

THE EXEGETICAL ROOTS OF TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

MICHAEL SLUSSER

Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pa.

IN RECENT YEARS systematic theologians have been showing increased interest in studying the doctrine of the Trinity. An integral part of that study should be an exposition of the origins of the doctrine. The question of origins can be posed in an analytical fashion, as Maurice Wiles has done:

... we seem forced to choose between three possibilities:

either (1) we do after all know about the Trinity through a revelation in the form of propositions concerning the inner mysteries of the Godhead;

or (2) there is an inherent threefoldness about every act of God's revelation, which requires us to think in trinitarian terms of the nature of God, even though we cannot speak of the different persons of the Trinity being responsible for specific facets of God's revelation;

or (3) our Trinity of revelation is an arbitrary analysis of the activity of God, which though of value in Christian thought and devotion is not of essential significance.¹

I think that this analytical approach is in important respects secondary to the genetic one. The first Christians spoke about God in the terms which we now try to analyze; surely the reasons why they used those terms are most relevant to a sound analysis.

The main words whose usage needs to be fathomed are the Greek words *prosōpon*, *hypostasis*, *ousia*, and *physis*.² *Prosōpon* is the earliest of these terms to have attained an accepted conventional usage in early Christian speech about God, and therefore the chief determinant of the shape which the complex of terms was to take. But, as John J. Lynch pointed out in the pages of this journal, "The history of how *prosōpon* and *hypostasis* came to be the terms for 'person' in the Trinity and in the doctrine of Christ has not been fully traced."³ This article will examine the way in which *prosōpon* attained currency in Christian speech

¹ Maurice F. Wiles, "Some Reflections on the Origins of the Doctrine of the Trinity," *Working Papers in Doctrine* (London: SCM, 1976) 15.

² The corresponding Latin words, *persona*, *subsistentia*, *substantia*, and *natura*, have a history whose shape is somewhat different but in my opinion secondary both in its growth and its influence to that of the Greek words.

³ John J. Lynch, "Prosōpon in Gregory of Nyssa," *TS* 40 (1979) 729.

about God; in the process we shall gain some insight into the Christological controversies.

STATE OF THE QUESTION

In 1961 Carl Andresen published the most useful contribution to date on the origins of the Trinitarian use of *prosōpon*,⁴ deriving its meaning from the way it was used in Trinitarian exegesis of the Old Testament. This approach is fundamentally sound and most promising, though neglected by systematic theology, as Basil Studer says.⁵ More recently, Andresen's work has been extended in an extremely rich study by Marie-Josèphe Rondeau on the patristic exegesis of the Psalms.⁶

Andresen's thesis was developed as a corrective to Harnack, who had framed the question of the development of the Trinitarian notion of person in terms of the respective responsibility of Tertullian and Hippolytus. Andresen had recourse to a tradition which was older and more widespread than either writer, a practice of discerning the speakers or *prosōpa* in reading Scripture which he called "prosopographic exegesis." I think Andresen is right to correct Harnack on this point, but he continues what I think to be an overemphasis on developments in the West as if they were decisive for the outcome of the main Trinitarian debates in the East.⁷ Rondeau does much to restore balance on this issue,

⁴ Carl Andresen, "Zur Entstehung und Geschichte des trinitarischen Personbegriffes," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 52 (1961) 1-39.

⁵ Basil Studer, "Zur Entwicklung der patristischen Trinitätslehre," *Theologie und Glaube* 74 (1984) 86. He adds that "the grammatical use of *persona* and *prosōpon* determined the exegesis of the Trinitarian texts in Scripture and thus the Trinitarian terminology itself down to the close of the patristic era—primarily in the West but also in the East."

⁶ Marie-Josèphe Rondeau, *Les commentateurs patristiques du Psautier (IIIe-Ve siècles)* 1: *Les travaux des Pères grecs et latins sur le Psautier. Recherches et bilan*; 2: *Exégèse prosopologique et théologie* (Rome: Oriental Institute, 1982 and 1985). Note should also be taken of the new book by Andrea Milano, *Persona in teologia: Alle origini del significato di persona nel cristianesimo antico* (Naples: Edizioni Dehoniane, [1984]). Milano's book traces the background of the theological concept of person, which overflows the bounds of particular words such as *prosōpon* or *hypostasis*. He shows familiarity with the notion of what Andresen calls "prosopographic exegesis," but is more concerned with finding the antecedents of Boethius' definition of person.

⁷ There can, of course, have been indirect influences, although I am not prepared to trace and defend them here. The prime possibilities are through Constantine's personal influence at Nicaea (see Wolfgang A. Bienert, *Das vornicaenische homoousios als Ausdruck der Rechtgläubigkeit*, "Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte" 90 [1979] 5[151]-29[175]) and through Rome's stubborn support of Paulinus and his party in the Antiochene schism. Andresen ("Zur Entstehung" 36) sees Basil and Athanasius as especially influenced by contacts with Western theology.

since she is studying commentaries on the Psalms and has more interesting and extensive Greek material with which to work. She shows how what she calls prosopological⁸ exegesis was, in the hands of the Fathers, not only "a tool of literary analysis and historical identification, but also and especially one of spiritual perception and theological elaboration,"⁹ and its applications extended into the doctrines of the Trinity, inspiration, Christ, and the Church. It was also the source of the use of *persona/prosōpon* in Christian theology, although, as these terms were adapted to use in Trinitarian doctrine, Christology, and ecclesiology, new theological meanings displaced their specialized literary and dramatic sense.

