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# The Spirit and the Scriptures: Revisiting Cyprian's Use of Prosopological Exegesis

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## ABSTRACT

While recent research into the early Christian reading practice of prosopological exegesis, 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, has highlighted the complexities involved in attempts to identify the Holy Spirit as the prosopological speaker of Old Testament quotations, there remains a need for clear criteria by which scholars can distinguish between different forms of the Spirit’s speech. Building on terminology suggested by Matthew Bates, this article proposes just such a means of distinguishing between when the Spirit functions as the primary speaking agent and when it functions as an inspiring secondary agent, with the former endowing the Spirit with a sufficient degree of theodramatic personhood to make its speech truly prosopological in nature. Applying this criteria to an analysis of Cyprian of Carthage’s use of prosopological exegesis in *On Works and Alms (De opere et eleemosynis)*, this article challenges the conclusions of David Downs by demonstrating that the Spirit does not truly speak from its own person in this treatise, though Cyprian may make some moves in this direction elsewhere in his writings. As a result of this study, we have not only a means of better assessing the extent of the pneumatological discontinuity between Cyprian and his Carthaginian predecessor Tertullian but also a clearer path forward for future scholarship that seeks to investigate how early Christian writers conceived of the relationship between the Spirit and the Scriptures.

**Keywords:** Cyprian; Tertullian; Holy Spirit; prosopological exegesis; pneumatology

## Introduction

In a 2012 article, David J. Downs applied emerging research into early Christian writers’ use of a reading strategy known as prosopological exegesis to Cyprian of Carthage’s treatise *On Works and Alms (De opere et eleemosynis)*, suggesting that Cyprian

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used this method to identify the Holy Spirit as the speaker of certain Old Testament quotations.<sup>1</sup> Since that time, however, our understanding of prosopological exegesis has deepened considerably in light of a new wave of English-language scholarship on the subject.<sup>2</sup> As this article will demonstrate, a more refined understanding of how early Christian writers utilised prosopological exegesis, especially with respect to the person of the Holy Spirit, not only challenges Downs's analysis of Cyprian's rhetorical strategy in *De opere et eleemosynis* but also points to the need for clear criteria by which scholars can distinguish between different forms of the Spirit's speech. After providing a critical overview of scholarship concerning the complexities involved in distinguishing between two forms of the Spirit's "speech" with respect to the divine theodrama, this article suggests the means by which these two forms can in fact be distinguished, finally positioning us to revisit Cyprian's purported use of prosopological exegesis from the person of the Spirit. As a result, this article provides, more generally, a refinement and clarification concerning how early Christian writers conceived of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the biblical text and, more specifically, another window into the extent of the discontinuity between Tertullian and his Carthaginian successor Cyprian with respect to their views of the Holy Spirit.

## The Problem of the Spirit as a Theodramatic Person

Despite providing a general overview of previous research on the subject of prosopological exegesis, Downs neglects to highlight one divisive issue that is critical for his argument concerning his understanding of the Spirit's speech in *Eleem. 2*. Though not addressed in Downs's article, the issue of the extent to which the Holy Spirit could speak prosopologically as a theodramatic person in its own right has in fact been a subject of significant scholarly debate.<sup>3</sup> Michael Slusser, whose influential 1988

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1 David J. Downs, "Prosopological Exegesis in Cyprian's *De opere et eleemosynis*," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 6 (2012): 279–94. Simply put, prosopological exegesis refers to the 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.

2 See, e.g., Matthew W. Bates, *The Hermeneutics of the Apostolic Proclamation: The Center of Paul's Method of Scriptural Interpretation* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012); Matthew W. Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity: Jesus, God, and Spirit in New Testament and Early Christian Interpretations of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198729563.001.0001>; Kyle R. Hughes, "The Spirit Speaks: Pneumatological Innovation in the Scriptural Exegesis of Justin and Tertullian," *Vigiliae Christianae* 69 (2015): 463–83, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700720-12341231>; Kyle R. Hughes, "The Trinitarian Testimony of the Spirit: Prosopological Exegesis and the Development of Pre-Nicene Pneumatology" (Ph.D. diss., Radboud University Nijmegen, 2017). In his author's note, Downs indicates that he had access to Bates's doctoral dissertation, which would later be revised and published as *The Hermeneutics of the Apostolic Proclamation*, but in any event Bates's initial work makes little reference to the complexities associated with the prosopological speech of the Spirit.

