The Spirit Speaks: Pneumatological Innovation in the Scriptural Exegesis of Justin and Tertullian

Kyle R. Hughes
Radboud University Nijmegen
sogdia@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper considers the role of the Spirit within early Christian writers’ use of prosopological exegesis, an interpretive method which seeks to identify various persons (prosopa) as the “true” speakers or addressees of a Scriptural text in which they are otherwise not in view. While scholars are increasingly recognizing that, for some early Christian writers, the Spirit could himself be a speaking agent, there remains no systematic analysis of the texts in which the Spirit speaks from his own prosopon. After making just such an analysis, focusing on key texts in the writings of Tertullian and Justin Martyr, this paper concludes that the need for divine testimony concerning both the Father and the Son was the central motivating factor for assigning OT quotations to the prosopon of the Spirit. In particular, this paper argues that this emphasis on the Spirit’s role as one who testifies is a direct outgrowth of the portrayal of the Spirit in the Johannine corpus and arose in the context of conflict with Judaism concerning the cessation of the Spirit. By making this connection, we have a new means by which to glimpse the theological dynamics at work in the pre-Nicene period that would contribute to the development of a distinctively Trinitarian, and not merely binitarian, view of God.

1 I am deeply indebted to Matthew W. Bates, whose writings and personal correspondence have stimulated and refined many of the ideas herein, and who graciously provided me with an advance manuscript of his forthcoming The Birth of the Trinity. Gregory M. Barnhill and Stephen O. Presley also provided helpful feedback on an earlier draft. Portions of this study have been presented at the 2014 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in San Diego as “The Spirit Speaks: Prosopological Exegesis and the Johannine Testimony Motif.”
Keywords

Justin Martyr – Tertullian – Holy Spirit – prosopological exegesis – trinitarianism

Even amidst renewed focus on the development of early Christian theologies of the Spirit, numerous unanswered questions continue to puzzle modern scholars. One such perplexing question concerns the role of the Spirit within early Christian writers’ use of prosopological exegesis, an interpretive method which seeks to identify various persons (prosopa) as the “true” speakers or addressees of a scriptural text in which they are not otherwise in view. Studies of this method of biblical reading have largely focused on how certain early church fathers employed this method in their development of Trinitarian theology, with almost exclusive emphasis on the method’s contribution to the development of Christology. 2 As such, the little attention given to prosopological exegesis has been chiefly concerned with demonstrating how these Christians discovered Christ, the Logos of God, as both speaker and addressee.

---

in ambiguous dialogues in the Hebrew Bible (thus, “prosopological” in the most literal sense of the term). Indeed, because the Father and the Son are the most common subjects of prosopological exegesis, the texts in which the Spirit speaks have suffered comparative neglect.

While previous scholarship found evidence of the Spirit speaking prosopologically only as early as Tertullian, more recent work has demonstrated the existence of this phenomenon as early as the writings of Justin Martyr, if not earlier. As Matthew Bates argues, “That the Holy Spirit was regarded at least by the time of Justin Martyr (the middle of the second century) as a distinct person capable of speaking in the theodrama on his own, not just in the guise of another, is fairly clear.” But while scholars are increasingly recognizing that, for some early Christian writers, the Spirit could himself be a speaking agent, there remains no systematic analysis of these texts, much less an explanation for the logic behind them. Thus, in this paper, I wish to go beyond these scholars who have identified the key texts in which “the Spirit speaks” prosopologically by first examining the nature of the OT quotations that were assigned to the prosopon of the Spirit by Justin and Tertullian. Through a careful analysis of these texts, I will demonstrate that the need for divine testimony concerning both the Father and the Son was the central motivating factor for assigning OT quotations to the prosopon of the Spirit. Finally, I will pose the question of what prompted this particular pneumatological innovation and identify both exegetical and historical reasons for this development. As a result of this inquiry, we have a new window by which to view the historical and theological dynamics at work in the pre-Nicene period that would contribute to the development of a distinctively Trinitarian, and not merely binitarian, view of God.

The Spirit Speaks in Justin and Tertullian

While the pioneering use of prosopological exegesis by Justin and Tertullian has received detailed attention elsewhere, this section attempts the first systematic analysis of their approach to the prosopological speech of the Spirit. While

---

there may be other early texts in which the Spirit speaks prosopologically,\(^5\)
I have chosen Justin and Tertullian as the two earliest Christian writers for
whom we can identify the Spirit speaking prosopologically with a high level
of confidence.

**Tertullian**

We begin with Tertullian, whose writings have provided the clearest examples
of prosopological exegesis from the *prosopon* of the Spirit in the minds of many
scholars.\(^6\) Tertullian's efforts to identify the divine *persona*\(^7\) behind many OT
passages, set out most clearly in his treatise *Adversus Praxeas*, stemmed from
his desire to refute the teaching of modalistic monarchianism that threatened
to collapse the distinctions between the members of the Godhead.\(^8\) As such,
Tertullian in *Adv. Prax.* 11 presents a series of OT quotations that he assigns first
to the Father, then to the Son, and finally to the Spirit. In this section, we will
examine the quotations Tertullian attributes to the Spirit in order to formulate
a hypothesis about the underlying logic at work in such attributions, and then
evaluate this hypothesis within the broader context of Tertullian's thought.