While Rondeau's excellent book corrects the imbalance in Andresen's article, I would contest some particular points of his to which she does not object: his division of prosopological exegesis into two distinct types, represented by Justin and Tertullian respectively,¹⁰ and his proposal that in the Greek East this style of exegesis was so characteristic of Sabellians and Marcellus of Ancyra that more orthodox writers were reluctant to use it in developing their Trinitarian ideas.¹¹ But I prefer to defer a detailed discussion of Andresen's whole article to another occasion;¹² here I intend to give a positive exposition of what I shall call, with Rondeau, "prosopological exegesis" and its influence on the development of both Trinitarian and Christological theology.

PROSOPOLOGICAL EXEGESIS

Justin, Tertullian, and Athanasius all explicitly derive their exegetical method from literary procedures. Justin's explanation of his method is in *1 Apology* 36, 1-2, where he says:

⁸ Andresen had used the term "prosopographische," but, as Rondeau says (*Les commentateurs* 1, 19), "prosopography" has come to mean not the identification of speakers in a text but the cataloguing of mentions of individuals.

⁹ *Ibid.* 2, 9.

¹⁰ "Zur Entstehung" 18-21; see also 23-24, n. 39.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 30-32. Nothing prevents such an exegesis from having been the common tradition of orthodox and Sabellians, with the key difference being whether each *prosōpon* exists as truly being or only as fictive. As for the alleged chilling effect of Marcellus of Ancyra's use of prosopological exegesis, Rondeau points out that Marcellus of Ancyra's chief opponent, Eusebius of Caesarea, extends the old argumentation with new Scripture texts and deeper analysis of the person of the Word "en fonction d'une problématique qui est celle de Marcel d'Ancyre" (*Les commentateurs* 2, 177).

¹² A fortiori I omit from the main text my arguments with the comments on Andresen by Joseph Moingt, *Théologie trinitaire de Tertullien* (Paris: Aubier, 1966). Moingt (2, 559) would allow Andresen's thesis only if the same formula (*apo prosōpou*) were always used and a true "tradition" could be shown to have existed on this point. I find his objections Procrustean.

But when you listen to the words of the prophets spoken "as from a person" (*hōs apo prosōpou*),¹³ do not suppose that they are said by the inspired people themselves, but by the divine Logos¹⁴ which is moving them. For sometimes by way of prognostication it says what things will happen, sometimes it speaks as from the person of God the Ruler and Father of all things, sometimes as from the person of the Christ, sometimes as from the person of the people responding to the Lord or to his Father—just as even in your writings it is to be noticed that while there is one who writes everything, there are distinct persons speaking.

Over the next several pages Justin proceeds to give examples of what he means, showing that in the Old Testament sometimes the Father is speaking (chaps. 37, 44), sometimes the Christ (38), sometimes the prophetic Spirit is foretelling things to come (39–42) or teaching (44), sometimes the people is speaking (47). Even the tenses of the prophets' words are to be noted, for with the past tense the Spirit "foretells what it surely knows will happen as already having happened" (42). Grammatical analysis of the text forms the basis of Justin's method of interpretation.¹⁵

Tertullian takes up this method in *Prax.* 11, where he uses it to refute the monarchian attempt to collapse all real distinctions in the Godhead. Citing several passages from the Psalms and Isaiah, he derives from them a rule that "the one who speaks and the one about whom he speaks and the one to whom he speaks cannot be seen as one and the same."¹⁶ What

¹³ Bernard Dominique Marliangeas, *Clés pour une théologie du ministère: In persona Christi, in persona ecclesiae* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1978) 34, gives L. Pautigny's translation of these words: "s'exprimer comme en leur propre nom," which I think is misleading, like Rondeau's ". . . prononcées par les prophètes à la première personne" (2, 24). Justin's awkward locution points to occasions when the prophets are speaking in someone else's name, but do not state the fact explicitly.

¹⁴ *theiου logou*. It would be inappropriate to press this terminology to Trinitarian conclusions and claim that, in Justin's mind, it was not the divine Spirit who was responsible for the inspiration of the prophets (see, e.g., *1 Apol.* 61: ". . . the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets foretold everything about Jesus").

¹⁵ Irenaeus speaks of using the same procedure: ". . . so consequently God is addressing one and the same person, that is, I say, Christ the Son of God. Since David says: *The Lord hath said to me*, one must say that it is not David who is speaking; nor does any other at all of the prophets speak in his own name, for it is not a man who utters the prophecy; but the Spirit of God, taking form and shape in the likeness of the person concerned, spoke in the prophets; sometimes He spoke on the part of Christ, sometimes on that of the Father. So most properly does Christ report in the first person, through David, the Father's speech with Him; and most properly also does He say the other things too through the prophets in the first person. . . ." (*Epid.* 49–50, tr. Joseph P. Smith, *St. Irenaeus: Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* [ACW 16; New York: Newman, 1952] 80).

¹⁶ "non posse unum atque eundem videri qui loquitur et de quo loquitur et ad quem loquitur" (*Tertullian's Treatise against Praxeas*, tr. Ernest Evans [London: SPCK, 1948] 100). Andresen (18–19) is right to make much of this passage, but he does not quote what precedes and follows, where Tertullian speaks most directly to the Trinitarian issue: the

Tertullian means by this is explained at the end of *Prax.* 11:

So in these [texts], few though they be, yet the distinctiveness of the Trinity 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 as being himself and none other.¹⁷

In other words, the dialogue structure of Scripture enables us to identify Father, Son, and Spirit as the interlocutors, inside or outside of the text.