3 According to Bates (*Birth*, 5 n. 8), the term "theodrama" refers to "the dramatic world invoked by

article brought the study of prosopological exegesis to the attention of English-language scholarship, highlights the problem:

Apart from a very few texts of Tertullian ... 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.” As the one who speaks all the words, including those spoken as by the persons of the 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.<sup>4</sup>

Slusser thus distinguishes between two forms of the Spirit’s speech: on the one hand, the Spirit can indeed speak prosopologically as its own distinct person, but this happens only very infrequently; on the other hand, as is the case in the vast majority of instances in which the Spirit is identified as the speaker of an Old Testament text, the Spirit stands behind the text of Scripture as an inspiring force. For instance, Slusser notes that, for Justin, the Spirit is identified as the one through whom the prophets foretold matters concerning the coming Christ,<sup>5</sup> and a thorough survey of Justin’s writings indeed indicates that in the vast majority of instances in which the Spirit is referenced in relation to an Old Testament quotation it is simply to highlight the divinely inspired nature of the prophecy.<sup>6</sup>

This distinction between the two forms of the Spirit’s speech was in turn picked up by Matthew Bates. For his part, breaking with previous research on the role of the Spirit in early Christian prosopological exegesis,<sup>7</sup> Bates argued that “the Holy Spirit

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an ancient reader of Scripture as that reader construed a prophet to be speaking from or observing the person (*prosōpon*) of a divine or human character.” One significant aspect of using the language of theodrama is that it reminds us that the “person” language involved in prosopological exegesis is ultimately metaphorical. Still, the term “personal” is problematic, as modern notions of a conscious, self-aware individual must not be read into ancient references to “personhood.” For a summary of the relevant issues with respect to the Spirit, see Bernd Oberdorfer, “The Holy Spirit—A Person? Reflection on the Spirit’s Trinitarian Identity,” in *The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism*, ed. Michael Welker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 27–46.

- 4 Michael Slusser, “The Exegetical Roots of Trinitarian Theology,” *Theological Studies* 49 (1988): 476, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056398804900304>. For earlier scholarship on prosopological exegesis, see Carl Andresen, “Zur Entstehung und Geschichte des trinitarischen Personbegriffes,” *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 52 (1961): 1–39, <https://doi.org/10.1515/zntw.1961.52.1-2.1>; Marie-Josèphe Rondeau, *Les commentaires patristiques du Psautier: Recherches et bilan, 2; Exégèse prosopologique et théologie* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1985).
- 5 Slusser, “Exegetical Roots,” 464 n. 14; cf. *I Apol.* 61.13.
- 6 See, e.g., *Dial.* 25.1–5, 34.3–6, 43.3, 43.5–6, 52.1–2, 53.3, 54.1, 55.2, 73.3–5, 77.4, 78.8, 84.1, 91.4, 114.2, 114.3, 124.2–4, 139.3; *I Apol.* 32.1–2, 33.1–2, 35.3, 39.1, 40.1–4, 40.5–19, 41.1–4, 48.4–6, 51.1–5.
- 7 Besides Slusser, other early scholars of prosopological exegesis also maintained that Tertullian was

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.”<sup>8</sup> While disagreeing with Slusser on when early Christian writers first portrayed the Spirit as capable of prosopological speech in its own right, Bates followed Slusser in distinguishing between this form of speech and the Spirit’s usual function in inspiring Scripture. Bates termed these two ways in which the Spirit relates to the Old Testament as, respectively, the “primary speaking agent” and the “inspiring secondary agent.”<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, Bates leaves many questions unanswered at this point; for instance, it is unclear whether or not he intends for us to understand the Spirit’s function as an inspiring secondary agent to be considered a form of prosopological exegesis. Likewise, Bates does not indicate any criteria by which one might distinguish between when the Spirit speaks as a primary speaking agent and when it “speaks” as an inspiring secondary agent. Moreover, it is not clear what Bates means by “agent,” and it is not in any event clear that agency is even the best category for this discussion. On this issue of agency, I will continue using these terms now that they have been introduced into the literature,<sup>10</sup> but the first two questions demand answers from scholars such as Downs who seek to analyse passages in which the Spirit is said to be speaking through Scripture in some capacity, and the next section of this article will seek to do precisely that.

