiah 48:16. Bates, *Hermeneutics of Apostolic Proclamation*, 216–17.

Because prosopological exegesis is the act of identifying who speaks in a passage of scripture, Isaiah scholars today also engage in the practice. What differs is their willingness to identify members of the Trinity as the *prosopa*.

[31] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, trans. Edwin Hamilton Gifford, vol. 7, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 2 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 16.30.

the same with Himself and with Those with Whom He is ranged."[32] Basil the Great, in showing

the greatness of the Holy Spirit's works, cites Isa. 48:16d to show the dignity of the Holy Spirit

as the sender of Isaiah.[33] These references are all quite short, and often function as proof texts for

these men's arguments. Here there is little interacting with the text. These authors use Isa. 48:16d

to make one point: the Spirit sends, just as the Lord YHWH sends, and therefore He is fully God.

2. Sending of the Son. Others address the question of who is sending and being sent in this

passage. On the one hand, Origen in *Against Celsus* and his *Commentary on the Gospel of*

Matthew says that the Father sends the Son and the Spirit. On the other hand, Augustine in *On*

the Holy Trinity and Origen in his earlier *Commentary on the Gospel of John* sees the Father and

a subordinated Spirit sending the Son. Origen's citations are interesting, but do not relate to this

strain as it is developed by Medieval and Reformed theologians. See the Appendix for further

discussion of Origen's treatment of Isa. 48:16d. Augustine's discussion of the Son's mission

becomes central to the Medieval reflection upon Isa. 48:16d, and so it is to his citation in *On the*

Holy Trinity that I now turn.

In Book II, chapter 5 of *On the Holy Trinity*, Augustine explains how the Son being sent

by the Father does not make him inferior to the Father. The Son being sent refers to his coming

forth from the Father into the world and being born of a woman.[34] Augustine here is

distinguishing between *theologia* and *economia*. The Son is not sent by the Father in any way

that makes the Father greater and the Son lesser. He is sent to earth in his becoming incarnate,

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[32] Gregory Nazianzen, *Select Orations*, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow, vol. 7, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 2 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 41.9. He concludes his list of almost forty titles and attributes in trinitarian reflection: "All that the Father hath the Son hath also, except the being Unbegotten; and all that the Son hath the Spirit hath also, except the Generation. And these two matters do not divide the Substance, as I understand it, but rather are divisions within the Substance."

[33] Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans. Stephen Hildebrand, PPS 42 (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), 19.49.

[34] Augustine of Hippo, *On the Holy Trinity*, ed. W. G. T. Shedd, trans. Arthur West Haddan, vol. 3, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 2.5.7, 8.

though as the eternally begotten Son, He fills the whole world.[35] The Son is only to be

understood as "sent" with regards to the economy of salvation. And in the economy of salvation,

the Son "could not be sent by the Father without the Holy Spirit." After citing Luke 1:34-5 and

Matthew 1:18 to show that the Holy Spirit came upon Mary in the incarnation of the Son,

Augustine says, "Although, too, in the prophet Isaiah, Christ Himself is understood to say of His

own future advent, 'And now the Lord God and His Spirit hath sent me.'"[36] It is unclear what

Augustine means by this sentence. He seems to begin this sentence with an adversative

conjunction,[37] which would imply that Christ's words in Isaiah somehow confuse what he has

previously written. It may be that Augustine did not understand how the Spirit could properly be

seen as sending the Son in his incarnation. In that case, Augustine refrains from making an

exegetical judgment about this verse and leaves it to future exegetes to reconcile this issue. If the

conjunction is not adversative,[38] Augustine's meaning is far more straightforward: Isa. 48:16d is

proof that the Father and Spirit send the Son, and this refers to Christ's future advent. Whichever

way this should be understood, Augustine, reading the scriptures in Latin, clearly understands the

Spirit to be part of a dual-subject, and sees the Son as the *prosopon* speaking in Isa. 48:16d.

