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About Whom Does the Prophet Say This? The Implications of Prosopological Exegesis for Christ-Centered Preaching of the Psalms

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Abstract: *Modern advocates of Christ-centered preaching have championed typology as one of the best strategies to preach Christ from the Old Testament. In this article, I seek to show that when it comes to the book of Psalms, prosopological exegesis offers a better way to preach Christ from many of the Psalms than typology. To demonstrate this claim, I first define prosopological exegesis, then provide examples of the practice from early church Fathers. After this, Psalm 22 and 69 are used as "case studies" to demonstrate instances where the apostles interpreted the Psalms prosopologically. Finally, I discuss the implications of prosopological interpretation for Christ-centered preaching of the Psalms, showing how it supplements typology as another exegetical practice to preach Christ from the Old Testament, and in many cases, provides a richer way to preach Christ from the Psalms than typology.*

Key Words: *Christ-centered preaching, exegesis, prosopological, prosopology, Psalms, typology.*

The practice of preaching Christ from the whole of Scripture has experienced a renaissance in popularity over the past few decades.[1] Preaching Christ from every text was considered normative practice during the first millennium and a half of the church, up until the Enlightenment.[2] During the Enlightenment, the rise of the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation fragmented the sense of the unity of Scripture and divine inspiration and authorship. When this method was used, it evacu-

[1] This has been fueled by the preaching and books of men like Bryan Chappell, Sidney Greidanus, Graeme Goldsworthy, Edmund Clowney, G. K. Beale, Christopher Wright, and Tim Keller.

[2] The exegetical history of Christ-centered preaching and exegesis is traced out in De Lubac's three volumes: Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998–2009).

ated the ability to legitimately see Christ in the Old Testament because the "meaning of the text" could be nothing more than what the human author intended to the original audience. Any Christological interpretation of an Old Testament text was considered a reading into the text because, under the presuppositions of this method, the human authors would not have been able to understand that they were speaking about Christ, nor would there have been any legitimate Christological "fuller sense" in the text that could be discerned in light of Christ's incarnation and passion.

What was considered illegitimate during the Enlightenment and the rise of the historical-critical method is once again considered a legitimate goal in expository preaching. Preachers are encouraged to preach Christ in every sermon, whether their text is from the Old or New Testament. With that said, those championing Christ-centered preaching today have neglected to engage in retrieving some of the Christ-centered reading strategies of the early church. Many warnings have been offered by contemporary advocates of Christ-centered preaching to avoid allegorical interpretation without providing counter-examples, which has hampered many preachers' confidence to preach Christ out of more difficult Old Testament texts. Sidney Greidanus is representative, saying, "If we were to preach the story of Sarah and Hagar (Gen 21) guided by Paul's use in Galatians 4, we would miss the point of the Old Testament story."[3] Dennis Johnson argues that allegory loses controls for interpretation by devaluing the historical and narrative context of the passage.[4] Bryan Chapell agrees, saying that allegorical interpretation devalues the literal sense and allows the interpreter's imagination to make the Bible say "anything we want."[5]

I propose that the continual warnings against allegory and the "allegorism" of the church fathers have prevented modern preachers from using reading strategies which are found in the New Testament itself. Instead of being eisegetical impositions on the text, many of the exegetical practices the early church used to interpret the Old Testament Christologically are used by the New Testament authors themselves. There-

[3] Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 190.

[4] Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 232–33.

[5] Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 76–78.

fore, retrieving the exegetical practices of the early church, specifically prosopological exegesis, will help us more clearly see Jesus in the text of the Old Testament. Recovering this reading strategy can help us better reach our ultimate goal: to faithfully preach Christ from the whole of Scripture in a way that does justice to the text. My proposal in this essay is that prosopological exegesis is often superior to typological exegesis for preaching Christ from the Psalms.

To show the superiority of prosopological interpretation of the Psalms, prosopological exegesis will be defined, then examples of the practice from the early church will be shown. Case studies of the New Testament's interpretation of Psalm 22 and 69 will show the way the apostles interpreted the Psalms prosopologically. Finally, the implications of prosopological exegesis for Christ-centered preaching will be drawn out to show that this reading strategy often makes better sense of the text of Psalms than typological interpretations. Retrieving this exegetical practice helps one more faithfully preach the good news of the person and work of Christ from the whole of Scripture, rather than simply the mechanics of justification or the atonement disconnected from his person.

Defining Prospological Exegesis

Prosopological exegesis is a new name for an old practice. Matthew Bates has now written two books discussing the importance of this reading strategy in the New Testament and the early church.[6] He defines prosopological exegesis as: "a reading technique whereby an interpreter seeks to overcome a real or perceived ambiguity regarding the identity of the speakers or addressees (or both) in the divinely inspired source text by assigning nontrivial prosopa (i.e., nontrivial vis-à-vis the "plain sense" of the text) to the speakers or addressees (or both) in order to make sense of the text."[7] In other words, when an Old Testament text is ambiguous with regard to who is speaking, being spoken to, or being spoken about, prosopological exegesis refers to discerning who is speaking,

[6] Matthew W. Bates, *The Hermeneutics of the Apostolic Proclamation: The Center of Paul's Method of Scriptural Interpretation* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012); 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, 2016).

