

The Real Presence of the Son Before Christ: A New Approach to Old Testament Christology

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Martin Luther once wrote: “All of Scripture is pure Christ.”¹ In principle, few of you would disagree. Indeed, most of us readily recite the hermeneutical principle of Christocentricity to our confirmands; namely, all of Holy Scripture proclaims the reality of Christ. Putting that principle into practice, especially in our exegesis of the Old Testament, is where we encounter some difficulty. In practice we tend to view the Christological content of the OT as those isolated messianic prophecies or broader typological patterns of the coming messiah. Our primary understanding of Christ in the OT is one of prophecy, not presence. Oh, we do show some boldness by stating that that the use of the plural in the creation narrative— “Let *us* make man in *our* own image” (Wineb. ~da' hf.[h; Gen 1: 26)—indicates the presence of the Son in creation and that the appearances of the Angel of the Lord are appearances of the pre-incarnate Christ. This “prophecy-with-a-little-presence” approach to OT Christology has been enshrined by the great 19th century defender of orthodoxy E. W. Hengstenberg in his classic *Christology of the Old Testament*.² Beyond the Messianic prophecies and Angel of the Lord theophanies, however, our exegetical practice sometimes has trouble supporting the Christocentricity principle we have memorized, much less Luther’s pronouncement: “All of Scripture is pure Christ.”

Nor can we look to modern scholarship for help, be it historical criticism or conservative evangelicalism. The former *condemns* and the latter *cautions* against Christocentric exegesis of the OT as unwarranted or undue “Christianizing of the OT”. These unlikely bedfellows both see such exegesis as spiritual eisegesis that reads Christ into the OT with uncritical lenses ground and colored by the study of Jesus in the New Testament. For example, one recently published hermeneutics textbook from conservative evangelical circles issues this strong warning:

At the same time, interpreters must exercise extreme caution to avoid an undue Christianizing of the OT. Parallel NT passages should not be used to make OT passage teach NT truth. The early church had the tendency—one continued by Protestants after the Reformation—to read NT theological concepts into OT passages. We must avoid this error; our first task is always to understand each text on its own terms—as its writer and readers would have understood it.³

Obviously, there is an element of truth in every heresy. The interpreter should begin with the OT text and its own historical context, rather than running immediately to parallel texts in the NT. But before you begin to think I am too harsh with this textbook, listen to the illustration that immediately follows the warning just quoted:

¹ “Treatise on the Last Words of David” (1543), *LW* 15:339.

² *Christology of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1970 [reprint]). This popular edition is an abridgement done by of the English translation of . For the original work, see

³ *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (ed. William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, Robert L. Hubbard, Jr.; Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993) 171.

Early in our careers one of the authors became embarrassingly aware of how prevalent this practice [undue Christianizing] continues to be among Christians. After preaching a sermon on Jeremiah's call, in which he stressed insights for responding to God's leading today, a parishioner bluntly admonished him at the door, "Young man, preach Christ!" The confident "But I did, sir!" did not reassure the indignant parishioner who felt that every OT passage has to serve as a springboard for a Christ-centered gospel message. Unfortunately, he, and many others like him, have failed to realize that God's message in the OT for the Church today must grow out of the intended meaning of the text itself.⁴

Most of us would ask: How can any OT passage not be preached as a Christ-centered gospel message? Yet notice that the authors carefully spoke about "God's message in the OT" in distinction from "a Christ-centered gospel message"; obviously the authors do not want us to understand the *theology* of the OT as *Christology*.