Another theologian who adopts procedures of literary analysis in dealing with Scripture is Athanasius.¹⁸ In *C. Ar.* 1, 54, he says:

Now it is right and necessary here, as in the case of all divine Scripture, faithfully to grasp the time (*kairon*) of which the Apostle wrote, and the person (*prosōpon*), and the subject (*pragma*), lest the reader, from ignorance either of these things or anything similar, may remain outside of the true understanding. For even that eunuch so eager to learn understood this, when he entreated Philip asking: "I pray you, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?" For he was afraid that, taking the reading in the wrong person (*para prosōpon*), he would err from the sound understanding.¹⁹

This principle is then applied to the Arians: "For if they had known the person and the subject and the time referred to in the apostolic word, the stupid people would not have committed such a great impiety, attributing the human characteristics to the divinity" (1, 55).²⁰ Athanasius makes similar methodological distinctions elsewhere.²¹ His theological reading of Scripture and of other texts required that he advert to literary factors in the text: what time is supposed by the text, who is speaking or acting, to whom reference is being made, what the subject

prosopographic exegesis of Scripture can yield valid insight into God only if God is true and refuses to deceive us by the way inspired Scripture is phrased.

¹⁷ This translation is from Evans 144–45.

¹⁸ My choice of Athanasius should not be taken as implying that earlier authors such as Origen disdained prosopographic exegesis. Cf. Rondeau, *Les commentateurs* 2, 39–40; she provides a detailed exposition of Origen's use of the method.

¹⁹ Rondeau (2, 23, n. 19) notes a similar association in *1 Clem.* 16.

²⁰ The Scripture passage in question is Heb 1:4, "Being made so much greater than the angels."

²¹ *C. Ar.* 2, 8: "But that understanding (*toi autēn dianoian*) and the time (*kairon*) and the person (*prosōpon*) the Apostle himself is more than able to make clear for us, who also writes, 'being faithful to the one who made him' [Heb 3:2], if we take the things which precede. . . ." *Decr.* 14, 1: "Whoever does not merely skim the reading, but who also searches out the time (*kairon*) and the persons (*prosōpa*) and the need (*chreian*) [which gave rise to] the writing, and thus distinguishes and penetrates the meaning of the things which have been read, will find this understanding (*dianoian*) standing fairly in the text." See also *Sent. Dion.* 4, 4.

under discussion is, or the *Sitz im Leben*²² of the text. It is this process of literary analysis which plays a major role in the development of the Christian Trinitarian distinctions, and, as the last example from Athanasius shows, is also of great Christological importance.

TRINITARIAN DISTINCTIONS

For a more extended illustration of the application of this method to Trinitarian distinctions, I return to Justin and his famous discussion of how Scripture shows that there is "another God besides the one who made all things."²³ His primary locus for his scriptural demonstration is the narrative in Gen 18–19 of the visit of three heavenly messengers to Abraham at the oak of Mamre. If God appeared to Abraham at Mamre (which Trypho admits²⁴), it must have been as one of the three visitors, the one who returned in Gen 21:12 to advise Abraham to cast out Hagar and her son, and who is then named "God."²⁵ Trypho grants this point in generous fashion, but claims that it is still not proven that there is another God besides the one who appeared to Abraham and the other patriarchs and prophets.²⁶ In reply, Justin sets out to prove that the one who appeared to the patriarchs and to Moses is distinct (*heteros*), "in number but not in purpose," from the God who made all things.²⁷ What follows is literary analysis. In Gen 19:23–25 two "Lords" are named: (1) the one who rained down brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah after discussing this plan with Abraham,²⁸ and (2) the one from whom they were rained down "out of heaven."²⁹ One of Trypho's companions tries to make this literary argument prove that there are three Lords, for

²² This is what I think Athanasius means by the need (*chreian*) treated as a factor in n. 21 above: Why was the author writing this, and what light can that throw on the meaning of the text?

²³ Trypho challenges Justin on this point as early as *Dial.* 50, 1, but Justin does not begin his demonstration until *Dial.* 55, and he continues it through *Dial.* 67, even though Trypho is portrayed as already willing to grant the point in *Dial.* 57, 3.

²⁴ *Dial.* 56, 4.

²⁵ The connecting link for Justin between the two passages is the return promised in Gen 18:10, 14, which he sees fulfilled in Gen 21:12 (*Dial.* 56, 8). Even sharing Justin's presuppositions about the unity of the text and how to read it, one might prefer to place the return at Gen 21:1.

²⁶ *Dial.* 56, 9.

²⁷ *Dial.* 56, 11: *arithmō legō alla ou gnomē*. For this use of *gnomē*, compare Ignatius of Antioch, *Eph.* 3, 2.

²⁸ See Gen 18:17–33. That this one is "the Lord" is clearly stated in Gen 18:17, 20, 22, 26, 27, 33.

²⁹ This passage, especially Gen 19:24, became a classic locus in Christian argument, and references to it became more and more compressed. See Irenaeus, *Epid.* 44 and *Haer.* 3, 6, 1; Tertullian, *Prax.* 16 (Evans 108.27–28); Photinus, in Epiphanius, *Haer.* 71, 2.

one of the angels who went to Sodom is also called "Lord" in the text.³⁰ Justin quickly brings in correlative passages from the Psalms: "The Lord said to my Lord. . ." and "Your throne, O God, is forever . . . therefore the God your God has anointed you. . . ,"³¹ to show that the Holy Spirit calls God and Lord only the Father of the universe and His anointed; then he proceeds to examine in detail the question of who exactly is identified in these terms in Gen 18–19.³²

Justin uses the same method in other instances. In connection with four episodes in which the patriarch Jacob encounters one whom he knows as God,³³ and Moses' meeting with God in the burning bush,³⁴ Justin identifies the one they met with the God who appeared to Abraham at Mamre. Trypho attempts to divide the being whom Moses met in the burning bush into two, saying that "it was an angel who was seen in the flame of fire, but God who spoke with Moses, so that in that vision there were two at the same time, both an angel and a God."³⁵ Justin first notes that this would make no difference to his overall point, since even in that case

the God who told Moses He was God of Abraham and God of Isaac and God of Jacob will be not the Maker of the universe but the one who has been shown to you to have appeared to Abraham and to Jacob, who serves the will of the Maker of the universe and who likewise ministered to His will in the judgment on Sodom. So even if, as you say, you should hold that there were two, both an angel and a God, no one who had even a little intelligence will dare to say that the Maker and Father of the universe, having left all that is above the heavens, appeared in a little corner of the earth.³⁶

In fact, the God who appeared to Moses is called "angel" in just the same way as in the accounts of Jacob's meetings with the same God. The key issue for us here is not the nature of the relationship between these two

³⁰ He seems to be referring to the vocative singular *kyrie* in Gen 19:18.