Tertullian first calls us to “observe also the Spirit speaking in the third per-
son concerning the Father and the Son”\(^9\) and furnishes three examples:

---

\(^5\) On the possibility of the Spirit speaking prosopologically in Heb 1:8-12, see Bates, *Birth of the
Trinity*, 163-165, 170-171.

Trinity*, 27-28, 164 n. 18; Rondeau, *Les Commentaires Patristiques*, 2.30-34.

\(^7\) E. Osborn, *Tertullian, First Theologian of the West* (Cambridge 1997) 137 defines Tertullian's
understanding of *persona* as “the effective manifestation of a distinct being,” and as such
must be distinguished from the metaphysical *substantia*. On the difficulties in translating the
various words Tertullian uses to distinguish the Persons within the Godhead, see D. Rankin,
“Tertullian's Vocabulary of the Divine ‘Individuals’ in *Adversus Praxeas,*” *Sacris Erudiri* 40

\(^8\) On the context and significance of *Adv. Prax.* for the development of Trinitarian theology, see
K.B. McCruden, “Monarchy and Economy in Tertullian's *Adversus Praxeas*,” *Scottish Journal
Daley, and T.J. Gaden (eds.), *God in Early Christian Thought: Essays in Memory of Lloyd G.
Patterson* (VCSupp 94; Leiden 2009) 61-81. The full complexity of Tertullian's pneumatology,
especially as presented in *Adv. Prax.* with respect to the present activity of the Paraclete, is
beyond the scope of this article, but see the essays above.

\(^9\) *Adv. Prax.* 11.7: *animadverte etiam spiritum loquement ex tertia persona de patre et filio.*
Quotations and (slightly modified) English translations of *Adv. Prax.* taken from E. Evans, ed.
and trans., *Q. Septimii Florentis Tertulliani Adversus Praxeas Liber: Tertullian’s Treatise Against
Praxeas* (London 1948).
The Spirit Speaks

(1) Ps 110:1: “The Lord said to my lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies the footstool of your feet.”
(2) Isa 45:1: “Thus says the Lord to my lord Christ.”
(3) Isa 53:1; John 12:38; Rom 10:16: “Lord, who has believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? We have announced concerning him like a young boy, like a root in a thirsty land, and there was no beauty or glory of his.”

Tertullian adds that “these are a few out of many,” but unfortunately does not provide us with any further examples. Nevertheless, careful analysis of these three quotations is enough to make sense of the broader pattern he likely had in mind.

We begin by taking Tertullian’s statement that these quotations all involve the Spirit speaking “concerning the Father and the Son” at face value, and work through the logic that may have led to such a conclusion. Quotations (1) and (2) may be treated together, as each involves “the Lord” speaking to “my lord,” who is Christ. This leaves either the Father or the Spirit as candidates for the one reporting the divine discourse. In both cases, however, the Spirit is the only logical option, given Tertullian’s subordinationist tendencies. For Tertullian, the Spirit is the “third sequence” of the divine economy, “third with God and his Son, as the fruit out of the shoot is third from the root, and the irrigation canal out of the river third from the spring, and the illumination of the beam third from the sun.” Thus, that the Father could refer to another Person as “my Lord” can be ruled out at once, and, in a trinitarian economy, this leaves only the Spirit as the one reporting the dialogue and the Father, therefore, as the first “Lord,” the one speaking to the Son. According to Tertullian’s logic, these quotations are to be read as follows:

---

10 Adv. Prax. 11.9: haec pauca de multis.
11 This christological identification is made explicit in (2), but is implicit in (1), given the long tradition of interpreting Ps 110:1 christologically. In (2), we may note that Tertullian is here following an inherited tradition of reading כּוֹר (Cyrus) instead of the LXX’s כּוֹר ("Cyrus"). Precedent for this reading is found in Barn. 12.11.
(1a) Ps 110:1: *The Spirit:* “The Father said to the Son, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies the footstool of your feet.”

(2a) Isa 45:1: *The Spirit:* “Thus says the Father to the Son.”

This brings us to quotation (3), a composite of Isa 53:1, John 12:38, and Rom 10:16. The subject of the divine speech is, again, the Son, as the allusions to the incarnation make clear. In this case, we must determine the referent of the one being addressed with the vocative “Lord,” as well as the nature of the speaker of the quotation. For the same reasons as above, we can assume that only the Spirit would address the Father as “Lord,” and not vice versa. The details of the text (e.g., the “arm of the Lord,” which typically refers anthropomorphically to the Father) seem to further support this notion.

(3a) Isa 53:1; John 12:38; Rom 10:16: *The Spirit:* “Father, who has believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? We have announced concerning the Son like a young boy, like a root in a thirsty land, and there was no beauty or glory of his.”

We have traced the basic logic at work in all three of these quotations assigned to the Spirit and have noticed that in each quotation the Spirit speaks concerning the Father and the Son. The significance of the consistent reference to each of the other two members of the Trinity cannot be understated; if we examine the quotations assigned to the Father and to the Son earlier in *Adv. Prax.* 11, we find that these are always spoken from one to the other. In other words, when the Father or the Son speaks, only those two Persons are in view, but when the Spirit speaks, all three Persons are participating in the divine discourse. This hypothesis gains support from none other than Tertullian himself, who notes at the conclusion of *Adv. 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.14

---

14 *Adv. Prax.* 11.9-10: *his itaque paucis tamen manifeste distinctio trinitatis exponitur: est enim ipse qui pronuntiat spiritus, et pater ad quem pronuntiat, et filius de quo pronuntiat. sic*
Note how the Spirit’s role is different from that of the Father and of the Son. Whereas the latter two have a strictly two-way communication (with no reference to the Spirit), the Spirit’s discourse involves both of the other two members of the Trinity.\textsuperscript{15} From this and the examples above, we can summarize Tertullian’s approach for identifying when the Spirit is speaking in his own \textit{prosopon} as those verses in which dialogue is spoken \textit{to or from the Father concerning the Son}. That is, either the Spirit speaks directly to the Father concerning the Son, as in quotation (3) above, or he reports the words from the Father concerning the Son, as in quotations (1) and (2).