Therefore, how can we *practice* in our exegesis of the OT more of what we *confess* concerning the Christocentricity of Holy Scripture? While affirming--and in no way diminishing--the importance of OT prophecies concerning the coming Christ, this study will demonstrate that *more emphasis should be given to the real presence of the Son in our exegesis of the Old Testament*.⁵ By "real presence" I mean understanding the God who is heard and seen in the OT after the Fall in Eden as the Son. This approach takes seriously the blunt statement at the end of John's prologue: "No one has ever seen God at any time, the Only Begotten God, from the position alongside the Father, made him known" (John 1:18). How could anyone who has read the OT write this? God is seen repeatedly, but it is "the Only Begotten God"—the Son—who is seen and has made known or expounded the mystery of YHWH, not only *after* the incarnation, but also in the *before* Christ (B.C.) times of the OT.

This *new* approach is an exegesis that is actually quite *old*, generously illustrated for us in several exegetes of the early Church as well as Luther. Justin Martyr, who wrote in the middle of the second century, provides many examples of this approach, two of which I quote here⁶:

[*Dial.* 127.4] Therefore, neither Abraham, nor Isaac, nor Jacob, nor any man saw the Father and ineffable Lord of absolutely all things and of Christ Himself, but [saw] only him who, according to his [the Father's] will, is both God, his Son, and Angel, from the fact that he ministers to his purpose. Whom he also has willed to be born through the Virgin, and who once became fire for that conversation with Moses in the bush.

[*Dial.* 61.1] God begat before all creatures a Beginning, [who was] a certain rational Power [proceeding] from himself, who is called by the Holy Spirit, now the Glory of the Lord, now the Son, again Wisdom, again an Angel, then God, and then Lord, and Word; and on another occasion he calls himself Captain, when he appears in human form to Joshua son of Nave.

⁴ *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 171.

⁵ See further Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (AGJU 42; Leiden: Brill, 1998).

⁶ See D. C. Trakatellis, *The Pre-existence of Christ in the Writings of Justin Martyr* (HDR 6; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976); see also Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 187-346.

Justin's OT Christology consists not only of the prophetic promises regarding the coming Christ, but primarily of the "real presence" of the Son in the lives of God's people throughout the OT. As will be shown, this real presence of the Son in the OT was also expressed by NT writers: Jude says Jesus led Israel out of Egypt and punished their disobedience (Jude 5), Paul says Christ was with Israel in the Wilderness (1 Cor 10:1-10), John says Isaiah saw Jesus in his call vision (John 12:41), and Jesus acknowledges that he interacted with Abraham (John 8:56-59). It is this kind of Christocentric reading of the OT that will be advocated in this study. This *Christocentric* exegesis stands in sharp contrast to the *theocentric* exegesis that characterizes most modern exegetes of the OT, be they proponents of Historical Criticism writing for the scholarly world or Reformed and Evangelical scholars writing for the church.

I. The Old Testament: *Theology, Christology, or Sonology?*

Let's begin by briefly acknowledging two significant problems we face in tackling this topic. The first problem is alluded to in my revised title: "The Real Presence of the Son Before Christ". Dogmatians use the label "Christology" for the doctrine of the Son, but exegetes encounter challenges in using this designation for the Son in the OT because it is anachronistic: the Son really is not "the Christ" until he becomes incarnate. "Christ", similar to the personal name "Jesus", is a title that we use primarily for the incarnate Son. It could also be used as a title for teaching about the coming Messiah, but usually is not used for the preexistent or preincarnate Son. Although it would be difficult to change the dogmatic category "Christology" to "Sonology", such a category certainly would lend itself to a wider usage when dealing with the OT or "Before Christ" evidence.

The second problem, which is closely related to the first, is the perennial emphasis, especially since Calvin, that the OT contains *theology* (not Christology) and is *theocentric* (not Christocentric).⁷ This distinction, however, is like arguing the category "apple" should be compared with the category "fruit". Christology is a subcategory of theology, and if we take the Son seriously, it is the primary subcategory of theology: the Son has told us, "No one comes to the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). The doctrine of the Father, according to Jesus, is a very slim subcategory of theology since the Son is the one who reveals the Father. There is a strong wave of scholarship that reacts vehemently against reading the OT with such a Trinitarian understanding of God. The real problem here is that the NT is not seen as a hermeneutical guide to the OT; some modern scholars even conclude that NT writers often misinterpret the OT. If we, however, take the NT as our guide and understand the doctrine of God in light of the revelation of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, then the OT is not teaching generic theology, but theology based upon the revelation of the Son.