[7] Bates, *The Hermeneutics of the Apostolic Proclamation*, 218.

being spoken to, or being spoken about (or all three) in a text.[8] The Greek word πρόσωπον (*prosōpon*: later translated *persona* in Latin) originally referred to a "face" or a "mask" that an actor would wear on stage, but by the time of the New Testament had come to refer to "personal presence or the whole person."[9] Thus, prosopological exegesis is concerned with determining which person or persons (most often of the Trinity) are speaking or being spoken about in an Old Testament text. Bates argues that many theologians in the early church believed that through the inspiration of the Spirit, certain prophets were able to "overhear" conversations between the Father and the Son. These conversations were then recorded as Scripture. In other places, various prophets took on the "person" of the Son or the Father as if they were actors delivering a script in a play that would later be acted out on the stage of world history when the Son came into the world.[10]

While this specific term seems to have been recently created by Marie-Josèphe Rondeau,[11] once again, it describes a reading practice that is seen in the church as early as the writings of the New Testament. As an introductory example, consider what the author of Hebrews writes in Hebrews 10. In discussing the inability of the sacrificial system to truly effect atonement, the author of Hebrews says that "when Christ came into the world, he *said*" (Heb 10:5 ESV, italics added) and proceeds to quote from Psalm 40 (Heb 10:5–10). Thus, the author of Hebrews asserts not simply that Jesus typologically fulfills the pattern of some aspect of David's life in Psalm 40, but rather Jesus *is the speaker* of Psalm 40, speaking about the human body the Father has prepared for him in the incarnation and how in the incarnation he has come to do the Father's will. David, through the inspiration of the Spirit, spoke the Psalm in the person (*prosopon)* of the Christ.

This reading strategy continues after the New Testament in the early church as well. For example, Justin Martyr, in his *First Apology*, says:

[8] "Prosopological exegesis demanded that the interpreter identify a speaking character or person (Greek: *prosōpon*; Latin: *persona*) and/or a personal addressee, and early Christian interpreters frequently assigned persons that are not explicitly mentioned in the scriptural passage at hand as an explanatory move" (Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity*, 36).

[9] Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity*, 37.

[10] Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity*, 4–5. See also Craig A. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 192–93.

[11] Bates, *The Hermeneutics of the Apostolic Proclamation*, 186–87.

> However, when you listen to the prophecies, spoken as in the person (of someone), do not think that they were spoken by the inspired Prophets of their own accord, but by the Word of God who prompts them. For, sometimes He asserts, in the manner of a Prophet, what is going to happen; sometimes He speaks as in the name of God, the Lord and Father of all; sometimes, as in the name of Christ; sometimes, as in the name of the people replying to the Lord, or to His Father. So it may be observed even in your own writers, where one person writes the entire narrative, but introduces different persons who carry on the conversation.[12]

Tertullian writes in *Against Praxeas*:

> No, but almost all the Psalms which sustain the role (*personam*) of Christ represent the Son as speaking to the Father, that is, Christ as speaking to God. Observe also the Spirit speaking in the third person concerning the Father and the Son: *The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies the footstool of your feet* (Psalm 110:1). Again, through Isaiah: *Thus says the Lord to my lord Christ* (Isaiah 45:1)…. So in these texts, few though they be, yet the distinctiveness of the Trinity (*Trinitate*) is clearly expounded: for there is the Spirit himself who makes the statement, the Father to whom he makes it, and the Son of whom he makes it. So also the rest, which are statements made sometimes by the Father concerning the Son or to the Son, sometimes by the Son concerning the Father or to the Father, sometimes by the Spirit, establish each several Person (*personam*) as being himself and none other.[13]

Augustine, preaching on Psalm 31 and commenting on verse 5, says:

> Let us listen now to something our Lord said on the cross: *Into your hands I commit my spirit* (Lk 23:46). When we hear those words of his in the gospel, and recognize them as part of this psalm, we should not doubt that here in this psalm it is Christ himself who is speaking. The gospel makes it clear. He said, *Into your hands I commit my spirit; and bowing his head he breathed forth his spirit* (Lk 23:46; Jn 19:30). He had good reason for making the words of the psalm his own, for he wanted to teach you that in the psalm he is speaking. Look for him in it.[14]

[12] First Apology, ch 36 in Justin Martyr, *The First Apology, The Second Apology, Dialogue with Trypho, Exhortation to the Greeks, Discourse to the Greeks, The Monarchy of the Rule of God*, trans. Thomas B. Falls, The Fathers of the Church 6 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1965), 37.

[13] Tertullian in *Against Praxeas* 11, quoted in Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity*, 27–28.

Examples could be further multiplied, but these suffice to show a sampling of how often this exegetical strategy was practiced in the early church. The reason this reading strategy was practiced in the early church is because the example of the New Testament authors encouraged it.[15] They constantly interpret the Psalms as the speech and actions of Christ, particularly psalms of lament. Not only do they portray Christ's speech and work in the passion through prosopological exegesis of the Psalms and Isaiah, in the way that the New Testament authors interpret them, the Psalms open a window into Christ's human soul during the work of salvation.[16]

Further, Jesus himself reads the Psalms in this way. The prime example is when Jesus is teaching in the temple during the Passion week. In Mark 12:35, he poses the question, "How can the scribes say that the

[14] Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms: Volume 1, 1–32*, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000), 1:330–31.