Medieval Scholasticism: Lombard and Aquinas

The Medieval Scholastics develop the second strand of theological reflection as they seek

to follow Augustine. Peter Lombard, in *The Sentences*, walks through the passage of Augustine

cited above. He reads Augustine's citation of Isa. 48:16d as Augustine showing that The Son

being sent by the Spirit "is confirmed by authoritative texts." Lombard does little more than

rehash Augustine in this section, though he clarifies what Augustine leaves murky, and helpfully

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[35] Ibid., 2.5.7. Here Augustine prosopologically reads the Son as the speaker of Jer 23:24
[36] Ibid., 2.5.8.
[37] This is my reading of *quamquam* here.
[38] *quamquam* can also mean "also."

brings in Ambrose's discussion of Isa 48:12-16 in his *On The Holy Spirit*. Lombard understands

the Spirit sending the Son to mean that the Spirit worked in the miraculous conception and came

upon Jesus in order that he might accomplish his ministry.[39]

Thomas Aquinas addresses the issue of the mission of the Divine Persons in Question 43

of *Summa Theologica*. For Aquinas, "For a divine Person to be sent means to begin to exist in a

new way in the world or in the souls of human beings."[40] The Son, for example, "is said to be

sent by the Father into the world, inasmuch as He began to exist *visibly* in the world by taking

our nature."[41] For Aquinas, this means that among the divine persons, being sent does not imply

inferiority. Again, this draws on and elucidates Augustine's discussion in *On the Holy Trinity*.

When it comes to Isa. 48:16d, which he cites in Article 8, he is answering "Whether a Divine

Person is Sent Only by the Person Whence He Proceeds Eternally?" Aquinas claims that this is

not the case, citing Isa. 48:16d as his proof text. In explaining how it can be said that the Spirit

sends the Son, he argues that most appropriately, "the whole Trinity sends the person sent" when

"the person sending is understood as the principle of the effect which [is] the purpose of the

mission."[42] To understand this, we must understand what Aquinas means by "mission."

The "mission" of a divine person refers to "the act of eternal procession with the addition

of a temporal term and effect,"[43] or more simply, "an eternal procession plus a created effect."[44]

The incarnation of the Son and the descent of the Spirit, both at Christ's baptism and at

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[39] Peter Lombard, *The Sentences, Book 1: The Mystery of the Trinity*, trans. Giulio Silano, vol. 1, Medieval Sources in Translation 45 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2008), 1.15.3.

[40] Paul J. Glenn, *A Tour of the Summa* (Rockford, IL: TAN Books and Publishers, Inc., 1978), 37.

[41] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, in *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas*, ed. Anton C. Pegis, vol. 1 (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997), II, q. 43 a. 1.

[42] Ibid., II, q. 43 a. 8.

[43] Steven J. Duby, "Trinity and Economy in Thomas Aquinas," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 21, no. 2 (2017): 39.

[44] Torey J S Teer, ""As The Father Has Sent Me, Even So I Am Sending You": The Divine Missions And The Mission Of The Church," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 63, no. 3 (September 2020): 545.

Pentecost, as well as the sending of the Spirit and the Son by grace into men's souls are all "missions" of the respective persons.[45] Returning to the discussion of Isa 48:16d, the Spirit here can be said to send the Son, because in view here is the whole Trinity's role in bringing about the effect of the Son's mission, which here refers to the incarnation and ministry of the Son. The Son came into this world, going Himself, as well as being Sent by the Father, and being incarnate by the Holy Spirit, as well as anointed by the Spirit at his baptism. The whole Trinity accomplishes this together, and so we can appropriately speak of the Son being sent by the Spirit.

Aquinas and Lombard sought to remain close to Augustine's theology. In doing so, they made use of Isa. 48:16d to develop the second strand of theological reflection I have identified, namely, the Spirit's sending of the Son. Lombard clarified Augustine's citation of the verse, while Aquinas used it to develop his theology of the divine mission.

With the coming of the reformation, there arises an exegetical tradition far more hesitant to read passages in the OT christologically. John Calvin, along with many after him, takes up Isa. 48:16d to further develop our first strand of theological reflection, the deity of the Spirit. But others, including John Owen, further develop the second theological strand.