⁷ See discussion in Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 53

II. The Christocentricity of the OT in the History of Interpretation

Sidney Greidanus, already widely known in homiletical circles for his book *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*,⁸ provides a helpful historical introduction to this topic in his most recent book: *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*.⁹ Much could be said, but I will highlight two things. First, the ongoing tension within the church between reading the OT Christocentrically or theocentrically is seen already in the ancient schools of Alexandria vs. Antioch as well as in the reformation traditions of Luther vs. Calvin. Second, Historical Criticism pulled the plug on this type of exegesis with pronouncements such as, “the Christological interpretation of the OT text can be substantiated only by an artificial exegesis.”¹⁰

David Steinmetz, in an intriguing article entitled “The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis”, has noted that many modern exegetes assume that “the most primitive meaning of the text is its only valid meaning.”¹¹ He goes on to explain that “medieval theologians defended the proposition, so alien to modern biblical studies, that the meaning of Scripture in the mind of the prophet who first uttered it is only one of the its possible meanings and may not, in certain circumstances, even be its primary or most important meaning.”¹² I agree. Certainly there is significance in OT texts that is more fully understood only after the Christ event.

III. The Real Presence of the Son: Theophanies in the OT

As stated above, this study will demonstrate that the theophanies within the OT after the Fall are manifestations of the Son. The theological foundation for this understanding is the tension within the OT between the theophanies of YHWH and the testimony that one cannot see YHWH and live. The latter point is most clearly stated in by YHWH in a conversation with Moses recorded in Exodus 33:20: “You cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live.” This point is made in several of the theophanies; those who see YHWH’s presence are surprised to be alive.

If one cannot see YHWH and live, and yet people are seeing YHWH and are not dying, then who is this visible image of YHWH in the OT? The OT texts provide some assistance by often using a distinct title for the form of YHWH that people see: they see the Angel of YHWH, the Name of YHWH, the Glory of YHWH, or the Word of YHWH. There is some distinction between this form of YHWH and YHWH’s unveiled presence, even though this form of YHWH is not separate from YHWH.

⁸ *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988).

⁹ *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

¹⁰ Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, 166.

¹¹ David C. Steinmetz, “The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis”, *Theology Today* (April 1980) 28.

¹² “Pre-Critical Exegesis”, 33.

The NT helps us understand this enigma because it functions as a hermeneutical guide to OT. I will use it as such in this study by reading various theophanies in light of NT evidence. The basis of the NT as a guide to the OT is found in the teaching of Jesus:

[John 5:39] “You search the Scriptures [. . .]; it is they that bear witness to me [. . .]. [45] Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; it is Moses who accuses you, on whom you set your hope. [46] If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. [47] But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?”

[Luke 24:17] And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Paul states that the Son is “the image of the *invisible* God” (Col.1:15). This understanding of the son as the image of God does not apply only to his incarnate state, but also his pre-incarnate state; he has been the image of God seen by sinful man since the Fall in Eden. Does this mean that since the Father is unseen, he is somehow unknown in the OT? Absolutely not. What Jesus said about his incarnate state also applies to the OT: “The one who has seen me, has seen the Father” (John 14:9)

As I said, such a real presence of the Son in the OT is not new, nor unfaithful to Lutheran exegetical practice. Like Justin Martyr and several other early interpreters, Luther stated:

Thus it follows powerfully and irrefutably that the God who led the people of Israel out of Egypt and through the Red Sea, who guided them in the wilderness through the pillars of cloud and fire, who nourished them with heavenly bread, and who performed all the miracles Moses describes in his book, who also brought them into the land of Canaan and then gave them kings and priest and everything, is therefore God and none other than Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of the Virgin Mary, whom we call Christ our God and Lord [. . .] And, again, it is he who give Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, saying, “I am the Lord your God who led you out of Egypt; you shall have no other gods.” Yes, Jesus of Nazareth, who died for us on the cross, is the God who says in the First Commandment, “I, the Lord, am your God.”¹³

A. The Angel of YHWH

This first category of theophanies that are to be considered the real presence of the Son is the most popular among conservative exegetes: The Angel of YHWH or Angel of the LORD.¹⁴ The 17th century Lutheran dogmatician Calov stated that anyone who denied that the Angel of the LORD in the OT was the Preincarnate Christ was not orthodox.¹⁵ The Angel of YHWH is especially prominent in the theophanies of the Genesis. The distinction, yet inseparability, between YHWH and this “angel” is especially clear in these words of YHWH to Moses after the Exodus:

¹³ *On the Last Words of David*, 1543, WA 54, 67.1.

¹⁴ For further discussion, see Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 51-69.

¹⁵ A. Calovius, *Consensus repetitus fidei vere Lutherae* (1664); see discussion in William Graham MacDonald, “Christology and ‘The Angel of the Lord’”, *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation: Studies in Honor of Merrill C. Tenney* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 327.

[Exod 23:20] Behold, I send an angel in front of you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. [21] Be attentive to him and listen to his voice; do not rebel against for he will not pardon your transgression; for my Name is in him. [22] But if you listen to his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.

Notice that this angel possesses the Name of YHWH. You cannot separate the name YHWH from the reality of YHWH; thus, he is also YHWH. This is also shown in the fact that this angel has the power to absolve and retain sin as well as the ability to speak as YHWH.

The NT identifies theophanies related to this angel as manifestations of the Son. The most substantive testimony to this is found in 1 Corinthians 10 where Paul speaks of the presence of Christ with Israel as they traveled through the wilderness after the Exodus. Discussion of this Christological presence has tended to focus on Christ as “the spiritual Rock” who followed Israel mentioned in 10:3. Even more significant is the mention that “Christ” was the one whom Israel put to the test with their disobedience:

[1 Cor 10:9] We must not put Christ¹⁶ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. [10] And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the Destroyer.

The fact that this testimony to the real presence of Christ with ancient Israel was problematic to some scribes is visible in textual emendations that substitute “the Lord” or “God” for “Christ” in verse 9. The scribes obviously understood that it was the Lord or God active in the life of Israel, not Christ. But Paul understood Christ to be the agent of punishment against Israel’s disobedience who, like the angel of Exodus 23, did not pardon their transgressions. It is possible that Paul understood the Destroyer in 10:10 to be designation for the pre-incarnate Christ. Paul asserts that the Corinthians could be certain of Christ’s judgment of their disobedience by looking at how he punished Israel of old. Therefore, the Son is the one who both sent serpents and had Moses fashion a bronze serpent on a pole in order to heal the Israelites who were dying.

Paul is not alone in this understanding. The presence of Christ with Ancient Israel as the delivering and destroying angel is a tradition that also influenced the author of Jude. Based upon the variant reading that is more difficult and has some good attestation, this short letter maintains that *Jesus* is the Angel of YHWH who detained the fallen angels, destroyed Sodom and Gommorah, and *also struck the unfaithful Israelites in the wilderness*:

[Jude 5] Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that Jesus¹⁷ delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe.

¹⁶ Some MSS have *ton kuriōn* or *ton qeōn* here. The editors of Nestle-Aland 26th and 27th editions opted for “Christ” as the more difficult reading that still have significant MS support. For a text critical analysis supporting this reading, see C. D. Osburn, “The Text of 1 Corinthians 10:9”, *New Testament Textual Criticism: Its Significance for Exegesis. Essays in Honor of Bruce M. Metzger* (ed. E. J. Epp and G. D. Fee; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) 201-212.