³¹ Ps 109:1 LXX; Ps 44:7–8 LXX.

³² *Dial.* 56, 17–23.

³³ *Dial.* 58 (Gen 31:10–13, 32:22–30, 35:6–10, and 28:10–19).

³⁴ *Dial.* 59 (Exod 3:16).

³⁵ *Dial.* 60, 1. This example shows that "dividing the sayings," a procedure which we encounter in Antiochene and Western Christology, is not an exclusively Christological phenomenon but has its roots in the very method of reading Scripture prosopologically.

³⁶ *Dial.* 60, 2. A methodologically similar argument is proposed by Ptolemy the Gnostic in his *Letter to Flora*: "It remains to us to ask who is this god who gave the law. But this too has, I think, been demonstrated to you in what preceded, if you listened carefully. For if it was not laid down by the perfect God Himself, as we have taught, neither was it by the adversary, which it would not at all be permitted to say. Some other than these is the one who laid down the law" (Epiphanius, *Haer.* 1, 33, 7).

whom Justin names "God," whether or not it be a subordinationist one,³⁷ but the method of literary analysis by which he establishes that in Scripture there are two to whom the names "God" and "Lord" are applied. He does not use the term *prosōpon* in this passage, but that does not diminish the fact that even here he is considering the *prosōpa*,³⁸ the kind of literary analysis to which I have been referring, in which one tries to determine exactly who is speaking, who is spoken to, who is being referred to. One need not agree either with the method or with Justin's use of it to recognize that this is what he is doing.

EXCURSUS: CLASSICAL AND JEWISH ANTECEDENTS

As has been pointed out, this procedure is not a peculiarly Christian intervention, although its application to the Trinitarian character of God is. According to Andresen, Origen's *Cels.* 7, 36 speaks of this development of literary characters, each with its own viewpoint and individuality, as going back at least to Homer, and studies of Stoic interpretation of Homer show that he was not alone in his view.³⁹ Platonic school tradition made similar moves in interpretation and drew ontological conclusions from their analysis, which Andresen says made that tradition especially congenial for thinkers like Justin and Origen.⁴⁰

Andresen also cites a number of illustrative passages from Philo, showing that the Alexandrian Jewish theologian also interpreted Scripture as showing Moses speaking "in the person of" God; his examples are *De specialibus legibus* 4, 7, 39; *De fuga et inventione* 25, 137; *De mutatione nominum* 2, 13; and especially *De vita Moysis* 2, 35, 188: "Of the divine utterances, some are spoken by God in His own Person with His prophet for interpreter, in some the revelation comes through question and answer, and others are spoken by Moses in his own person, when possessed by God and carried out of himself."⁴¹ Likewise Andresen shows that Philo deals with the question of the apparent plurality of creators raised by "Let us make . . ." in the interpretation of Gen 1:26-27 in *De opificio* 24, 72-75.⁴² To his useful references may be added

³⁷ This very complicated question is briefly dealt with in my doctoral dissertation, "Theopaschite Expressions in Second-Century Christianity as Reflected in the Writings of Justin, Irenaeus, Melito and Celsus" (Oxford University, 1975) 9-16 (as a general problem) and 37-48 (in Justin).

³⁸ According to Rondeau, *Les commentateurs* 2, 28-29, the *apo prosōpou* formula has only prepositional value, and its presence or absence is unimportant.

³⁹ "Zur Entstehung" 14-17; see also his "Justin und der mittlere Platonismus," *ZNW* 44 (1952-53) 182-83.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 17.

⁴¹ Tr. F. L. Colson, in the Loeb Classical Library, *Philo* 6 (London: Heinemann, 1959) 544.

⁴² Andresen, "Zur Entstehung" 12; nn. 20-21 contain all his references to Philo.

several more which use the phrase *ek (tou) prosōpou tou theou*,⁴³ and other places where Philo shows that he reads Scripture with an interpretive framework quite similar to the one we have seen later Christian authors using. In *De posteritate Caini* 32, 110–11 he notes the several factors which condition an author's choice of style: "Nor is it only persons (*prosōpa*) and matters dealt with (*pragmata*) that occasion our speech to vary its form, but the causes (*aitiai*) too of the things that happen, and the ways in which they happen, and besides these, times (*chronoi*) and places (*topoi*) which enter into all things."⁴⁴ Philo even provides one instance of *prosōpon* used of a character in narrative.⁴⁵ The evidence from his work supports the theory of a recognized literary method of exegesis.

The considerations we have been presenting can also be illuminated from classical literature, and Andresen has made efforts in that direction.⁴⁶ To his suggested parallels may be added the grammarians' use of *prosōpon*⁴⁷ and the deliberate way in which authors introduced characters in their works, as illustrated from Cicero's *Att.* 13, 19, 3–4:

If I had made Cotta and Varro discuss it between them, as you suggest in your last letter, I should have been a *muta persona*. This is quite agreeable if the characters (*personis*) belong to history. . . . In these too the characters (*personae*) were such that I had to keep silent. . . . But my recent compositions follow the

⁴³ *De Cherubim* 14, 49; *De posteritate Caini* 48, 167; *Quod Deus sit immutabilis* 6, 23 and 24, 109; *De plantatione* 15, 63; *De confusione linguarum* 33, 168; *De mutatione nominum* 5, 39; *De somniis* 2 32, 221.