[15] Jason Byassee writes, "While contemporary exegetes may wish, for whatever reason, to say that 'the stone the builders rejected' of Psalm 118 or 'the Lord said to my Lord' of Psalm 110 ought not be read with reference to Christ, Jesus' own exegetical practice demonstrates otherwise and so closes the case for Christian exegetes" (*Praise Seeking Understanding: Reading the Psalms with Augustine*, Radical Traditions [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007], 54).

[16] Michael Cameron says, "The canonical gospels portrayed Jesus using psalms to explain his identity, his message, and above all his passion. The Synoptics cast the story of the crucifixion in terms of lament psalms, especially Psalm 21 (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34), Psalm 30 (Luke 23:46), and Psalm 68 (Matt. 27:34). Luke's post-resurrection Jesus is said to have explicitly taught the apostles 'everything about himself in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms' (Luke 24:44). The apostles are portrayed as preaching and teaching the Psalms as prophecies of the messianic age in general and of Messiah in particular (Acts 2:25–28; 4:25–26; 13:33–37; Rom. 15:8–11; Heb. 1:5–13). But Christians also read the Psalter as the Book of Christ in another way: not only as an 'objective' account of fulfilled prophecies but also as a spiritual revelation of his human soul, in fact as a virtual transcript of his inner life while accomplishing the work of redemption. Paul particularly taught Christians to read the Psalms as echoes of the voice of Christ" (*Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine's Early Figurative Exegesis*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology [New York: Oxford University Press, 2012], 167–68). Quoted Psalm numbers are 1 behind English manuscripts.

Christ is the son of David?" He then quotes Psalm 110:1, saying that David, speaking in the Spirit, says that he heard the speech of the Lord saying to his Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet." Jesus then says that David himself refers to the Messiah as Lord, and questions how he can be both David's Lord and Son. The pertinent point for prosopological exegesis is that in Jesus's interpretation, David under the inspiration of the Spirit hears a conversation between two persons that are both referred to as Lord. This has implications for the doctrine of the Trinity,[17] but it also shows that Jesus read the psalm Christologically, with himself as the referent! He reports that this is divine speech between the Father and the Son (himself), written down thousands of years before his incarnation and concerning the time of his ascension and session, before his return. Even though Jesus had not been born as a human being at the time the Spirit uttered these words through David, he believes he is the referent of the Father's speech in Psalm 110. He disambiguates the identities of the "Lords" that David speaks of in Psalm 110 using prosopological exegesis.[18]

Jesus is not the only person to utilize this sort of interpretation of the Psalms in the New Testament. Both Peter and Paul, in Acts 2 and 13, quote and explain Psalm 16 in their preaching. Peter states that David spoke concerning the Christ and then quotes Ps 16:8–11. Then, he makes an important move. He tells his audience that David clearly could not be speaking about himself, because the words he uttered would not be true if he was their referent. He did die, and his body has seen decay. Because of this, Peter argues that David was speaking prophetically about the coming Christ, knowing God's promise to him about one of his descendants—which Peter infers is Jesus Christ, who was not abandoned to death, nor did his flesh see corruption, because he was raised from the dead. Thus, because Jesus is the referent of David's words, David, through the inspiration of the Spirit, was speaking in the person of the Christ in Psalm 16. This evidence is strengthened by the use of personal pronouns throughout the quoted verses, both in Psalm 16 and in Peter's quotation of it in Acts 2, such as "you will not abandon *my soul* to Hades." Thus, Peter seems to be arguing that the "yet-to-be revealed Jesus was making an in-character speech at the time of David *through*

[17] This is the major thesis of Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity*. He is concerned to demonstrate how prosopological exegesis of the Old Testament in the New Testament was critical for the orthodox formulation of the Trinity as one God existing as three persons.

[18] See Bates's discussion of this text (*The Birth of the Trinity*, 47–62).

David."[19] Jesus spoke through David as David prophetically spoke in the person of the future Christ about his hope of resurrection on the other side of death.

A key element of Peter's exegesis of Psalm 16 is the need to look for another referent since the quoted words are clearly not true of David. Paul makes the exact same argument in Acts 13:36–37 after quoting Ps 16:10. This is important for prosopological exegesis, as it seeks to clarify ambiguous referents. If David's words are not true of David, it is a clue to look for another speaker and/or referent. As will be discussed in more detail below, this contrasts prosopological exegesis with typological exegesis because both Peter's and Paul's "point is specifically that David's experience was *incommensurable* with the words spoken by the Psalmist, but Jesus Christ's was not."[20] Typology depends on a historical pattern and parallel in the experience of both type and anti-type, but Peter and Paul both state that these words were not true of David's life and experiences.[21] Thus, at least in the case of Psalm 16, a typological explanation for how Christ is present in the Psalm goes astray from the New Testament authors' own convictions and fails to sufficiently explain the words of the text.

Multiple church fathers follow the teaching of Peter and Paul, that when David clearly cannot be the referent of a psalm, it is a clue to look for another speaker or addressee. Discussing Ps 2:7–8, Irenaeus says:

> These things were not said to David, for he did not rule over the nations nor over the ends (of the earth), but only over the Jews. So it is evident the promise (made) to the Anointed, to rule over the ends of the earth, is to the Son of God, whom David himself confesses as his Lord, saying in this way, "'The Lord says to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand,'" and the following, as we have said before. For he says that the Father speaks with the Son… it is necessary to affirm that it is not David nor any other one of the

[19] Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity*, 153–54.

[20] Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity*, 72.