Looking at the broader context of Tertullian’s theological thought, we find that his further description of the Spirit’s role clarifies his position on the nature of the Spirit’s speech. As Tertullian writes, the Holy Spirit is “the preacher of one monarchy and also the interpreter of the economy for those who admit the words of his new prophecy, and the leader into all the truth which is in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit according to the Christian mystery.”\textsuperscript{16} In Tertullian’s understanding, as revealed by this text, the Spirit’s primary purpose is to guide Christians into an understanding of the Trinity. In other words, the reason \textit{why} the OT contains the Spirit’s testimony to the Father concerning the Son is to illuminate Christians’ understanding of the Trinity. For Tertullian, the Spirit speaks in order to testify to the Father concerning the Son for the purpose of enlightening believers regarding the mystery of the Trinity. It is unlikely, however, that Tertullian was the originator of these ideas. Given that Tertullian “was heir to a robust exegetical tradition that decisively shaped his Trinitarian discourse,”\textsuperscript{17} we must consider the extent to which similar

\textsuperscript{15} Rondeau, \textit{Les Commentaires Patristiques}, 2.33 n. 41 seems to be driving at the same point: Que l’Esprit soit la troisième personne divine non parce qu’il est en fonction de troisième personne grammaticale, mais parce qu’il est en fonction de troisième locuteur, montre que, bien que Tertullien lui-même fasse interférer le schéma grammatical dont les “trois personnes” offraient une analogie séduisante, l’exégèse prosopologique porte fondamentalement sur le locuteur (et sur le ‘tu’, qui est un locuteur potentiel).


\textsuperscript{17} Bates, \textit{Birth of the Trinity}, 27.
examples of this kind of prosopological exegesis may be found in the earlier traditions to which we now turn.

Justin Martyr
Tertullian freely admits his familiarity with the writings of Justin Martyr, and the influence of the earlier apologist is felt in many ways, both subtle and overt, throughout Tertullian's writings. But whereas Tertullian carefully distinguishes the Spirit from the Son, Justin's views on the Spirit are often described as "confused" in light of his seeming failure to distinguish between the "activity and identity" of the Spirit and the Word. This ambiguity complicates our efforts at unpacking Justin's prosopological exegesis with respect to the Spirit. For instance, in the passage where Justin gives a brief overview of his use of prosopological exegesis, the Word appears to take on the functions that are elsewhere ascribed to the Spirit:

But when you hear the sayings of the prophets spoken as from the person of someone, do not suppose they are spoken from the inspired persons themselves, but from the divine Word who moves them. For sometimes He speaks as one announcing beforehand things that are about to happen, but sometimes He speaks as from the person of God, the Father and Master of all, and still other times as from the person of Christ, and at still other times as from the person of the people answering the Lord or His Father.

---

18 E.g., Tertullian, Adv. Valent. 5.
19 For examples, see e.g. G.D. Dunn, Tertullian (London and New York 2004) 66, 167 n. 36, 175 n. 82. Cf. T.D. Barnes, Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study (Oxford 1971) 232; Daniélou, Origins of Latin Christianity, 267-270; O. Skarsaune, The Proof from Prophecy: A Study in Justin Martyr's Proof-Text Tradition: Text-Type, Provenance, Theological Profile (SNT 66; Leiden 1987) 445 notes that Irenaeus and Tertullian both "reflect features of Justin's exegesis which derive directly from Justin's own work with the LXX text—not from his testimony sources."
21 1 Apol. 36.1-2: "Ὅταν δὲ τὰς λέξεις τῶν προφητῶν λεγομένας ὡς ἀπὸ προσώπου ἀκούητε, μὴ ἀπ’ αὐτῶν τῶν ἐμπεπνευσμένων λέγεσθαι νομίσητε, ἀλλ’ ἀπὸ τοῦ κινοῦντος αὐτῶς θεοῦ Λόγου. Ποτὲ μὲν γὰρ ὡς προσγεγελητικῶς τά μέλλοντα γενήσεσθαι λέγει, | ποτὲ δὲ ὡς ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ δεσπότου πάντων καὶ πατρὸς θεοῦ φθέγγεται, ποτὲ δὲ ὡς ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ποτὲ δὲ
Nevertheless, as Anthony Briggman observes, this “confusion of function does not have to prevent the distinction of the Holy Spirit and Word.” While in Justin’s writings the Spirit often, if not primarily, functions as the one through whom the prophets and even the other divine persons speak, the Spirit can also, as we will see, speak truly and exclusively as his own character. Indeed, for Justin, the Spirit is worthy of worship along with the Father and the Son, though the Spirit is nevertheless subordinate to the Father and the Son. And, most interestingly of all, based on the nature of the texts he assigns to the prosopon of the Spirit, we can find parallels to the same pattern of prosopological exegesis that we witnessed in Tertullian.