⁴⁴ Tr. Colson, LCL *Philo* 2, 391. Other language parallel to the usage of our Christian interpreters can be found in *De specialibus legibus* 2 2, 6: ". . . never staying to examine whether the places (*topous*) are profane or holy, whether the occasions (*kairous*) are suitable, whether they themselves are pure in body and soul, whether the business (*pragmata*) is important or the objects (*chreias*) necessary" (tr. Colson, LCL *Philo* 7, 309); *De specialibus legibus* 3 15, 85: ". . . and yet how can it be called the same when the times (*chronois*), the actions (*praxesi*), the motives (*boulemasi*) and the persons (*prosōpois*) are different?" (tr. Colson, *ibid.* 529); and finally the curious explanation of the coat of many colors in *De Iosephi* 7, 32: ". . . for political life is a thing varied and multiple, liable to innumerable changes brought about by personalities (*prosōpois*), circumstances (*pragmasin*), motives (*aitiais*), individualities of conduct, differences in occasions (*kairōn*) and places (*topōn*)" (tr. Colson, LCL *Philo* 6, 157 and 159). While none of these passages refers directly to literary interpretation, they all show how current in Philo's thinking was the "who, what, when, where, why" structure, and they give us examples of the consistency in variety of the Greek terms used in this connection.

⁴⁵ *De cherubim* 12, 54, where he says that Moses clearly identifies the character of Eve.

⁴⁶ Andresen, "Zur Entstehung" 14–18.

⁴⁷ Gustavus Uhlig, ed., *Grammatici graeci* 1/1 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1883) 171. See also Dionysius' definition of a verb (*hrēma*) and his explanation of the three grammatical persons as respectively *aph' hou*, *pros hon*, and *peri hou ho logos* (*ibid.* 46–47 and 51). The Scholia Marciana on Dionysius paraphrase this as *tou legontos kai prosakouontos and mnemoneuomenou*; see A. Hilgard, ed., *Scholia in Dionysii Thracis Artem grammaticam* (*Grammatici graeci* 1/3, 402).

Aristotelian pattern, in which the other roles in the dialogue are subordinate to the author's own.⁴⁸

CHRISTOLOGICAL DISTINCTIONS

It would be a mistake to suppose that Christian thinkers used prosopological exegesis solely as a key to the hidden Trinitarian face of God in the Old Testament. The method was understood to have general application, and consequently it became involved in Christological discussion as well.

As we have seen, Justin distinguished the character of Christ from the highest God in Old Testament texts by looking for the persons: the one speaking, spoken to, or spoken about. He did not use the same method to subject the words and deeds of Christ himself to analysis. According to Rondeau, the professedly Christological use of the prosopological method begins with Origen, who reflects upon "the involvement of the speaker in his utterance, and consequently the possibility of drawing from the utterance some knowledge of the speaker himself."⁴⁹ Neither Origen nor Justin, however, engages in dividing up the sayings and deeds of Christ and assigning them to two speakers or agents as some other writers of their time did.

The first to do that were the Gnostics, particularly those concerned to distinguish the Christ from above and the Jesus from below. Irenaeus says: "And besides, they divide the prophecies, wanting some to be said by something from the mother, some by something from the seed, and some by something from the Demiurge. But they also similarly [contend that] Jesus spoke something from the Savior, something from the mother, something from the Demiurge."⁵⁰ Irenaeus himself refuses to divide either the prophecies or Jesus in this way,⁵¹ and the passages sometimes used to support the contrary view are not compelling. For example, in *Haer.* 3, 19, 3 we read: "On the one hand, the Logos became quiescent so that he could be tempted and be dishonored and be crucified and die; on the other hand, the human being was taken up by the Logos in his conquering

⁴⁸ Tr. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Cicero's Letters to Atticus* 5 (Cambridge: University Press, 1966) 211. *Muta persona*, incidentally, is Shackleton Bailey's translation of the manuscript *kophon prosôpon*.

⁴⁹ Rondeau, *Les commentateurs* 2, 96.

⁵⁰ *Haer.* 1, 7, 3.

⁵¹ His view is well summarized by William Sanday, *Christologies Ancient and Modern* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910) 24: "The central position of Irenaeus is the assertion of the true deity and true humanity of Christ. He speaks of a *commixtio et communio dei et hominis* (iv.20.4), and he does not distinguish between the working of the two sides as they are distinguished in the doctrine of the Two Natures."

and enduring and rising and being received on high."⁵² In Irenaeus this being "quiescent" means refraining from one's proposed impulse.⁵³ It does not refer to escaping from external influences, and consequently does not mean that the Logos and the human being were doing separate things. Likewise, "was taken up" for him "did not mean the absorption of the human being in the divinity, but the disappearance of human fragility."⁵⁴ Irenaeus' intent throughout (not surprisingly, since he was arguing against Gnostics) was to underline the unity of the subject of all Christ's actions and experiences.