[21] Graeme Goldsworthy states, "The essence of typology is the recognition that within Scripture itself certain events, people, and institutions in biblical history bear a particular relationship to later events, people, or institutions. The relationship is such that the earlier foreshadows the later, and the later fills out or completes the earlier" (*Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 77).

> prophets, who speaks from himself—for it is not man who utters prophecies—but the Spirit of God, conforming Himself to the person concerned, spoke in the prophets, producing words sometimes from Christ and at other times from the Father.[22]

He later discusses Isa 50:6, saying that Jesus himself said through Isaiah the words of Isa 50:6.[23] He also says of Ps 3:6, "David did not say this concerning himself, for he is not raised after dying, but the Spirit of Christ, who (was) also in other prophets, now says by David concerning Him, 'I lay myself down and slept, I awoke, for the Lord has received me'—he calls death 'sleep,' because he arose."[24] Augustine's interpretation is similar in his exposition of Psalm 3. He writes:

> That this psalm should be understood as spoken in the person of Christ is strongly suggested by the words, *I rested, and fell asleep, and I arose because the Lord will uphold me* (Ps 3:6). For this seems more in tune with the Lord's passion and resurrection than with the particular story in which we are told about David's flight from the face of his own son who was at loggerheads with him.[25]

He then proceeds to interpret the psalm as referring to Judas' betrayal of Jesus.[26] Theodoret of Cyrus, commenting on Ps 22:9, says, "So blessed David, in the person of Christ the Lord, says, You both formed me in the womb and in turn brought me forth from there."[27] He says at

[22] Irenaeus, *On the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. John Behr, Popular Patristics 17 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 73. Content in parentheses is supplied by the translator, John Behr.

[23] Irenaeus, *On the Apostolic Preaching*, 84.

[24] Irenaeus, *On the Apostolic Preaching*, 87.

[25] Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, 1:76.

[26] Craig Carter lucidly explains Augustine's hermeneutical strategy as he interprets Psalm 3: "Augustine is reading Psalm 3 as a psalm of David, just as anybody who pays attention to the title would do. The psalm is literally about David. But the psalm is also literally about more than merely an incident in the life of David; it is prophetic speech, which can be understood to have been spoken by Christ, who inspired the prophet David and speaks through him… This is not a matter of reading New Testament content into an Old Testament text, because the preincarnate Word, the Son and Wisdom, was really inspiring David so that David's psalm became Christ's own speech" (*Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*, 208).

[27] Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentary on the Psalms, 1–72*, trans. Robert C. Hill, The Fathers of the Church 101 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 148.

the end of his commentary on the psalm, "We see none of this happening to David or to any of his successors. Only Christ the Lord, on the contrary."[28]

These examples suffice to show that prosopological exegesis was practiced frequently by the church fathers. But the most pertinent questions for prosopological exegesis are: Can this be demonstrated from Scripture? Does this align with the interpretive practices of the New Testament authors themselves? When the church fathers use prosopological exegesis, are they interpreting in ways that go with or against the grain of the interpretative practices of the New Testament authors?

Case Studies

In support of an affirmative answer to these questions, two psalms will be used as case studies, Psalm 22 and Psalm 69. These are chosen as paradigmatic examples, because of how frequently they are quoted or alluded to in the New Testament. I will argue that psalms like these are interpretive guides that teach an attentive reader of the New Testament how to read the rest of the Psalms and Prophets.[29] If the presupposition is granted that the New Testament authors are teaching followers of Jesus how to read the Old Testament,[30] the use of these two psalms in the New Testament can be transformative examples for preaching and hermeneutics.[31]

[28] Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentary on the Psalms, 1–72*, 155.

[29] Concerning Augustine, Cameron writes, "The bedrock authority of the dying Savior's exegesis of Psalm 21 (22) discloses his voice throughout the Psalter and indeed the entire Old Testament. Psalm 21 accordingly reveals not only the Mediator's future work but also his secret pre-incarnate presence in the people, writers, and events of the ancient prophetic people" (*Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, 207).

[30] The appropriateness of following the apostles' exegesis of the Old Testament is a major debate in hermeneutical circles. For contrasting answers to the issue, see Peter J. Leithart, *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 29–40; Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), especially his answer on 198.

[31] As an example of this transformative effect of New Testament Scripture as a hermeneutical keystone in the preaching and exegesis of Augustine, Jason Byassee writes, "For Augustine, Christian teaching derives from scripture, and then sends one back to scripture, for new and deeper reading. For example, Augustine's interwoven doctrines of Christ and the church as one body—totus

Psalm 22

Quotations of Psalm 22 are concentrated in the Gospels, but one is also found in the book of Hebrews. Jesus takes the opening words of the psalm on his lips while on the cross in Matt 27:46, saying, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The crucifixion narratives are filled with allusions to the psalm. The mocking of Jesus in Matt 27:39–43 alludes to Ps 22:6–8. John 19:24 tells the reader that they divided up Jesus's clothing and cast lots for it, in direct fulfillment of Ps 22:18. Psalm 22:16 speaks of them "piercing my hands and feet," which is what would happen during a crucifixion. The author of Hebrews puts the words of Ps 22:22 on Jesus's lips in Heb 2:13, identifying Jesus as the speaker. It is plausible that Heb 5:7 is alluding to Ps 22:24. The apostles put direct quotations of verses at the beginning and ending of the Psalm on the lips of Jesus, in one case as he speaks the words directly from the cross; the other by the author of Hebrews, with Jesus speaking after his resurrection. The psalm moves from death to resurrection hope and life on the other side of death, and verses on both sides of the movement are put on the lips of Jesus by the New Testament authors. Further, by speaking the opening words of the psalm from the cross, knowing that his audience would know the full context of the psalm, which ends in triumphant hope and vindication from God, Jesus invites the attentive bystander and later reader to interpret the psalm as being spoken by him in full.[32] Cassiodorus says, "The Lord Christ speaks through the whole of the Psalm…. Though many of the Psalms briefly recall the Lord's passion, none has described it in such apt terms, so that it appears not so much as prophecy, but as history."[33] When interpreted as about