## Distinguishing the Spirit’s Functions

In a 2015 article, I made an initial attempt to examine the nature of the Old Testament texts that Justin and Tertullian, in the opinion of recent scholars, identified as having been spoken by the Spirit as a primary speaking agent. Given that no scholars have questioned that Tertullian presents the Spirit as truly speaking from its own person in *Prax.* 11, that article analysed the Old Testament quotations assigned to the Spirit in *Prax.* 11 (Ps 110:1; Isa 45:1; Isa 53:1–2) and concluded that Tertullian identifies the Spirit as the prosopological speaker of Old Testament dialogical passages when the dialogue is spoken to or from the Father concerning the Son; the Spirit, that is,

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the first to portray the Holy Spirit as capable of speaking prosopologically as its own person; see Andresen, “Zur Entstehung,” 19–20; Rondeau, *Les commentaires patristiques*, 31.

8 Bates, *Birth*, 164–65. Following Bates, more recent scholars of prosopological exegesis have also maintained that Justin portrayed the Spirit as capable of speaking prosopologically as its own person; see, e.g., Anthony Briggman, “Measuring Justin’s Approach to the Spirit: Trinitarian Conviction and Binitarian Orientation,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 63 (2009): 113–14, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157007208X377274>; Hughes, “The Spirit Speaks,” 470–75. The key text for demonstrating that, in Justin’s opinion, the Spirit could function as a primary speaking agent is *Dial.* 36.6, in which Justin deliberates over whether the speaker of Ps 24:10 is the Spirit speaking in the person of the Father (which would be as an inspiring secondary agent) or as its own person (as a primary speaking agent).

9 Bates, *Birth*, 164 n. 18.

10 See, e.g., Hughes, “The Spirit Speaks,” 473.

functions as a primary speaking agent in a dialogical passage in which both of the other members of the Trinity are in view.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, in the case of Justin's *Dial.* 56.14, the Old Testament quotations placed on the lips of the Spirit (Ps 110:1; Ps 45:6–7) are again dialogical passages that have in view both the Father and the Son.<sup>12</sup> In both cases, compared with examples of prosopological exegesis from the Father or the Son, it is only the Spirit who speaks when both of the other two divine persons are in view. Moreover, in both cases the quotations refer to the other divine persons as “God” or “Lord.” Justin explicitly picks up on this fact, following his quotation of Ps 110:1 and Ps 45:6–7 with the claim that in these passages the Holy Spirit testifies to the deity and lordship of the Father and the Son by calling them both “God” (θεολογέω) and “Lord” (κυριολογέω). The conclusion derived from this pattern is therefore as follows:

This [that is, that the Spirit's role as a speaker always seems to involve *both* the Father and the Son], 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.<sup>13</sup>

According to this conclusion, therefore, which could be further buttressed by the evidence of Irenaeus's use of prosopological exegesis with respect to the person of the Spirit,<sup>14</sup> the sole criterion by which one can identify an instance of the Spirit functioning as a primary speaking agent is if the dialogue assigned to the Spirit involves both the Father and the Son, with particular emphasis on ascribing to them the qualities of divinity and lordship. While this insight accurately captures the dynamics at work in *Dial.* 56 and *Prax.* 11, a more thorough reading of all the works of Justin, Irenaeus, and Tertullian

11 Hughes, “The Spirit Speaks,” 466–70.

12 Hughes, “The Spirit Speaks,” 470–73. To return to the aforementioned case of *Dial.* 36.6, I have argued that Justin's uncertainty about the prosopological speaker of this text is explained by the source text; while the words spoken concern testimony to the lordship of the Son, the addressee is not the Father but rather the group of “heavenly rulers” described by the psalmist (Hughes, “The Spirit Speaks,” 474–75). To the extent, therefore, that the heavenly rulers parallel the Father as a heavenly, non-human audience, this would fit the observed pattern in *Dial.* 56 and Tertullian's *Prax.* 11, but given that the Father is not actually the addressee, the pattern does not exactly hold and therefore an alternative prosopological interpretation is also given. In any event, the fact that Justin lays out these two options side by side provides further justification for distinguishing between these two forms of the Spirit's speech.