Justin’s clearest use of prosopological exegesis from the person of the Spirit comes in the midst of a discussion of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19) found in his Dialogue with Trypho. Justin here strives to distinguish the Father from the pre-incarnate Son and introduces two quotations that, he claims, demonstrate the following:

It is in every way necessary to admit that, besides the one considered Maker of all things, some other was called Lord by the Holy Spirit—not only by Moses, but also by David, when he said [Ps 109:1 LXX and Ps 44:7-8 LXX]…

---

23 Dial. 7.1; 1 Apol. 39.1. It is also important for Justin that the Spirit speaks about future things in the past tense, “as if they had already happened [ὡς ἤδη γεγονόμενα]” (1 Apol. 42.1). On this “temporal aspect” of prosopological exegesis, see Bates, Hermeneutics of the Apostolic Proclamation, 201-202. Cf. Stanton, “Spirit in the Writings of Justin Martyr,” 326-329.
24 1 Apol. 38.1-3; 44.2. Cf. Bates, Hermeneutics of the Apostolic Proclamation, 204-205; Briggman, “Measuring Justin’s Approach to the Spirit,” 121. It is perhaps Justin’s ambiguity at precisely this point that has given rise to views such as Slusser’s (“Exegetical Roots,” 476).
27 Dial. 56.14: ἐκ παντὸς τρόπου ὁμιλοῦσιν ἔδει ὅτι παρὰ τόν νοούμενον ποιήσαντον τῶν ἁλαθων καὶ ἄλλος τις κυριολογεῖται ύπό τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος· οὗ μόνον δὴ διά Μωσέως, ἄλλα καὶ διά Δαυιδ. Καὶ γάρ καὶ δι’ ἑκείνου εἴρηται:
The clear implication of this text is that, while David indeed “spoke” (ἐίρηται) in writing these psalms, the Holy Spirit stands behind David as the one testifying to the Son by “calling him Lord” (κυριολογεῖται).28 Perhaps there is some significance in the past-tense action ascribed to David (εἴρηται), as opposed to the present-tense, presumably gnomic action of the Spirit (κυριολογεῖται). The Spirit, then, is not merely an agent of inspiration, but the true, omnitemporal speaker of the words which David merely transcribes.29 We turn now to the two quotations which follow this introduction:

(4) Ps 109:1 LXX: “The Lord says to my Lord: Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”
(5) Ps 44:7-8 LXX: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; the scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness. You have loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows.”30

In these proof-texts, we find ambiguity regarding the speaker of the source texts, which Justin attempts to resolve by assigning these words to the Spirit. Thus, we have here further examples of prosopological exegesis in which the Holy Spirit is identified as a prosopon in his own right.

Right away we notice that Ps 109 (110):1 was one of the verses Tertullian cited as prosopological exegesis from the prosopon of the Spirit. In light of his subordinationist view of the Trinity, Justin could similarly only conclude that the first “Lord” was the Father and the second “Lord” the Son, with the Spirit as speaker, resulting in the interpretation which Justin utilizes in this passage:

(4a) Ps 109:1 LXX: The Spirit: “The Father says to the Son: Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”

---

28 To underscore the role of the Spirit in testifying to the Father and the Son as “God and Lord,” Justin immediately follows these quotations by asking Trypho if there is anyone else who so testifies: Ἐὰν οὖν καὶ ἄλλον τινὰ θεολογεῖν καὶ κυριολογεῖν τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἁγιὸν φατε ὑμεῖς παρὰ τὸν πατέρα τῶν ὅλων καὶ τὸν Χριστὸν αὐτοῦ, ἀποκρίνασθέ μοι (Dial. 56.15).

29 Bates, Birth of the Trinity, 164 n. 18 admits ambiguity concerning whether the Spirit is the primary or the secondary agent here, but nevertheless considers it more likely that it should be interpreted in accordance with what I have suggested here (contra Andresen, “Zur Entstehung,” 19).

30 On Justin’s text of Ps 44:7-8 LXX and 109:1 LXX, see Skarsaune, Proof from Prophecy, 86-88, 126.
Again, the speech assigned to the prosopon of the Spirit reports the words of the Father concerning the Son. Justin’s second example, Ps 44:7-8 LXX, presents an interesting twist on our formula. To follow Justin’s logic, we start with the assumption that the addressee can only be the Son because, among other things, he is the “anointed” one. The God of the Son (the “your God” who does the anointing) must, therefore, be the Father, leaving the Spirit as the speaker of the discourse and yielding the following result:

(5a) Ps 44:7-8 LXX: *The Spirit*: “Your throne, *O Son*, is forever and ever; the scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness. You have loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore the *Father* has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows.”

Thus, in this verse, Justin understands the Spirit to be testifying to the Son, concerning the actions of the Father. Unlike in our other examples so far, the Spirit here does not merely report the words of the Father to the Son but actually makes his own statement to the Son concerning the Father. This divergence from the norm highlights what remains constant in both cases: the Spirit’s role as a speaker always seems to involve both the Father and the Son, a phenomenon we do not find when either the Father or the Son is speaking.