¹⁷ Some MSS have *kuriōj* or *qeōj* here. This translation follows this more difficult reading and not *kuriōj* as did the editors of Nestle-Aland 27th edition. For a discussion of this text that includes a text critical analysis, see Jarl E. Fossum, “Kyrios Jesus as the Angel of the Lord in Jude 5-7”, *NTS* 33 (1987) 226-243.

B. The Name or the Name of YHWH

Much less frequently recognized theophanies in the OT that should be understood as a manifestations of the Son are those that are identified as “the Name” or “the Name of YHWH.”¹⁸ There are several texts--mainly in Deuteronomy, later historical books, and Jeremiah--that speak about the presence of YHWH as the Name dwelling in the midst of Israel or later in the temple. Here are two representative examples of these texts:

[Deut 12:11] Then you shall bring everything that I command you to the place that YHWH your Elohim will choose, to make his Name to dwell there.

[1 Kgs 5:5] So I [Solomon] intend to build a house for the Name of YHWH my Elohim, as YHWH said to my father David, ‘Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place shall build the house for my Name.

Although these two texts do not record the actual theophany, they witness to the real and accessible presence of YHWH with Israel. Too often we think of the designation “the Name” or “the Name of YHWH” as a concept, some words or sounds, rather than as a designation for the personal and tangible form of YHWH. We should remember that the Angel of YHWH possessed the unique “name” YHWH. The fact that the visible image of YHWH bore the Divine Name is the probable reason that some of the theophanies in the OT came to be labeled “the Name” or “the Name of YHWH”.

There is testimony in the NT that Jesus was identified as the possessor the Divine Name and was even called “the Name” at times. It is especially prominent theme in the Christology of John. The Name is mentioned already in the Prologue: “But to all who received him, who believe in his Name [. . .]” (John 1:12). That this is a reference to the Divine Name that belongs to the Father, and not the name “Jesus”, can be deduced from Jesus’ words elsewhere in the Gospel: “I [Jesus] have come in my Father’s Name” (John 5:43). This is especially clear in the farewell prayer:

[John 17:11b] “Holy Father, protect them in your Name that you have given me, in order that they be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your Name that you have given me.”

Jesus also identifies himself in John as the one who is an hypostasis of the Divine Name: “Father, glorify your Name” (John 12:28). This is not simply a pious prayer about the Divine Name; it is Jesus’ self-identification as the hypostatized Divine Name. This conclusion is based upon the announcement Jesus makes shortly before this prayer: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified” (John 12:23). “The Son of Man” is, therefore, equated with the designation “Your Name”; they are both designations for Jesus who will be glorified when he is lifted up on the cross (John 12:32). The Name as a title for Jesus is also found elsewhere in the Johannine corpus: “For they [the brethren] have set out for the Name and have accepted nothing from the heathen” (3 John 7).

¹⁸ See Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 70-78.

Other NT writers understand Jesus as bearing the Divine Name. Two examples will suffice. The opening of Hebrews states: “Because he became as much superior to the angels as a Name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs” (Heb 1:4). In the Philippians Hymn, Paul states that Christ “has been given the Name that is above every name” (Phil 2:9). In both cases, the Divine Name is the only name that exceeds all others.

C. Glory of YHWH

Exodus offers us a third way in which the theophanies are designated: the cloud, fire, or man-like presence of YHWH is “the Glory of the Lord”.¹⁹ In a pattern similar to the Angel of the Lord theophany at Moses’ commissioning in Exodus 3, YHWH manifests himself in a fire and cloud atop Sinai:

[Exod 24:15] Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. [16] The Glory of YHWH settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days; and on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. [17] Now the appearance of the Glory of YHWH was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. [18] And Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain.