13 Hughes, “The Spirit Speaks,” 473.

14 In *Haer.* 3.6.1, Irenaeus, clearly following his predecessor Justin, cites Ps 110:1, Gen 19:24, and Ps 45:6–7 as evidence of the Spirit designating both the Father and the Son as “God” and “Lord.” Gen 19:24, which Justin used to introduce his argument in *Dial.* 56.14, is not a dialogical passage and therefore does not meet the formal criteria for being recognised as an instance of prosopological exegesis. This goes to show that the Spirit's work in testifying to the deity and lordship of the Father and the Son, in the writings of Justin and Irenaeus, transcends the avenue of prosopological exegesis.

suggests that one important modification is needed. There are, in fact, several instances in which the Spirit testifies to the deity and/or lordship of either the Father alone or the Son alone.<sup>15</sup> Thus, a better conclusion that fits all of the data would be that the Spirit functions as a primary speaking agent in dialogical passages in which it testifies to the deity and/or lordship of the Father and/or the Son.

This criterion for discerning when the Spirit speaks from its own person may be satisfied under one of two conditions. The first may be found in the content of the dialogical Old Testament quotations themselves. If, in a quotation attributed to the Spirit, the other divine persons are addressed or described with the terms “God” or “Lord,” the condition is met. The second may be found outside of the quotations themselves, in the introductory formula preceding the quotation or in the interpretive statement following it. In these instances, verbs such as θεολογέω and κυριολογέω reinforce the testifying element of the quotation. In Justin and Irenaeus, both of these conditions are met;<sup>16</sup> in Tertullian, the former is present without the latter.<sup>17</sup> Regardless of how this criterion is satisfied, the context of the Spirit’s testifying function is important because it pushes the Spirit in the direction of being conceptualised as a distinct theodramatic person; in the former case, the Spirit is portrayed as a co-equal participant in the divine theodrama alongside of the Father and the Son, and in the latter, the introductory verbs seem to necessitate their subject have a unique voice or identity capable of providing independent testimony, ascribing a degree of personhood that transcends a force that inspires the prophets concerning the coming Christ.<sup>18</sup>

The recognition that the vast majority of passages assigned to the Spirit fail to meet this criterion, meaning that the Spirit is speaking only as an inspiring secondary agent and not as a distinct person, has ramifications for how these passages are categorised with respect to prosopological exegesis. To the extent that a writer chooses to explicitly identify the Spirit as a secondary, inspiring agent with respect to an Old Testament text in which it is not otherwise in view, we could perhaps label this a type of prosopological exegesis, albeit a diminished one in which the personality of the Spirit is considerably

15 See, e.g., key passages in Justin (*Dial.* 32.6, 36.3–4, 37.3–4), Irenaeus (*Haer.* 3.21.4), and Tertullian (*Marc.* 5.11, 5.17; *Prax.* 11.8, 14.10).

16 *Haer.* 3.6.1 is not extant in Irenaeus’s original Greek; the Latin translation reads *Deum nominassent* and *Dominum appellassent* for the key verbs, which the edition of Rousseau (SC 211:64–66) retroverts to the Greek ἐθεολόγησάν and ἐκυριολόγησάν. Given Irenaeus’s likely dependence on Justin in this passage, this retroversion seems eminently plausible.

17 Interestingly, whereas Tertullian is the writer who makes most explicit the Spirit speaking from its own person (*ex persona*), he does not himself use the language of the Spirit calling the Father and the Son “Lord” and “God,” leaving this implicit in the quotations themselves. This likely stems from the fact that Tertullian’s purpose in citing these quotations is not to highlight the Spirit’s testimony but rather to demonstrate the distinctiveness of each of the three divine persons.

18 To put it in other terms, in texts of this nature, “the idea of person is derived from the dialogue character of the text”; so Eric Osborn, *The Emergence of Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 191, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511598029>.

diminished. Still, given the vast gulf between these two functions of the Spirit with respect to Scripture, it may be best, to avoid confusion, not to label the Spirit's impersonal, inspiring "speech" as prosopological exegesis in the first place. In any event, having established a means of distinguishing between the Spirit as primary speaking agent and inspiring secondary agent, we are now in position to revisit Downs's argument concerning Cyprian's use of prosopological exegesis from the person of the Spirit.