This, I believe, is the basis for distinguishing between these texts, in which the Spirit speaks as his own character (the primary agent), and other texts in which the Spirit is merely the inspiring source for the words spoken from the prosopon of another (the secondary agent). As indicated above, all of the texts explicitly and exclusively assigned to the Spirit have to do with testimony concerning the Father and the Son. On the other hand, when the Spirit speaks in the prosopon of another, this kind of testimony is not in view. The key point, therefore, is that Justin thinks about the speaking role of the Spirit in not one but two distinct ways. As a secondary agent, the Spirit is the source of prophetic descriptions of coming events that are placed in the mouths of other

---


32 For instance, according to Justin, when the Spirit speaks ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ Χριστοῦ, the cited scripture is simply autobiographical speech in which Christ foretells his passion (1 Apol. 38); put differently, the Spirit is “announcing beforehand things which are about to happen” (cf. 1 Apol. 36.1-2). Similarly, when the Spirit speaks ἀπὸ προσώπου λαῶν, the cited scripture is merely a prophetic description of coming human events (1 Apol. 47).
speakers. As a primary agent, however, the Spirit is a speaker in his own right concerning testimony about one person of the Godhead to another person of the Godhead, which matches the pattern of prosopological exegesis observed later in Tertullian.

The boundaries between these categories are not always clearly demarcated, however, giving rise to Justin’s uncertainty about how to prosopologically exegete certain passages. Take, for instance, Justin’s exposition in Dial. 36.4-6 of the following verse:

(6) Ps 23:8 LXX: “Who is this King of Glory? // The Lord of hosts, He is the King of Glory.”

The “King of Glory,” Justin argues, is the Son after his ascension. But who is the speaker, and who is the addressee, of this text? Justin provides the following prosopological interpretation: “For when the heavenly rulers [cf. Ps 23:7 LXX] saw that he had an appearance that was unsightly, dishonored, and inglorious, and not recognizing him, they asked, ‘Who is this King of Glory?’” Justin is confident that the question is spoken by the “heavenly rulers,” but he is unsure whether the response comes from the Spirit, speaking from his own prosopon, or from the prosopon of the Father. Thus, Justin admits two possible prosopological interpretations of Ps 23:8 LXX:

(6a) Ps 23:8 LXX: Heavenly rulers: “Who is this King of Glory?” // The Spirit (primary agent): The Son, He is the King of Glory.

(6b) Ps 23:8 LXX: Heavenly rulers: “Who is this King of Glory?” // The Father (the Spirit as secondary agent): The Son, He is the King of Glory.

The nature of the source text helps explain why this particular verse might have vexed Justin. As with Ps 44:7-8 LXX, Ps 23:8 LXX could be interpreted as being spoken from the prosopon of the Spirit (so 6a). The words of the Spirit concern the Son, and to fit our pattern of the Spirit speaking as the primary agent, the addressee of the Spirit’s speech must be the other member of the Godhead, in this case the Father. But the addressees, Justin argues, are in fact the “heavenly rulers.” Because the “heavenly rulers” could serve as a suitable heavenly alternative addressee (as opposed to earthly personae such as men,
Israel, etc., as in the examples in which the Spirit is the secondary agent), the Spirit would be the most apt candidate for providing this testimony (for reasons to be explained in the following sections). But the fact that the Father is not the addressee is enough of a break from the pattern to generate a different prosopological interpretation, (6b), in which the Father is the ultimate speaker of this source text. Justin’s uncertainty regarding this liminal case, I suggest, actually serves to strengthen my hypothesis that there are two different methods by which the Spirit is said to speak that Justin could employ to interpret the Old Testament prosopologically.

Having analyzed the data in more detail, we can confirm Anthony Briggman’s passing observation that Justin gives the Spirit a distinctive role “in testifying to the deity and sovereignty of the Father and the Son.”34 This can take the form, as we have seen, of the Spirit either testifying to dialogue between the Father and the Son or testifying in his own right. Significantly, this emphasis on testimony to the other members of the Godhead matches what we found in the writings of Tertullian when the Spirit speaks as the primary agent. We may conclude, therefore, that both Justin and Tertullian understood the Spirit to be speaking prosopologically when testifying to both the Father and the Son.

The Exegetical and Historical Roots of an Emerging Pneumatology

Thus far, we have found evidence of an emerging pneumatology in which the Spirit could indeed speak as a primary agent in some early Christian writings, and observed that the Spirit speaks in this manner only when both Father and Son are in view. Now, though, we turn to a different and yet equally vexing question: why did the early Christians begin to assign to the Spirit such a role? Slusser attempted to answer this question with reference to early Christian prayer, suggesting that it was Christian experience, exemplified in Stephen’s final cry (Acts 7:55-56), in which “two persons are recognized, and the declaration springs from a divine impulse somehow distinct from them both.”35 While this may have been influential in the development of Trinitarian thought writ large, it does not explain how and why certain OT texts were assigned to the

---

34 Briggman, “Measuring Justin’s Approach to the Spirit,” 113. Citing Dial. 56.15, Briggman goes on to add that, for Justin, “the Holy Spirit holds a unique position of importance, since his activity stands behind the texts of scripture that Justin uses to illustrate the divinity of the Father and his Word” (114). This very closely parallels my own findings above.

prosopon of the Spirit. Similarly, Briggman’s passing suggestion that the Spirit’s role in testifying to the Father and the Son might be based on 1 Cor 12:3 proves unsatisfying insofar as the testimony in view of this verse appears to be limited to that of a human being; the Father is not in view.\footnote{Briggman, “Measuring Justin’s Approach to the Spirit,” 113 n. 20.} In light of our findings above, a more nuanced explanation is clearly necessary.