The Reformation

First strand revisited

John Calvin and Martin Luther both refrain from a Trinitarian interpretation of Isaiah 48:16d. Calvin's hesitancy towards reading Old Testament passages christologically is seen earlier in his treatment of Isa. 48:16b ("Not from the beginning have I spoken in secret") where he says, "Many apply [this phrase] to Christ, though the Prophet meant no such thing… we ought

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[45] Glenn, *Tour of the Summa*, 38; Teer, *"As The Father Has Sent Me,"* 546–7.

to guard against violent and forced interpretations."[46] Calvin wishes to make statements of the text that are textually verifiable. When it comes to Isa. 48:16d Calvin asserts that "Isaiah now begins to speak of himself."[47] Luther acknowledges the trinitarian interpretation of this passage with less scorn than Calvin, but he reads Isa. 48:16 in light of the context, which he takes to be the prophet speaking forward in time to the Babylonian captives about the coming deliverance through Cyrus. Because it is "absurd" for Christ to say that he was sent to Babylon, Luther follows Jewish interpreters and takes Isaiah as the speaker of this entire verse.[48]

Calvin, as he proceeds to mine Isa. 48:16d draws on the verse as an argument for the deity of the Holy Spirit, because he reads this as God *and* the Spirit sending Isaiah.[49] He draws on classical trinitarian language: "He mentions 'the Spirit,' not as if he meant something different from God, because he is of the same essence with him; for in one essence of God we acknowledge Three Persons."[50] He draws on the argument from united actions of God as well: "it belongs to God alone to send [the prophets],… and since the Spirit does this,—since he directs them and gives to them power and efficacy, unquestionably he is God."[51] Calvin then follows our first theological strand, drawing arguments from the text for the deity of the Holy

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[46] John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, trans. William Pringle, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 483. On the development of Calvin's hermeneutics surrounding theophanies, see John Thomas Slotemaker, "'*Fuisse in Forma Hominis*' Belongs to Christ Alone': John Calvin's Trinitarian Hermeneutics in His Lectures on Ezekiel," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 68, no. 4 (2015): 421–436.

[47] Calvin, *Isaiah*, 3:483. Even a modern evangelical scholar such as John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, NICOT 19b (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 278, note 71, cites Calvin in defense of his interpretation.

[48] Martin Luther, *Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman, vol. 17 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 165–66. Calvin differs from Luther, seeing a change of speakers here. In Isa 48:16a-c God speaks, and in 48:16d Isaiah begins to speak. For Luther, Isaiah speaks 16a-d.

[49] Likely because Luther focuses so strongly on the historical context of this passage in Isaiah, he spends little time theologizing on the role of the Spirit here.

[50] Calvin, *Isaiah*, 3:484.

[51] Ibid. See also John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1, LCC 20 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967), 138, where he cites this verse to prove the deity of the Spirit, because "in sending the prophets [Jehovah] shares the highest power with the Holy Spirit."

Spirit. For Calvin, He is the divine sender and inspirer of the prophets. Many Reformed

theologians follow him in this line of thought.[52]

Second strand further developed

Within the Reformed tradition, John Owen represents those who follow the second

theological strand concerning the Son's mission, interpreting Isa. 48:16d as a christological

statement in *ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΟΛΟΓΊΑ or A Discourse Concerning The Holy Spirit*. In arguing that

"The Holy Spirit, …anointed [Christ] with all those *extraordinary powers and gifts* which were

necessary for the exercise and discharging of his office on the earth" at his baptism, Owen cites

Isa. 48:16d. In his explanation, he does not, with Aquinas, focus on the Triune sending of Christ,

but rather on the different ways in which both Father and Spirit can be said to send the Son:

> The same work in sending of Christ is ascribed unto the 'Lord GOD," that is, the Father,
> and to the 'Spirit,' but in a different manner. He was sent by the Father *authoritatively*;
> and the furniture he received by the Spirit, of gifts for his work and office, is called *his
> sending* of him; as the same work is assigned unto different persons in the Trinity on
> different accounts.[53]

Owen roots the differentiation in the Father and Spirit's sending in the unity of the actions of

God: the "same work" is ascribed to Father and Spirit. His focus is on explaining distinctions

within that same work. For Owen, the Spirit sends the Son by giving Him power for His earthly

ministry, or as Owen puts it, "furniture" for his "office."[54] Owen has yet again developed this

second theological strand: Augustine asserted that our text showed that Father and Spirit send the

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[52] Bavinck uses this verse twice to show that the Holy Spirit "sends and anoints the prophets": Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 334; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 88. Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Kim Batteau, Annemie Godbehere, and Roelof van Ijken, trans. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), 40. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Bible Doctrines*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000), 114–15, calls the verse "a somewhat puzzling sentence" but says that either way we take the verse (i.e. the Spirit sending or being sent) we see the Spirit as the source of prophetic inspiration.