Tertullian, however, does begin to separate the Scripture texts involving Jesus and assign them to his divinity and his humanity respectively. The most famous and influential passage is *Prax.* 27:

The characteristic property of each substance is preserved in so real a way that the Spirit carried on its own activities in him—that is, powers and works and signs—and at the same time the flesh was involved in its passions, hungering in his encounter with Satan, thirsting in his meeting with the Samaritan woman, weeping over Lazarus, disturbed to the point of death, and at length dead.⁵⁵

Tertullian is going through the Gospel references to Jesus and doing much the same thing as Justin did in the Old Testament when he established the distinct character of the Father and the Word; the difference here is that Tertullian assigns individual texts of Scripture to the human or the divine in Jesus, and this division is made the basis for an analysis of the underlying reality. In *Prax.* 30 Tertullian makes the cry from the cross in Mt 27:46 the cry of the manhood, not of God: "But this voice belongs to the flesh and the soul, that is, the human being, not to the Word nor the Spirit, that is, not to God."⁵⁶ Tertullian has been defended as "not compromising the unity of Christ"⁵⁷ with this language,

⁵² This is Richard A. Norris Jr.'s translation in *The Christological Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 56–57. Norris is correct in preferring the Latin text *absorto autem homine* to Theodoret's quotation in the *Eranistes*, which reads *sunginomenou de tō anthrōpō*. What Irenaeus probably wrote was *katapothentos tou anthrōpou*, an expression which Theodoret could not have allowed in the mouth of an orthodox Father (see PG 83, 153C, where the expression is used by Eranistes).

⁵³ *quiescere/hēsuchazein*; see *Haer.* 4, 18, 3: "Quiescere autem quid aliud est quam desinere a proposito impetu?" See also *Haer.* 2, 28, 4, where *quiescere* clearly means a refraining from activity, not a freedom from being acted upon.

⁵⁴ Albert Houssiau, *La christologie de saint Irénée* (Louvain: Univ. Louvain, 1955) 195.

⁵⁵ Tr. Norris, *Christological Controversy* 63.

⁵⁶ Rondeau, *Les commentateurs* 2, 61, says that Origen sometimes designates the speaker by "le personnage qui parle (*to prosōpon legon*) est un tel,' ou le tour 'ceci est la voix (*uox*) d'un tel.' "

⁵⁷ Raniero Cantalamessa, *La cristologia di Tertulliano* (Fribourg: Edizioni Universitarie, 1962) 186.

but when one reads similar language from the time of the Nestorian controversy one can hardly help but be impressed with the power of the prosopological method of exegesis to give rise to metaphysical analysis.

Origen occasionally distinguishes the human in Christ prosopologically, but, as Rondeau says, his Christology "is less concerned with the two natures in Christ than with his [successive] conditions in the history of salvation,"⁵⁸ and consequently Origen's employment of the method does not lead to a static analysis or a division of Christ.

Athanasius engages in Christological prosopological exegesis as well, but he does so with a subtlety which is not always appreciated. A fine example is in *Ar.* 3, 29–33,⁵⁹ which discusses the "double account of the Savior" in Scripture, according to which

...the things proper to this flesh are said to belong to him (*autou legetai*) because he was in it—such things as being hungry, being thirsty, suffering, getting tired, and the like, to which the flesh is susceptible. But the proper works of the Logos himself, such as raising the dead and making the blind see and healing the woman with a hemorrhage, he accomplished through the instrumentality of his own body (*dia tou idiou sōmatos*).⁶⁰

A further explanation of this comes in *Ar.* 3, 32:

Thus, when it was necessary to raise up Peter's mother-in-law, who was suffering from a fever, humanly⁶¹ he extended his hand but divinely he caused the disease to cease. Likewise, in the case of 'the man blind from birth' it was human spittle which he spat, but divinely he opened the man's eyes by means of clay. And where Lazarus is concerned, he uttered human speech in his capacity as a human being (*hōs anthrōpos*), but divinely, in his capacity as God (*hōs theos*), he raised Lazarus from the dead.⁶²

⁵⁸ Rondeau, *Les commentateurs* 2, 106. She gives as examples of Origen's assigning something in Scripture to the humanity of Christ a passage in his commentary on the Psalms (PG 12, 1296A) and another from *Comm. in Joh.* 1, 28 (30), 191–96 (GCS 10, 35–36).

⁵⁹ So far I am unconvinced by the arguments put forward by Charles Kannengiesser, *Athanasie d'Alexandrie, évêque et écrivain* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1983), in support of his hypothesis that *Ar.* 3 had a different author from *Ar.* 1–2; see my review of his fascinating book in *TS* 46 (1985) 144–46. *Ar.* 3, 29–33 is easily available for discussion with students in Norris, *Christological Controversy* 87–92, and except where noted I have used Norris' translation in what follows.

⁶⁰ *Ar.* 3, 31.

⁶¹ Norris (90) has "it was a human act when" for the Greek *anthrōpinōs* and "it was a divine act when" for *theikōs*. While in general this is a good translation, it is not adequate when the precise point of this paper is under discussion; so I have taken the liberty of translating the two terms with "humanly" and "divinely" respectively.

⁶² The end of *Ar.* 3, 40 is a more compressed example: "Just as he asked questions humanly and raised Lazarus divinely, so the words 'he received' are said of him humanly, while the subjection of the angels gives evidence of the deity of the Logos." See also the middle of *Ar.* 3, 46, and 3, 56.

Athanasius as a rule⁶³ does not divide these actions as if they came from two centers of agency, but rather uses either the adverbial approach we see here, or the expressions “as man, as God,” or prepositional phrases introduced by *kata*.⁶⁴ Earlier examples from Athanasius’ writings occur in *De incarnatione*,⁶⁵ the second *Oration against the Arians*,⁶⁶ and *On the Opinion of Dionysius*.⁶⁷

Eustathius of Antioch practiced a “dividing of the sayings” rather freely. In regard to Jn 20:17 he said: “It was not the Word of God, who while rushing down from the heaven dwells in the bosom of the Father, who said the ‘I have not yet ascended to my Father,’ nor the Spirit which encompasses all created things; but the very man composed of various members. . . .”⁶⁸ He uses prosopological exegesis similarly for Christological purposes when he comments on Mt 11:27 “He is known to prophesy ‘All things have been handed over to me by my Father’ in the person of the human being (*ex persona hominis*), as we have also proved earlier.”⁶⁹

Apollinaris of Laodicea, on the other hand, prefers the more guarded techniques used by Athanasius. *De unione* 10 provides a good example of Apollinaris’ position.