Christus—originate from Paul's teaching on the church as the body of Christ in such places as 1 Corinthians 12:12–27. That exegetically based teaching sends Augustine back to Psalm 21 (eng. 22) with new skills with which to read. In turn, this christologically laden rereading of Psalm 21 affects the way Augustine reads and uses 1 Corinthians 12 and the language with which he speaks of Christology, soteriology, and all the rest of Christian teaching throughout his work" (*Praise Seeking Understanding*, 56).

[32] Augustine concurs, saying, "Why did he say, *My God, my God, look upon me, why have you forsaken me?* unless he was somehow trying to catch our attention, to make us understand, 'This psalm is written about me'?" (*Expositions of the Psalms*, 1:229).

[33] "In the first section He cries that He has been abandoned by the Father, that is, He has undertaken the passion assigned to Him. He commends the great potency of His humility brought by the degradation imposed by men. In

Christ and spoken by Christ in the way that the New Testament authors do, Psalm 22 contains the story of the gospel, the saving death and resurrection of the Christ that results in salvation for the nations.[34]

Identifying the prosopological exegesis of Psalm 22 practiced by the New Testament authors provides a richer understanding of the whole of the Psalm in contrast to a typological explanation, as this is another Psalm that clearly does not align with David's experience. A typological explanation of this text will necessarily be strained, as one will look in vain for a situation in David's life that matches up with the words spoken in the text. Justin Martyr says, "You are indeed blind when you deny that the above-quoted Psalm was spoken of Christ, for you fail to see that no one among your people who was ever called King ever had his hands and feet pierced while alive, and died by this mystery (that is, of the cross), except this Jesus only."[35] This Psalm can only be referring to one person—Christ. The apostles' clarity in showing how the Psalm refers to the crucifixion and resurrection along with the vast amount of quotations and allusions to it means interpretative weight should be given to their interpretation of the Psalm. The apostles' interpretation of Psalm 22 can and should function as a hermeneutical guide to the rest of the Psalms.[36]

the second part He foretold the sacred passion by various comparisons, praying to be freed by divine protection from His savaging enemies. Thirdly, He advises Christians to praise the Lord for having looked on the Catholic Church at His resurrection, so that having heard of this great miracle they may continue in the most salutary constancy of faith. This was so men's weak hearts might not be in turmoil, if the passion alone had been foretold. Let us listen to this psalm with rather more attention, for it abounds in admiration of mighty events" (Cassiodorus, *Explanation of the Psalms, Vol. 1*, trans. P. G. Walsh, Ancient Christian Writers 51 [New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1990], 216).

[34] Chapter 106 in Dialogue with Trypho in Martyr, *The First Apology, The Second Apology, Dialogue with Trypho, Exhortation to the Greeks, Discourse to the Greeks, The Monarchy of the Rule of God*, 313.

[35] Chapter 97 in Dialogue with Trypho. Justin spends chapters 96–106 discussing Psalm 22 and how it is fulfilled in Jesus (Martyr, *The First Apology*, 301).

[36] Theodoret of Cyrus says, "The psalm, then, moves along those lines: more faith is to be placed in the sacred apostles' and the Savior's own clear adoption of the psalm's opening than on those essaying a contrary interpretation" (Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentary on the Psalms, 1–72*, 145).

Psalm 69

While Psalm 69 is not quoted or alluded to as often as Psalm 22, the quotations are spread out throughout the New Testament, unlike the quotations of Psalm 22 which are mostly concentrated in the Passion narrative. Psalm 69:4 is quoted by Jesus in John 15:25. Psalm 69:9a is quoted in John 2:17, Ps 69:9b is quoted in Rom 15:3. Psalm 69:21 is referred to as "fulfilled" in John 19:28–29. Psalm 69:25 is quoted in Acts 1:20. In each of these references, Christ is implied to be the speaker of the psalm, except potentially the quotation in Acts 1:20 which refers to the death of Judas as the fulfillment of the imprecation. When Jesus quotes Ps 69:4, he is talking about how the hatred of the world for him fulfills this verse, ostensibly placing himself as the "me" who the psalmist says they hated without a cause.