[53] John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 171, 173–4. Emphases original.

[54] Owen has in mind here Christ's "*prophetical office*." Ibid., 171.

Son; Aquinas rooted our text in the Trinity's united outworking of redemption in the Son's incarnation and ministry; Owen, identifying this unity, differentiated between the Father's authoritative sending and the Spirit's furnishing Christ for his office.

Conclusion

Unlike Calvin and Luther, we do not have insight into Owen's exegetical considerations that led him to conclude upon reading Isa. 48:16d that (1) The Lord God and the Spirit are sending, and (2) the speaker is the Son. We can however see some exegetical reasoning from others in the Reformed Evangelical strain of Christianity who follow Owen. Octavius Winslow, in *The Work of The Holy Spirit*, cites our text as a passage "which [teaches] the doctrine of the Trinity in the Godhead." He asserts that the speaker here is "The Lord Jesus, who in verse 12, says, 'Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; I am the first, I also am the last.'" [55] Winslow likely treats the words of verse 12 as those of Jesus because in Revelation 1:17 and 22:13, Christ himself says "I am the first and the last." For Winslow then, it seems that all of Isa. 48:12-16 is spoken by "the Lord Jesus," or perhaps better, by the preincarnate Son. Douglas Kelly similarly argues for a trinitarian reading of our text because in verse 15 "the LORD ('I AM') is speaking," but in verse 16 the same LORD is sent by the Lord GOD and his Spirit.[56] John M. Frame makes the same observation as Kelly, and asserts, "From a New Testament vantage point, we can see this as a Trinitarian passage."[57]

Winslow, Kelly, and Frame affirm what I argued in the exegetical section of this paper: Christ is the speaker of all of Isa 48:16. He is the pre-existent Son "from the beginning" who was

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[55] Octavius Winslow, *The Work of the Holy Spirit: An Experimental and Practical View* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), 23.

[56] Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications Ltd, 2008), 468.

[57] John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2002), 636–7. Frame also notes that in the following verse God is given three names: "The LORD—your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel." This "threefold self-description correspond[s] somewhat to the Trinitarian persons."

sent by the Father and furnished by the divine Spirit. To identify the speaker with Him is not wishful thinking. It is reading the Old in light of the New Testament's "revelation of the fullness of God's tri-personal Being."[58] Old Testament Scholars need to be exegetically responsible with the text of scripture. At times, that may require sacrificing reputation for the sake of Christ. This will serve those in our churches who wonder whether their Redeemer, Christ the Son of God, is in the Old Testament at all. In Isaiah 48:16, He is there, sent by the Father and the Spirit.

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[58] Kelly, *Systematic Theology*, 1:468.

Appendix

Origen's Treatment of Isaiah 48:16d.

With regards to who sends the Son, Origen falls on both sides of the debate. *Against Celsus* and the *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* are both later than the commentary on John, and therefore reflect his mature thought on this verse.[59] In *Against Celsus*, Origen cites Isaiah 48:16d as he refutes Celsus' accusation that Jesus learned how to perform his miraculous deeds from Egyptian sorcerers. Origen instead says the Holy Spirit, coming upon Jesus in the form of a dove after His baptism, is the source of his miraculous deeds. To prove this he points to Celsus' own scriptures and identifies Christ as the *prosopōn* speaking in Isa. 48:16d. He acknowledges that "the meaning is doubtful—viz., whether the Father and the Holy Spirit sent Jesus, or the Father sent both Christ and the Holy Spirit" but the latter is correct. His reasoning is "because the Saviour was sent, afterwards the Holy Spirit was sent also, that the prediction of the prophet might be fulfilled."[60] Origen's logic seems to be that because in the gospels we see Christ coming, and the Holy Spirit coming upon Christ later, Isa. 48:16d must be read according to its Hebrew word order: the Father sends the Son, and then His Spirit. In fact, the gospels record this event to show that Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled in this order. Here Origen uses this clause apologetically to defend the validity of Christian scriptures.