Furthermore, he says, “On their account I sanctify myself. . . .” He does not make

⁶³ I cannot claim to have examined Athanasius’ writings exhaustively for this usage.

⁶⁴ *Ar.* 3, 43 has *hōs men logos . . . hōs de anthrōpos*, and also contains a compact combination of these styles, showing their equivalence: *eidōs hōs theos agnoi sarkikōs*. Newman’s note to this passage (NPNF, 2nd ser. 4, 417, n. 10) is worth reading for the parallels it offers. See a few lines further in *Ar.* 3, 32: “. . . even though they did not touch him in his deity” (*ei kai mē hēpteto kata tēn theotēta autou*); 3, 43: *peri tou kata ton anthrōpinon autou*; 3, 57 has him speaking *hōs anthrōpos*, and later contrasts *theikōs* and *anthrōpinōs*.

⁶⁵ See, e.g., *Inc.* 18, where the Word manifests its divinity in the miracles of Jesus, the invisible divine reality being able to be contemplated as the cause of the wonders; *Inc.* 21, where he hungered *dia to idion tou sōmatos* but did not starve *dia ton phorounta auto Kyrion*; *Inc.* 53, where Christ’s works done in the body were not human (*ouk anthrōpina*) but belonged to the Word of God (*alla . . . tou theou logou*); *Inc.* 54, test his works *ei anthrōpina estin ē theou*. These are all further linguistic devices by which Athanasius avoids “dividing the sayings.”

⁶⁶ *Ar.* 2, 12, where the Word is said to have been “made” *kata to anthrōpinon*; 2, 53, which describes Scripture’s custom (*ēthos*) thus: when it refers to Christ’s origin *kata sarka*, it assigns the cause (*aitia*), whereas it speaks of his Godhead absolutely.

⁶⁷ *Sent. Dion.* 9, 4. There follow contrasts between *ton anthrōpinou* and *hōs theos, sōmatikōs* and *theikōs*.

⁶⁸ Fr. 24 (ed. Michel Spanneut, *Recherches sur les écrits d’Eustathe d’Antioche* [Lille: Facultés catholiques, 1948] 102–3).

⁶⁹ Fr. 51 (ed. Spanneut 110). The lemma, interestingly enough, is “Rursus autem eodem libro de verbis Christi disputans dicit.” It looks as if Eustathius’ controversy with the Arians has led him into the use of this exegetical method. For other examples in Eustathius, see fragments 21, 33, 36, 47, 50, 52–53. Fr. 67 makes a more careful assertion when it says that Christ’s genealogy *kata to sōma* can be recounted, but not that *kata tēn anōtatō taxin* (Spanneut 115).

a division and say, "I sanctify the flesh." Rather, he makes a conjunction and says, "I sanctify myself," even though, for anyone who considers the matter with care, it is not possible for him to be the agent of his own sanctification, for if the whole sanctifies, what is sanctified? And if the whole is sanctified, what is the sanctifying agent? Nevertheless he preserves the one person (*prosōpon*) and the indivisible manifestation of one life, and attributes both the act of sanctifying and the sanctification which results to the whole Christ.⁷⁰

It is in the *Kata meros pistis*, however, that Apollinaris applies the method of grammatical analysis most intensively both to Christology and to Trinitarian theology. First he uses it to establish the reality of the three persons against Sabellius' attempts to introduce an *anupostaton* . . . *prosōpon*,⁷¹ countering that the *prosōpon* of each establishes its being and its subsistence.⁷² This is founded on Paul's distinction between "of whom" and "by whom" in 1 Cor 8:6, which Apollinaris finds significant.⁷³ Later Apollinaris applies the method to Christology, confessing "one *prosōpon* and one worship of the Word and the flesh which he took on,"⁷⁴ and insisting that "there is not one *prosōpon* God the Word and another the man Jesus. . . ."⁷⁵ The basis for this latter assertion is not stated in *Kata meros pistis*, but it does appear briefly in *De fide et incarnatione*: ". . .and no division of the Word and its flesh is put forward in the divine Scriptures, but he is one nature, one hypostasis, one operation, one *prosōpon*, God entire, human being entire."⁷⁶

The relevance of all this to the Christological controversies of the fifth century need not be belabored. Rondeau's chapters on Eusebius of Caesarea, Jerome, Pseudo-Athanasius, and especially on Didymus the Blind fill in much of the history of how *prosōpon* came to be a technical term of Christological dogma.⁷⁷ The letters between Nestorius and Cyril

⁷⁰ Tr. Norris 105. Norris provides other easily accessible examples. See *De unione* 4, where "in human terms" = *anthrōpinōs*; 7 (on Jn 17: 5); 9; fr. 109.

⁷¹ *Fid. sec. pt.* 13 (ed. Hans Lietzmann, *Apollinaris von Laodicea und seine Schule* [Tübingen: Mohr, 1904] 171). According to Apollinaris, Sabellius identifies the Father as the one speaking, the Son as the Word (not therefore either as a speaker or as one spoken to or spoken about).

⁷² *Fid. sec. pt.* 15 (ed. Lietzmann 171).

⁷³ *Fid. sec. pt.* 16 (ed. Lietzmann 171).