The quotation of Ps 69:9a in John 2:17 is intriguing because, after Jesus overturns the tables and cleanses the temple, John says the disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." At the end of the pericope, John says that after the resurrection, the disciples remembered Jesus referring to the temple of his body and they believed "the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken" (John 2:22). The most natural referent for the "Scripture" they believed would be Ps 69:9. If this interpretation is correct, Jesus is being placed as the speaker of the Psalm,[37] and if the disciples are remembering after the resurrection, Jesus seems to be speaking of how zeal for the Father's house will consume him, literally in death. The disciples remember this Scripture after it has been "lived out" in the death of Jesus, which gives credence to it being prophetic speech from the person of the Christ, rather than simply a typological identification with David. It is as if the Spirit had written a script through the prophetic word of David that Jesus then acted out in history.[38]

Paul's quotation of Ps 69:9b in Rom 15:3 also seems to place Christ as the speaker of the psalm through the use of personal pronouns. In

[37] Origen has a similar interpretation in his commentary on John, saying, "However, we must know that Psalm 68 (69), which contains the statement, 'The zeal of your house has devoured me,' and a little later 'They gave me gall for food, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink,' both having been recorded in the Gospels, is placed in the mouth of Christ, indicating no change in the person of the speaker" (*Commentary on the Gospel According to John, Books 1–10*, The Fathers of the Church 80 [Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006], 304).

[38] Broadly following the discussion in Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity*, 115–22.

encouraging the church to welcome one another, Paul states that "Christ did not please himself, but as it is written," then quotes Psalm 69:9b, which says, "the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on *me*" (italics added). With this quotation, Paul seems to be placing Christ as the speaker of the psalm speaking to God the Father about the reproaches of those who reproached God the Father that fell on him on the cross.[39]

The quotation of Ps 69:21 in John 19 is especially pertinent because John says that Jesus says, "I thirst," to fulfill the Scripture, then is given sour wine to drink. This echoes the first-person pronouns used in the psalm: "they gave *me* poison for food, and for *my* thirst they gave *me* sour wine to drink." Jesus places himself as the speaker of the psalm by saying, "I thirst."[40]

Finally, the quotation of Ps 69:25 in Acts 1:20 comes on the heels of Peter saying, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus" (Acts 1:16). Thus, even if Jesus is not explicitly named as the speaker of the psalm in Acts 1, Judas is named as the enemy the psalmist is referring to. His betrayal of Jesus fulfilled what the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand concerning him in Psalm 69, which lends further credence to the Spirit inspiring David to speak Psalm 69 prosopologically as a prophetic script in the person of the Christ. The New Testament authors interpret the prophetic script of Psalm 69 as being realized in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus.[41]

In summary, prosopological exegesis of the Psalms as practiced by the New Testament authors and further developed by the early church fathers can serve as a hermeneutical key for how to read the rest of the Psalms according to their ultimate subject and referent: Christ. The way that some Psalms, such as 2, 22, 31, 40, 69, and 110, appear throughout the New Testament and are interpreted as spoken by Christ or speaking of Christ should demonstrate that other salms not discussed in the New

[39] This is Augustine's interpretation of the verse as well. See Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms: Volume 3, 51–72*, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2001), 3:379.

[40] Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity*, 116.

[41] "Christ's 'Action' earned him the right to speak the Psalms, not only as the Word who divinely authored them, but even more as the Just Man who humanly lived them" (Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, 209).

Testament are similarly spoken by Christ or speaking of Christ. Jesus himself testified to this on the road to Emmaus, saying that all that was written about him in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms had to be fulfilled (Luke 24:44).

Implications of Prosopological Exegesis for Preaching

The implications of prosopological exegesis for preaching are best seen by contrasting it with typological exegesis. Typological exegesis is held by many modern advocates of Christ-centered preaching as one of few legitimate methods of Christ-centered interpretation. They frequently highlight allegorical interpretation in contrast to typological interpretation. Allegory is used as an example of an illegitimate way to interpret the text. In so doing, they often undercut ways that New Testament authors see Christ in an Old Testament text, specifically through the use of prosopology. Prosopological exegesis is a type of allegorical exegesis in that it recognizes the text's ability to "other-speak" and speak beyond its original historical context about Christ.

Dennis Johnson worries that allegorical interpretation devalues redemptive history and thus loses controls on interpretation.[42] Bryan Chapell echoes this worry as well, arguing that not interpreting the Old Testament text according to the grammatical-historical method allows the interpreter to determine the meaning of the text rather than discovering the author's intended meaning.[43] Graeme Goldsworthy contrasts allegory with typology by saying that allegory saw "the old events and images as largely unimportant in themselves" compared to typology caring about the history and establishing a connection between the historical event and its later antitype (fulfillment) that builds upon it.[44] He later borrows John Currid's four characteristics of a type to define typology: "First, it must be grounded in history; both type and antitype must be actual historical events, persons, or institutions. Second, there must be both a historical and theological correspondence between type and antitype. Third, there must be an intensification of the antitype from the type. Fourth, some evidence that the type is ordained by God to foreshadow the antitype must be present."[45] Leonhard Goppelt concurs,

[42] Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 230–33.

[43] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 76–78.

[44] Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 77.