This theophanic designation is very prominent in other OT text, especially in Ezekiel where the prophet beheld the man-like image of YHWH on the throne (Ezek 1:26-28). This OT theophanic tradition is the basis for NT claims that in Christ one beholds the Glory of God. This claim does not mean that Christ resembles YHWH, but that the same visible form of YHWH that Moses and Ezekiel saw is now visible in the flesh and blood Jesus. For example, this theme is reflected in both the prologue and farewell prayer in John:

[John 1:14] And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, and we behold his Glory, Glory as of the Only Begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

[John 17:5] So now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the Glory that I had in your presence before the world began.

Furthermore, John even states that the image of YHWH that Isaiah saw was the Son:

[John 12:39] For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: [40] “It has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn—and I would heal them” [Isa 6:10]. [41] Isaiah said these things because he saw his Glory [the Son’s] and he spoke concerning him [the Son].

Paul shows a similar interpretation of the Sinai theophany as he compares what Moses saw to the fact that in Christ we now behold this same Glory of God:

[2 Cor 4:3] Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. [4] In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the Glory of Christ, who is the Image of God. [5] For what we preach is not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. [6] For it is the

¹⁹ See Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 78-88.

God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the Glory of God in the face of Christ.

D. Word of YHWH

We have already seen that the Angel of the Lord possesses the Divine Name (Exod 23:21). This unique “word” that he possessed, the Tetragrammaton, is probably the basis for the fact that some of the theophanies, especially those found later in the canon, identify the visible image of YHWH as “the Word of YHWH”.²⁰ This is especially clear in the call narratives of Samuel and Jeremiah, where YHWH’s real presence is identified as “the Word of YHWH”. Listen to Jeremiah 1:

[1.4] Now the Word of YHWH came to me saying, [5] “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” [6] Then I said, “Ah, Adonai Elohim! Behold I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.” [7] But YHWH said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I sent you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. [8] Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says YHWH”. [9] Then YHWH put forth his hand and touched my mouth; and YHWH said to me, “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.

Too often we treat this designation as an abstraction, rather than as a title for YHWH’s visible image that is much like Angel, Glory, or Name. As most of us are aware, this theophanic designation is used in the NT for Christ in the opening verse of John: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). It is also used as a title for Christ in Hebrews and Revelation:

[Heb 4:12] For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. [13] Namely, no creature is hidden before him, but all creatures are bare and laid open to his eyes, who for us is the Word.

[Rev 19:12] His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that on one but he himself knows. [13] He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood and the name by which he is called is the Word of God.

It is quite probable that the designation “Word of YHWH” in the OT theophanies grew from the realization that this visible image possessed the most important word: the Divine Name. Furthermore, in spite of the popularity of the Logos tradition within the Greco-Roman world of the first century, it is this OT theophanic background that is the primary foundation of its usage in NT Christology.

E. The Son as YHWH in the OT

Luther understood that the real presence of the Son in the OT meant the Son actually spoke OT prophecies about himself. For example, he was convinced that the Son

²⁰ See Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 103-114

spoke the first Gospel promise to Adam and Eve recorded in Genesis 3:15.²¹ He even gives the exegete the following basic guidance for interpreting the referent of divine speech: “But where the Person does not clearly identify himself by speaking and apparently only one Person is involved, you may follow the rule given above and be assured that you are not going wrong when you interpret the name YHWH to refer to our Lord Jesus Christ, God’s Son.”²² Luther did not invent this understanding; it is found in the NT. There are OT texts where YHWH is speaking that are applied to the Son by NT writers. This shows that NT authors fully identified the Son within the mystery of YHWH in the OT. Two examples will illustrate the point.

In Isaiah 45, which is a very monotheistic portion of Isaiah, YHWH declares:

“To me every knee will bow, and every tongue will swear.
 ‘Only in YHWH,’ it shall be said of me,
 ‘are righteousness and strength’” (45.23b-24a).