I suggest that there were two significant factors at work in this pneumatological innovation, and that both contributed to the development of prosopological exegesis from the prosopon of the Spirit. We will begin with the exegetical roots of this phenomenon, identifying 1 John 5 as the source of the testimony motif we have seen associated with the Spirit thus far, and then look at conflict with Judaism as the historical context that encouraged this particular theological development.

**Exegetical Roots: The Johannine Trial Motif**

We have seen that the most consistent theme emerging from a study of all the texts in which the Spirit speaks prosopologically is that of divine testimony. Interestingly, the notion of the Spirit as one who testifies does not have significant precedent in the writings of the Old Testament and of Second Temple Judaism. Instead, the role of the Spirit is generally confined to serving as the source of inspired speech, whether it be prophecy, wisdom, or encouragement to righteousness.\footnote{R.P. Menzies, *The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology* (JSNTSupp 54; Sheffield 1991) 112. For more on Jewish views of the Spirit at this time, see the thorough study of J.R. Levison, *The Spirit in First Century Judaism* (AGAJU 29; Leiden 1997).} The emphasis on the testifying role of the Spirit must have come from elsewhere. I propose that it is within the Johannine corpus that we find the earliest evidence of the theological move which allows for the later innovation of the Spirit speaking from his own prosopon. For it is here that we begin to see the development of the Spirit’s speaking role as a result of the need to have divine testimony concerning God.

In the Fourth Gospel, the Spirit is linked with the notion of testimony through the Evangelist’s employment of a “trial motif.”\footnote{On the history of scholarship concerning the Fourth Gospel’s trial motif (*Prozessmotiv*) see G.M. Burge, *The Anointed Community: The Holy Spirit in the Johannine Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI. 1987) 36-38 and bibliography cited therein.} Not only is Jesus on trial before his contemporaries, but the world is on trial before God, with Jesus cast as the witness providing the most important testimony (cf. John 18:37).\footnote{See further A.E. Harvey, *Jesus on Trial: A Study in the Fourth Gospel* (London 1976).}
John’s Gospel also extends this motif into the church age, but with the Paraclete functioning as “the other advocate who will carry on the trial even though the church now receives the persecution of the world.”  Thus the Johannine Jesus tells his disciples, “When the Paraclete comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify concerning me” (15:26).  In this verse, the Spirit’s role is explicitly cast as an advocate for the church who testifies concerning the Son.  Thus, in John’s Gospel, we find the idea of the Spirit testifying concerning the Son, but this characterization appears to be limited to the church age.

We find a second key insight regarding the Spirit in 1 John 5. Carrying on the trial motif from John’s Gospel, the epistle makes the following key argument:

Jesus Christ is the one who came by water and blood, not only by the water, but by the water and by the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three are in agreement. If we accept the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, because this is the testimony of God that he has testified concerning his Son.
In this passage, the Spirit testifies concerning the Son, namely his baptism and death (“the water and the blood”), though no explanation is given for precisely how the Spirit goes about this work of testifying. Crucially for our purposes, however, this passage goes further in its discussion of the trial motif in light of a key theological reflection: God’s testimony is “greater” than that of any human being in terms of its reliability. As Judith Lieu points out, given the immediately preceding context, “the ‘greater’ testimony that God gives [concerning his Son] is to be identified with, or at least includes, the testimony of spirit, water, and blood just mentioned.” Thus, though the “greater” testimony of God involves not the Spirit but the Father testifying to the Son and the resulting provision of salvation, the author’s emphasis on the importance of divine testimony to the Son is a striking theological insight. Even assuming the author does not believe the Spirit to be God, this claim’s close proximity to a reference to the Spirit as the testifier par excellence suggests that it would not be very difficult for later Christians to connect this need for divine testimony with the Spirit’s testifying role, particularly in light of developing Trinitarian theology.

Justin appears to have made precisely this breakthrough in response to a perceived theological problem found in the Hebrew scriptures. As early

44 On the variety of possible referents for this phrase, see Lieu, I, II, & III John, 208-13. The Spirit’s presence at Jesus’ baptism (John 1:32-33) and death (19:30) appears to reflect a common tradition; in the latter event, the conjunction of the Spirit (19:30) with blood and water (19:34-35) seems the basis for the claim that these three are “in agreement” (1 John 5:8). Cf. T.G. Brown, Spirit in the Writings of John: Johannine Pneumatology in Social-scientific Perspective (JSNTSupp 253; London and New York 2003) 251-253.

45 Brown, Spirit in the Writings of John, 251: “This question is not even answered obliquely in the text, which forces interpreters to propose theories about how the author envisioned the spirit testifying to the significance of these events.” For her part, Brown takes this to mean that “the community’s possession of the spirit serves as a witness to Jesus’ death because the spirit could not have been given without it” (254).

46 Lieu, I, II, & III John, 216.

47 Lieu, I, II, & III John, 215; “This passage brings together God and God’s Son in verses 9-12 entirely independently of the mention of the spirit, and instead it sets the spirit alongside water and blood in verses 6-8; this shows just how far 1 John is from the trinitarian understanding of the spirit that later scribes credited to him.”

48 A point reinforced by the later addition of the so-called Comma Johanneum, which added a reference to the Father, Word, and Holy Spirit as three witnesses “in heaven” in contrast to the three witnesses “on earth.” Cf. B.M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (Stuttgart ²1994) 647-649.