[45] Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 111; Sidney Greidanus has four similar principles in Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 256.

writing, "Only historical facts—persons, actions, events, and institutions—are material for typological interpretation; words and narratives can be utilized only insofar as they deal with such matters."[46] Sidney Greidanus works with a similar definition of typology and warns against "typologizing," meaning, searching for these correspondences in every detail of the texts, which he argues devolves into allegory.[47] He later sets this up as a rule for using typology, instructing readers to "look for a type not in the details but in the *central message* of the text concerning God's activity to redeem his people."[48]

The typological method sketched out above is commonly used by modern interpreters to see Christ in the Psalms. Richard Hays advocates for such an approach, writing, "The earliest church read the Psalms as the Messiah's prayer book … because they read all the promises of an eternal kingdom for David and his seed typologically… 'David' in these psalms becomes a symbol for the whole people and—at the same time—a prefiguration of the future Anointed One."[49] When discussing Paul's quotation of Ps 18:49 in Rom 15:9, which Paul seemingly places on the lips of Christ, Hays writes, "The point here is that Paul does not read the text, in Matthean fashion, as a 'prediction' about the Messiah; rather, the Messiah embodies Israel's destiny in such a way that David's songs can be read retrospectively as a prefiguration of the Messiah's sufferings and glorification."[50] Thus, for Hays, seeing Christ in the Psalms depends on a typology of David representing the people of Israel, a role that the Messiah will take on and intensify. But if the evidence was sufficiently proven above that the New Testament authors read the Psalms prosopologically, frequently highlighting that the text does not align with David's experience, in many places the typological explanation for seeing Christ in the Psalms loses its exegetical grounding and legitimacy.[51]

Prosopological exegesis represents a better way forward for preaching Christ from much of the Psalter and many portions of the Prophets

[46] Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 17–18.

[47] Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 253.

[48] Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 257.

[49] Richard B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 110–11.

[50] Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination*, 115.

[51] Helped by Bates, *Hermeneutics of the Apostolic Proclamation*, 301–2; Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity*, 127, 182–83.

where the speaker is ambiguous. Craig Carter says, "The difference between prosopological exegesis and typological exegesis is that in typological exegesis (at its best) we may *see Christ opaquely* in the Old Testament text, but in prosopological exegesis we actually *hear Christ speak clearly* in the text."[52] What he means by seeing Christ opaquely through the typological method is that at best, one can say that Jesus fulfills a pattern or resembles some aspect of David's life. He is "mimicking" David, but one could easily rebut that this sort of exegesis is an unnecessary flourish to the original historical meaning, which would be whatever the text said about David. But the prosopological exegesis seen in the New Testament encourages Christian readers of the Old Testament to hear Christ speaking out the Psalms. They are not first and foremost about David, with Jesus coming along later to mimic their pattern; their original referent is Christ. Further, if there are many instances throughout the Psalms that are clearly not referring to David, a typological framework has no legitimate recourse to preach Christ from that psalm, because there is no historical correspondence between David's experience and Christ's. Prosopological exegesis, however, allows one to follow the pattern of the New Testament in seeing Christ as the speaker and ultimate referent of the Psalms, even when a historical correspondence with David isn't plausible. David was a prophet who foresaw and spoke of the Christ.[53] Therefore, in many places, we would be *unfaithful* to the text to read the psalm with David as its original referent, with Jesus typologically fulfilling the pattern of David's lived experience.

If prosopological exegesis is a better way forward for preaching Christ from much of the Psalms, are the worries listed above legitimate? Does interpretation of the Psalms lose all controls since it is no longer rooted in a historical typology of David? Jason Byassee helpfully counters this worry in describing Augustine's interpretation of the Psalms: "This is also a thoroughly *historical* vision of exegesis, rooted in the history of the incarnation."[54] The control on prosopological exegesis is the historical gospel story of Jesus's incarnation, death, and resurrection, as described in the New Testament, especially the gospel accounts.[55] The incarnate history of Christ is the historical meaning of the psalm that needs to be discerned, and by all accounts it looks to be the "historical"

[52] Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*, 208–9.

[53] Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, 1:24, 44.

[54] Byassee, *Praise Seeking Understanding*, 62–63.

[55] Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*, 214; Byassee, *Praise Seeking Understanding*, 230.

meaning with which the New Testament authors were concerned.

But if the entire Psalter is a prophetic witness to Christ, what about when the Psalmist confesses his own sins, or his weakness? Augustine's use of 1 Corinthians to develop a theology of Christ as both head and body and his understanding of the incarnation provide helpful answers. In Ps 40:17 the psalmist says, "As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God!" The book of Hebrews has already put earlier parts of this psalm on the lips of Christ, so Augustine must interpret verse 17 with Christ as the speaker. He writes, "Christ himself is that poor man, since he who was rich became poor, as the apostle tells us: *Though he was rich he became poor, so that by his poverty you might be enriched* (2 Cor 8:9)."[56] In Augustine's understanding, Christ's emptying of himself in the incarnation makes sense of Jesus referring to himself in the psalm as "poor." In Ps 41:4, the psalmist asks God to heal him, because he has sinned against God. Augustine comments:

> But surely Christ cannot say this? Could our sinless Head make these words his own?... No, not as from himself; but as from his members he could, for the voice of his members is his voice, just as the voice of our Head is our voice. We were in him when he said, *My soul is sorrowful to the point of death* (Mt 26:38). He was not afraid of dying, for he had come to die; nor was the one who had power to lay down his life and take it up again refusing to die. But the members were speaking through their Head, and the Head was speaking on behalf of his members. This is why we can find our own voice in his in the psalm-verse, *Heal my soul, for I have sinned against you.* We were in him when he cried out, *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*... What sins could there be in him? None whatever, but our old nature was crucified together with him, that our sinful body might be destroyed, and that we might be slaves to sin no more.[57]

Jesus's substitutionary death for the sins of his people allows one to interpret verses referring to the salmist's sins as prophetic witnesses to the atoning work of Christ. The NT has shown that the Psalms are about Christ, so like Augustine, interpreters must wrestle with statements that would seem inconsistent with the NT presentation of Christ.

[56] Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms: Volume 2, 33–50*, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000), 2:221.