⁷⁴ *Fid. sec. pt.* 28 (ed. Lietzmann 177). The passage continues: "And we anathematize those who make different worships, one divine and one human, and worship the man from Mary as if he were other than the God from God."

⁷⁵ *Fid. sec. pt.* 36 (ed. Lietzmann 181).

⁷⁶ *De fide et inc.* 6 (ed. Lietzmann 198-99).

⁷⁷ Rondeau, *Les commentateurs* 2, 229-30 and 240, deals with Didymus and the way that, in his work, prosopographic exegesis developed "the Christological usage of *prosōpon* which will be consecrated at Chalcedon." Her best example (out of many) is from Didymus' commentary on Ps 15:8-9: "For they were all said as from one person (*hōs ex henos prosōpou*), both the things worthy of God and the human things. . . ." See the text in

deal in just such questions as that concerning the person who is presented as speaking or being spoken to, acting or experiencing, in texts of Scripture. One passage of Leo the Great's *Tome to Flavian* must have made some Cyrillian hearts miss a beat,⁷⁸ but by and large Leo uses the oblique, moderate language which characterized Athanasius. *Prosôpon* has become an independent theological term so far removed from its roots in scriptural exegesis that Leo can even say: "By the same token, it is not the act of one and the same nature (*naturae*) to say, 'I and the Father are one,' and to say, 'The Father is greater than I,' and then continue: "Even though there is, in our Lord Jesus Christ, one person (*persona*) of God and of a human being. . . ."⁷⁹

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

It was a method of literary and grammatical analysis of Scripture that provided the early Christian thinkers with a way to talk about God in a Trinitarian fashion. Application of the same method threatened to give rise to instability in Christology. Noticing the fact may answer our questions at one level, but at another level it raises new questions. Did it make sense to read the Scriptures this way and thus to draw from them an image of God? Did the early Christians employ this method seriously and openly, so that they could theoretically have found any number of divine persons in the text of Scripture? One might suggest that because there are three grammatical persons this method was destined to reach a three-personed God, but that suggestion is not convincing: there is no reason why a text needs to exhibit exactly three interlocutors. Were the results of the "method" foreordained by the conviction that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit *had* to be found in the texts?⁸⁰ I do not think it possible to prove that that was not the case. But the present study should at least suggest caution in adopting such a hypothesis, because when early Christian prosopological exegesis accords places to the Trinitarian persons which are congruent with both Christian piety and Christian worship, it raises the real possibility that the Trinitarian distinctions were arrived at in a methodical way.

Ekkehard Mühlenberg, *Psalmenkommentare aus der Ketenenüberlieferung 1* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1975) 180, lines 1-2.

⁷⁸ This is the famous passage from chap. 4: "Each 'form' carries on its proper activities in communion with the other. The Word does what belongs to it, and the flesh carries out what belongs to it. The one shimmers with wondrous deeds, the other succumbs to injury and insult" (Norris 150).

⁷⁹ Norris 151.

⁸⁰ It is at this point that the work of Georg Kretschmar, *Studien zur frühchristlichen Trinitätstheologie* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1956), and Jane Schaberg, *The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit* (Chico, Cal.: Scholars, 1982), could most profitably enter the discussion. See also the provocative proposal by Luise Abramowski, "Die Entstehung der dreigliedrigen Taufformel—ein Versuch," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 81 (1984) 417-46.

Apart from a very few texts of Tertullian, from which I believe Andresen has drawn excessively sweeping conclusions, the Holy Spirit does not appear as an interlocutor within the texts we have seen examined by prosopological exegesis. Instead, the Spirit is the source of all the utterances of Scripture, even those in which the Father or the Word express themselves "in their own person."⁸¹ As the one who speaks all the words, including those spoken as by the persons of Father, Son, the people of Israel, and everyone else, the Spirit never attains the personal definition of the others; and yet, if by *prosōpon* is meant "the one who speaks and concerning whom he speaks and to whom he speaks," the dignity, if not the clear definition, cannot be denied to the Holy Spirit. That lack of definition contributes heavily to the often-lamented underdevelopment of theology and piety concerning the Spirit. The most immediate and existentially significant model for prosopological exegesis may have been Christian experience of prayer under the impulse of the Spirit, of which Stephen's cry in Acts 7:55–56 is a moving example: "But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said: 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'" There two persons are recognized, and the declaration springs from a divine impulse somehow distinct from them both. A prosopological exegesis of that account of Stephen's prayer would give us Trinitarian distinctions like those which early Christians found in Scripture.⁸² It is difficult to say which came first, the exegesis of experience or the exegesis of Scripture.

⁸¹ Rondeau, *Les commentateurs* 2, 29, points out Irenaeus' expression of this in *Epid.* 49 (tr. Smith, ACW 16, 80): "Since David says: The Lord hath said to me, one must say that it is not David who is speaking; nor does any other at all of the prophets speak in his own name, for it is not a man who utters the prophecy; but the Spirit of God, taking form and shape in the likeness of the person concerned, spoke in the prophets; sometimes He spoke on the part of Christ, sometimes on that of the Father."

⁸² Other particularly suggestive passages are Rom 8:15–17 and 1 Jn 4:2–3. The importance early Christianity attributed to the baptism of Jesus by John, as reflected both in sermons and in iconography, may be due to the possibilities for prosopological exegesis inherent in that scene; see, e.g., Rondeau, *Les commentateurs* 2, 28, on Justin, *Dial.* 88, 8. The passage (*Haer.* 3, 18, 3) where Irenaeus explains the name "Christ" may be another early reference to the baptism of Jesus as a Trinitarian manifestation: "For in the name of Christ is implied the one who anointed, and he who was anointed, and the anointing itself with which he was anointed. And indeed the Father anointed, but the Son was anointed in the Spirit, which is anointing."