49 On Justin’s extensive use of the Johannine writings, see C.E. Hill, The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church (Oxford 2004) 312-351; Hill concludes that “it can no longer be claimed
Christian interpreters searched the Old Testament for examples of dialogue between the Father and the Son, verses such as Psalm 110:1 must have posed a unique theological challenge. This verse had, from pre-Pauline times, served as a *testimonium* to the exaltation of Christ.50 Without doubt, it was the christological significance of this verse that captured the attention of early Christian interpreters. What appears to have been less important at this early stage, as demonstrated by the variety of interpretations given, was the identity of the speaker of the quotation, that is, the one reporting the words of the Father to the Son.51 As theological thought became increasingly refined, a question must have emerged: who (or, perhaps, what sort of being) is capable or qualified to make such testimony? Insofar as many early Christians believed human beings to be created in the *imago Dei*, which was subsequently marred or disfigured on account of sin, we can understand how human testimony (even that of Israel’s greatest king) surely could not merit much concerning God to God.52 The solution to this theological problem, I suggest, was made by the claim in 1 John 5:1-12, where testimony to God is made by God himself. With the Father and the Son functioning as the speaker and addressee of the direct discourse of Ps 110:1, this necessitated the role of a third divine Person, the Spirit, to testify to this divine speech. Thus, the theological moves made in the Johannine writings provided just the rationale for assigning this verse, and others like it, to the

---

50 M.C. Albl, *“And Scripture Cannot Be Broken”: The Form and Function of the Early Christian Testimonia Collections* (NovTSupp 46; London 1999) 216-236. The literature on the Christian use of Ps 110:1 is vast, and the various functions to which this text was put to use exceed the scope of this article. The most thorough study to date is D.M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity*, (SBLMS 18; Nashville, TN. 1973). For our purposes, we are only concerned with the identity of the speaker of Ps 110:1a, an issue which is largely ignored in the literature.

51 Early options included “David himself, by the Holy Spirit ἐν τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ” (Mark 12:36), merely “David himself” (Luke 20:42; Acts 2:34; Barn. 12.10), or even “the Good,” an interpretation which, according to Hippolytus (Ref. 5.26.16-18), is found in the Gnostic *Book of Baruch* (cf. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand*, 48); others simply deleted the phrase “the Lord said to my Lord” and resolved the question that way (1 Clem. 36.4). See also Bates, *Birth of the Trinity*, 44-56, 59-62, 160-163.

52 On early Christian anthropology, see M.C. Steenberg, *Of God and Man: Theology as Anthropology from Irenaeus to Athanasius* (London and New York 2009), esp. 55-103 on Tertullian.
prosopon of the Spirit, an interpretation we find reflected first by Justin in *Dial.* 56 and then by Tertullian in *Adv. Prax.* 11.

In summary: it is in the Johannine writings that the Spirit’s identity is first connected to the motif of testimony; in light of God’s new dispensation, of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, a primary role of the Spirit was now seen to be testifying to this event. The genius of the early Christians which we see reflected in the writings of Justin and Tertullian was, therefore, to extend the Spirit’s role from that of testifier to man about God to *testifier to God about God* in response to the need to identify the speaker of texts such as Ps 110:1. Whereas it has already been demonstrated that Paul and subsequent Christian writers “accepted and employed a basic christocentric narrative tradition that itself articulated a fundamental hermeneutical posture,”53 we can now go further and say that, gradually, the early Christians discovered in the Hebrew Scriptures a thoroughly *Trinitarian* narrative, in which the testifying role of the Spirit was understood to be an essential part of the nature of the Triune God.

**Historical Roots: Conflict with Judaism**

This exegetical development did not, however, take place in an ahistorical vacuum; indeed, we cannot lose sight of the influence of historical context on the development of early Christian pneumatology. In particular, we must bear in mind that significant contact, dialogue, and debate between Jews and Christians continued well beyond the “parting of the ways” supposedly completed around the time of the second Jewish Revolt.54 One of the many developing fault lines between Jewish and Christian thinkers in the late second and early third centuries concerned the Holy Spirit, and it is in precisely this context which we can locate the kind of pneumatological innovation that we have observed in the scriptural exegesis of Justin and Tertullian. It is, after all, in the writings of these same two early Christian apologists that we first encounter

---

the argument for the cessation of the Spirit from Judaism.\(^{55}\) This link is, I contend, more than mere coincidence, and provides a plausible rationale for the emergence of the Spirit’s testifying role in their writings.

Justin is the first Christian writer to explicitly argue for the cessation of the Spirit from Judaism following the coming of Christ.\(^{56}\) As Justin explained to his Jewish interlocutor Trypho: “After man’s redemption was accomplished by [Christ], these gifts were to cease among you, and, having come to an end in him, should again be given, as was foretold, by him, from the grace of the Spirit’s powers, to all his believers in accordance with their merits.”\(^{57}\) Here Justin makes a bold move, arguing not only that the Spirit has been bestowed on the Christian community in fulfillment of Joel 2:28-29,\(^{58}\) but also that the (partial, inferior) bestowal of the Spirit on the Jews ceased with the incarnation. Thus Justin’s pneumatology contributes to his larger argument that the church is the “true spiritual Israel.”\(^{59}\)

Tertullian takes up the same theme in several of his writings, with the clearest expression found in his \textit{Adversus Marcionem}: at the time of the coming of Christ, “the entire operation of spiritual grace was to come to rest in him, and, as far as the Jews were concerned, to come to an end.”\(^{60}\) Tertullian then makes the empirical observation that “the facts themselves bear witness to this, since from then onwards the Spirit of the Creator no longer breathes among them,

---

\(^{55}\) J.E. Morgan-Wynne, \textit{Holy Spirit and Religious Experience in Christian Literature ca. AD 90-200} (Milton Keynes 2006) 317-323, from which the following is indebted. Morgan-Wynne also treats Irenaeus’ lone reference to the topic of the cessation of the Spirit from Israel, but, as he point out, this single reference is made tangentially in service of a separate point (319); as such, we will continue to limit our focus to Justin and Tertullian.