Paul’s applies this text to Christ, both in the Philippians Hymn and in Rom 14:11. Let’s examine the usage of Isaiah 45 in Philippians 2:

[Phil 2:9] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] in order that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

The unmistakable reference to the Divine Name in this hymn is widely recognized by interpreters: “the name that is above every other name” (2:9). The genitive relationship in *tw|onomati Ihsou* (“the name of Jesus”) is best understood as expressing simple possession: “the name that Jesus possesses”. The conclusion that the “name that Jesus possesses” is the Divine Name is collaborated by the resulting universal worship that climaxes in the confession: “Jesus Christ is Lord” (2:11). The parallel structure and logic of 2:10-11a is clear:

Every knee should bow at the name of Jesus, because Jesus’ name is YHWH.
Every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord, because Jesus is truly YHWH.

This text demonstrates that Paul fully identified YHWH who is speaking in Isaiah 45 with the exalted Son.²³

A second example of this is found in Paul’s use of Jeremiah 9:24, “Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord”, in both Corinthian epistles (1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17). The prophet Jeremiah records YHWH saying the following:

²¹ As noted by Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament* (2nd Eng. ed.; trans Eric W. and Ruth C. Gritch; Mifflintown, PA: Sigler Press, 1997 [1969]) 201.

²² *Treatise on the Last Words of David* (1543), LW 15:336.

²³ See David Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul’s Christology* (WUNT II.47; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992) 157-160, and Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 56-61.

[Jer 9:24] “Let him who boasts, boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am YHWH who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says YHWH.”

Paul applies this text, where YHWH speaks of boasting in knowing him, to Christ in 1 Cor 1:31 and 2 Cor 10:17. Paul, therefore, fully identified the YHWH who spoke as the Son.

IV. Conclusion

After having looked at some of the evidence, the OT exegesis of reading these theophanies as the real presence of the Son such as we saw in Justin rings true. Look once again at the text we read at the start of this paper:

[*Dial.* 61.1] God begat before all creatures a Beginning, [who was] a certain rational Power [proceeding] from himself, who is called by the Holy Spirit, now the Glory of the Lord, now the Son, again Wisdom, again an Angel, then God, and then Lord, and Word; and on another occasion he calls himself Captain, when he appears in human form to Joshua son of Nave.

This understanding of the Christology of the OT pervades the early exegesis. The Son is YHWH present, visible, and active in history of patriarchs and Israel. He is also the visible image of YHWH seated upon throne that was seen by prophets.

When I was serving as pastor in Traverse City, Michigan, I assisted with a vacancy at Reed City. I remember stepping into that pulpit the first time and being greeted by a yellowing three and half by five index card put there years before by the former pastor. The faded type on it contained words from John 12:21, “Sir, we want to see Jesus.” It was a poignant reminder concerning what preaching is all about, no matter which of the two testaments serves as the source of our homily.

If we are convinced that the Son is central to the identity of YHWH as he speaks and acts throughout the OT, we can and should show forth the pre-incarnate Son when preaching from the OT. To do this we do not need to have a messianic or typological prophecy in our text and we do not need to set up elaborate comparisons between God in the OT and then fast-forward to Christ in the NT. Instead we can let our congregation see Jesus by showing them the real presence of the Son in that OT text. Such an understanding of the Christocentricity of the OT will help us demonstrate the truth of Jesus’ words: “For Moses wrote of me” (John 5:46). Obviously, we should not stop with Moses, for just as the NT helps us to interpret the OT, we must lead people forward to see that the Son’s words and work in the OT climax in the incarnate Christ of the NT, who was crucified, died, and rose again on the third day. Jesus not only revealed YHWH to be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but he gave the ultimate revelation of who YHWH truly is by mounting the cross and giving his life for the life of the world. Moreover, it is vital to help God’s people see that this Son is still active bringing the salvation won there to us through his washing, his speaking, and his feeding in the church today.

If Jesus and the apostolic interpreters found in the NT serve as our guide to the OT, then our exegesis will indeed demonstrate the truth of Luther's dictum: "All Scripture is pure Christ."

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