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[59] See Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *Origen: New Fragments from the Commentary on Matthew* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), xxi, https://brill.com/view/book/9783657702800/BP000008.xm, for the dating of *Against Celsus* and *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* to the later period of Origen's life. For the *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Stephen E Waers, "Wisdom Christology and Monarchianism in Origen's Commentary on John," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 60, no. 3–4 (2015): 97, prefers a date as early as 217 AD. A later dating (226-231 AD) still makes it earlier.

[60] Origen, *Against Celsus*, trans. Frederick Crombie, vol. 4, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 1.46.

In Origen's second citation of Isa. 48:16d in favor of the dual-object reading, he allegorically reads the Holy Spirit as the "little child" in Matthew 18:2-6. He has already explained that becoming as a little child means being converted to and believing in Christ.[61] He goes from this "simpler" interpretation to ask his readers to consider that the child Jesus sets in the midst of his disciples is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, especially His humility, is our example as believers. We are "to imitate the Holy Spirit, who humbled Himself for the salvation of men." To prove this, Origen quotes Isa. 48:16d and argues that while "this expression is ambiguous," it is both the Son and Spirit who are sent.[62] Here Origen uses the Spirit's being sent as a sign of His humility, which ought to be imitated by Christians.

Origen's last citation of this verse comes from his earlier commentary on the Gospel of John. In explaining what "all things were made through Him" means, Origen comes to the conclusion that the Spirit must be "the most excellent and the first in order of all that was made by the Father through Christ."[63] This teaching, that "the Holy Spirit seems to have need of the Son, to minister to Him His essence" and "that the Spirit must have been called into being by the Word", Origen says, "may certainly raise some difficulty." Why? Because there are passages, like Isa. 48:16d, "where the Spirit is placed above Christ." This seeming inferiority of Christ to the Spirit can be explained: "The Saviour takes a lower place than [the Spirit] in order to carry out the plan which has been made that the Son of God should become man." He cites Hebrews 2:9, where Christ is said to be made "lower than the angels" for the sake of our salvation. His being "lower than the angels" is analogous to his being sent by the Spirit. He is not lower than

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[61] Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. John Patrick, Fifth., vol. 10, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 13.16-17.

[62] Ibid., 13.18.

[63] Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. Allan Menzies, Fifth., vol. 10, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 2.6.

the Spirit, but is sent by the Spirit for our salvation.[64] Origen seems to imply that this sending happens because the Spirit is unable to do the work assigned to him. Assigned to "set right what was wrong upon the earth" by introducing "into human nature… a happy and divine power," the Holy Spirit, "unable to support such a task, puts forward the Saviour as the only one able to endure such a conflict."[65]

This ingenious theologizing carries a host of question with it, which would only be resolved after the Trinitarian controversies of the fourth century. Clearly, Origen exhibits a problematic, subordinationist understanding of the relationship of the Son and the Spirit. There is a hierarchy in the Trinity: the Father is above the Son is above the Spirit. Yet there are positive things to draw from Origen's work. First, Origen is struggling to find language that adequately expresses what he means to say. Seeking to comprehend how the Spirit sends the Son, Origen determines that the task of bringing saving divine power to corrupt mankind "as it were" fell to the Holy Spirit. Origen likely does not believe that at some point in time God assigned tasks, and the Holy Spirit was given this task, could not make heads or tails out of it, and so sent the Son to do it instead. Origen is wrestling with the limits of language for describing the actions of God.

Second, Origen's use of Hebrews 2:9 shows the seeds of good theologizing in that he lets scripture interpret scripture to explain a difficult issue. He also understood the issue this verse brings up: how can the Son be equal to the Father and the Spirit yet be sent by them? Augustine, and the medieval scholastics who inherited his writings, all sought to explain this very thing. Origen recognized the correct issue. Because of his hierarchical understanding of the Trinity, however, even his right approach to scripture leads to the wrong conclusion. Origen reminds us how crucial it is to have good systematic theology and good exegetical theology mutually

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[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.

reinforcing each other. Origen also reminds us to be thankful to God for the developments that have been made in theology. Because Origen made a host of mistakes that prompted years of trinitarian debate, we can enjoy the fruit of that debate in our settled trinitarian confession. In this sense, Origen reminds us that God works all things for good, even our aberrant theologizing.

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