[57] Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, 2:232.

The control and boundary for such interpretation is the Rule of Faith, as summarized in the later creeds (Apostle's, Nicene, Chalcedonian) because the Church confesses that the creeds are a faithful summary of the Bible's presentation of the person and work of Christ.[58] If an individual interpretation of a psalm or psalm-verse leads the interpreter to argue that Jesus is created (in reference to his divinity and not his humanity) or sinful, for example, such an interpretation would be ruled out of bounds by the Rule of Faith.[59] Further, one's interpretation of a psalm needs to align with the historical account of Christ given in the NT. The words and details of the psalm should be seen to correspond with some aspect of Christ's life as described in the NT. One can never reach the same confidence of veracity in prosopological interpretation of Psalms that are not quoted in the NT. However, the psalms interpreted prosopologically in the NT can teach interpreters patterns and techniques of interpretation that can be applied to Psalms not quoted by the NT.

Even with the initial difficulty of relating verses in the Psalter like those above to Christ, rather than assuming they don't speak of him, a better way forward is the hard work of seeing how the entire Psalter bears witness to Christ, as Augustine models. This work is warranted because if a legitimate type can only be seen in the major message and not the details of the psalm, the richness of the whole Psalter's prophetic witness to the person and work of Christ will be obscured. The typological method makes a more broad, general connection to Christ from the psalm but cannot get too carried away with "typologizing" the details of the text. But as seen above, the New Testament authors frequently do not interpret the Psalms this way. The New Testament authors interpret the entire psalm as about Christ, not just its central message. The whole gospel story of Christ's preexistence, incarnation, atoning death,[60] resurrection, ascension, session, and return is foretold in the Psalter,[61] as well as insights into his human soul during the work of

[58] R. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 95–116.

[59] Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*, 148–59.

[60] Augustine says of Psalm 22, "The passion of Christ is recounted in this psalm as clearly as in the gospel, yet the psalm was composed goodness knows how many years before the Lord was born of the virgin Mary. It was a herald, giving advance notice of the coming of the Judge" (*Expositions of the Psalms*, 1:228–29).

[61] Athanasius sees in the Psalms this full scope of the gospel, all the way from Christ's eternal generation to his ascension and session and the gospel being proclaimed to the nations. Chapters 5–8 in Letter to Marcellinus Athanasius of Alexandria, *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. Robert C. Gregg, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1980), 103–6; Matthew Bates makes a similar argument in Bates, *Hermeneutics of the Apostolic Proclamation*.

salvation he accomplished. But if the details of individual psalms are not legitimately allowed to speak of Christ, then a preacher's confidence to preach the whole psalm as spoken by Christ or in some way referring to Christ will be diminished.[62] Many in the early church, and seemingly the New Testament authors, read the Psalms as speaking of Christ or spoken by Christ in their entirety. This exegetical practice can give a much greater depth and richness to preaching Christ from the Psalms in a way that appears more faithful to the text than simply making a broad connection to Christ from the life of David. Spending most of one's time in a sermon drawing applicational parallels from the life of David and making a typological connection to Jesus in the final minutes of the sermon is much different than spending most of one's time in a sermon showing how the psalm as a whole bears prophetic witness to the person and work of Christ. Prosopological exegesis allows the preacher to say more than a general statement such as, "Jesus suffered like David suffered." Instead, one sees the depths and specificity of Jesus's suffering, his human soul and emotional experiences during his suffering, and his trust in God during his earthly life; all of which serve as a model to contemporary hearers.[63] The applicational parallels that can be developed are greater under prosopological exegesis, because the hearers of a sermon

[62] Michael Fiedrowicz writes, "The result was that the risky wholesale interpretation of the psalms in reference to Christ, as Augustine understood it, proved repeatedly to be a gain in knowledge of Christ. If at first it seemed likely that some words in the psalms would threaten the personal mystery of the God-man, nonetheless the mode of understanding entailed by the prosopological option for the 'voice of Christ' led to a deeper understanding of Christ's person" (*Expositions of the Psalms*, 1:60).

[63] Cassiodorus, speaking of Psalm 31, says, "We have often said that the words contained in the heading are to be ascribed to Christ the Lord, with whom the whole of this psalm is to be associated, since it sings of His passion and resurrection. He deigned to speak from the level of our lowliness, and even endured a human body's suffering. The good master schools us by his eloquence, so that by imitating that teaching in things heavenly we too may with humility and devotion follow the words of our Head" (*Explanation of the Psalms*, 1:289–90).

can have greater confidence in the validity of God's promises in the Psalms because they have been actualized in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Because Jesus was truly crucified for sins, as the Psalms attest, but then was vindicated by God in the resurrection, as the Psalms also attest, hearers who trust in Jesus can have confidence that they also will be protected and vindicated by God because their lives are hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:1–4).

Conclusion

At the center of preaching stands a person. Preachers are called to preach "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). Paul gives preachers their subject: "Him we proclaim" (Col 1:28). Jesus tells us in both John 5:39–47 and Luke 24:13–48 that the Old Testament Scriptures bear witness to him. Prosopological exegesis will richly aid preachers in their task of preaching Christ from the Psalms. It has the potential to add a richness and depth to Christ-centered preaching that is still lacking in many contemporary approaches. Prosopological exegesis has biblical rationale and will allow the preacher to better preach the person and work of the main subject of the Bible: Christ.