\(^{56}\) On Justin’s view of the conflict between Judaism and Christianity more generally, see Lieu, \textit{Image and Reality}, 103-148.


\(^{58}\) As cited by Justin, along with Ps 67:19 LXX, in \textit{Dial. 87.6}.

\(^{59}\) Morgan-Wynne, \textit{Holy Spirit and Religious Experience}, 319; cf. \textit{Dial. 11.5}. Stanton, “Spirit in the Writings of Justin Martyr,” 334 sees this an innovation of Justin and a “corollary of his conviction that Christians are the true Israel.”

while from Judaea has been taken away the wise and prudent master-builder, the counsellor and the prophet.”61 Tertullian, like Justin, thus locates the complete cessation of the Spirit from Judaism at the time of the incarnation.

Taken together, these texts bear witness to what must have been a lively debate concerning to whom the Spirit belonged, be it Jews or Christians. The Christian side of the argument, preserved in the writings of Justin and Tertullian, clearly demonstrates increased reflection on how the role of the Spirit changed as a result of the coming of Christ. It is within this context that Justin and Tertullian took the innovative step of assigning verses from the Hebrew scriptures to the prosopon of the Spirit. Precisely because these verses all served the Christian purpose of providing testimony to the relationship between the Father and the Son, we can easily imagine how this prosopological exegesis contributed to the Christian appropriation of the Spirit. Even in the Jews’ own scriptures, the implicit argument appears to be, the Spirit serves a distinctively Christian purpose. The Spirit has, therefore, in a sense always truly belonged to the Christians.

Conclusion

According to a recent and widely influential reconstruction, the development of early Christian pneumatology can be thought of in three stages: a first stage with a “high” pneumatology heavily influenced by Jewish theologies of the Spirit, a second stage that abandoned the older Jewish-Christian pneumatologies and was characterized by an overall “low” view of the Spirit, and a third stage in which post-Nicene Christian theologians recovered and reconfigured some of the distinctive themes from the first stage.62 Within this scheme, Justin and Tertullian find themselves on opposite sides of a major theological turning point. In the words of Michel Barnes, “At the beginning of the third century, the Jewish theological superstructure for Christian pneumatology is rejected,” leading to “the development of an alternative grammar for

61 Adv. Marc. 5.8.5; sicut et res ipsa testatur, nihil exinde spirante penes illos spiritu creatoris, ablato a Iudaea sapiente et prudente architecto et consiliario et propheta. Morgan-Wynne, Holy Spirit and Religious Experience, 319-320 also suggests Tertullian, Adv. Iud. 8.13; 13.13; 13.24; Adv. Marc. 3.23 as other expressions of this theme.

62 L. Ayres and M.R. Barnes, “Pneumatology: Historical and Methodological Considerations,” Augustinian Studies 39 (2008) 163-236. This collection includes four papers, as well as an introduction and conclusion, which were originally presented at the annual meeting of the North American Patristic Society in 2005.
Theology of the Holy Spirit."\textsuperscript{63} The key figure in this transition, at least in the West, is Tertullian. As part of his larger project of criticizing Jewish-Christian theology,\textsuperscript{64} Tertullian rejected the Jewish-Christian views of the Spirit he had inherited from figures like Justin and developed his own account of Trinitarian theology centered upon the notion of \textit{gradus}.\textsuperscript{65}

This revisionist account of the development of patristic pneumatology has a great deal to commend it. The conclusions of this article, however, suggest the need for further refinement of the model. Having made the first systematic analysis of texts in which the Spirit speaks from his own \textit{prosopon}, we have concluded that the need for divine testimony concerning both the Father and the Son was the central motivating factor for placing OT quotations on the lips of the Spirit. Motivated by historical and exegetical concerns, a new vision of the role of the Spirit along these lines first emerged in the writings of Justin Martyr. Not only do we see a clear continuity between Justin and Tertullian in their use of prosopological exegesis from the \textit{prosopon} of the Spirit, but we also glimpse ways in which Justin was himself moving beyond the Jewish-Christian pneumatologies of his day.\textsuperscript{66} Though Tertullian would further refine and more consistently apply Justin’s example of identifying prosopological exegesis with respect to the Spirit, we must indeed credit Justin’s scriptural exegesis as a landmark pneumatological innovation.


\textsuperscript{64} Cf. Daniélou, \textit{Origins of Latin Christianity}, 139-161.

\textsuperscript{65} Barnes, “Beginning and the End,” 184.

\textsuperscript{66} Thus, the statement that “Justin and Trypho don’t argue over the ‘Spirit’ because they share—in a broad but functional way—a pneumatology” (Barnes, “Beginning and the End,” 170), is in need of some modification.