## Revisiting Cyprian's Use of Prosopological Exegesis

To at last return to Downs, his article argued that Cyprian, in his treatise *De opere et eleemosynis*, identifies the Holy Spirit as the true speaker of certain Old Testament quotations in order to give added weight to his claim that almsgiving can cleanse post-baptismal sin. Downs notes Tertullian's use of prosopological exegesis in *Prax.* 11–13 and, though he admits that he cannot be certain that Cyprian borrowed the reading strategy of prosopological exegesis from Tertullian, he nevertheless describes the connection between them as "intriguing."<sup>19</sup> This potential influence of Tertullian's *Prax.* 11 on Cyprian's use of prosopological exegesis from the person of the Spirit must therefore be examined in more detail. At the centre of his argument, Downs focuses upon the following passage from *Eleem.* 2:

The Holy Spirit speaks in the Scriptures and says, *By almsgiving and faith sins are purged* [Prov 16:6 (LXX 15:27)]. Not, in any case, those sins which had been contracted before, for those are purged by the blood and sanctification of Christ. Likewise he says again, *As water extinguishes fire, so almsgiving extinguishes sin* [Sir 3:30].<sup>20</sup>

Downs identifies this as an example of prosopological exegesis from the Spirit on account of it satisfying Bates's definition, which is worth citing again in full:

Prosopological exegesis is a reading technique whereby an interpreter seeks to overcome a real or perceived ambiguity regarding the identity of the speakers or addressees (or both) in the divinely inspired source text by assigning nontrivial prosopa (i.e., nontrivial vis-à-vis the "plain sense" of the text) to the speakers or addressees (or both) in order to make sense of the text.<sup>21</sup>

Downs argues that this passage from *Eleem.* 2 meets all aspects of this definition insofar as the declarative speech of these divinely inspired source texts are attributed to the Holy Spirit rather than Solomon, to whom the Book of Proverbs was traditionally ascribed.<sup>22</sup>

19 Downs, "Prosopological Exegesis," 288.

20 *Eleem.* 2 (CCSL 3A:55): "Loquitur in scripturis Spiritus sanctus et dicit: *Eleemosynis et fide delicta purgantur*. Non utique illa delicta quae fuerant ante contracta: nam illa Christi sanguine et sanctificatione purgantur. Item denuo dicit: *Sicut aqua extinguit ignem, sic eleemosyna extinguit peccatum*." All translations are my own.

21 Bates, *Hermeneutics*, 218.

22 Downs, "Prosopological Exegesis," 290–91.

Central to Downs's argument is that the Holy Spirit is identified as the exclusive speaker of these texts, whereas elsewhere in his writings Cyprian attributes quotations from Proverbs either to Solomon alone or to Solomon through the Holy Spirit.<sup>23</sup>

In light of our findings above, this passage does not meet the criterion for establishing it as an instance of the Spirit functioning as a primary speaking agent. First, lacking any explicitly named audience, these biblical quotations are not clearly dialogical; in other words, neither the Father nor the Son, much less any other dialogical partner, is in view. The Spirit is thus not participating in the divine theodrama in the way we would expect if the Spirit were truly speaking prosopologically. Second, given the complexities of distinguishing between forms of the Spirit's speech, neither the introductory formula nor the surrounding interpretation suggests this as an example of true prosopological exegesis. The verbs here, *loquitur* and *dicit*, are relatively colourless verbs (compared to verbs that more clearly ascribe personhood, such as θεολογέω and κυριολογέω) that are roughly akin to the ubiquitous Greek λέγει that often introduces the Spirit as an inspiring secondary agent in early Christian writings.

With this in mind, there are two further points that need to be addressed. The first of these is Downs's claims that this passage meets Bates's definition of prosopological exegesis because it identifies the Spirit as a "nontrivial" person.<sup>24</sup> Downs does not, for instance, validate the claim that Cyprian was one of the few early Christians who viewed the Spirit as capable of participating in the divine theodrama as its own person. As a result, the Spirit may in fact be best understood as a "trivial prosopon" with respect to the plain sense of the text, which at this time undoubtedly *included* a belief that the divine inspiration of the Spirit stood behind the human authors of the text.<sup>25</sup> Merely referencing the Spirit as the (im)personal means of the divine inspiration of Scripture, much like a modern Christian might preface a biblical quotation with "the Bible says" or "the Word of God says," tells us more about the speaker's view of biblical inspiration than their understanding of the theodramatic personhood of the Spirit.

A second problem that needs to be addressed is Downs's claim that the exclusive identification of the Holy Spirit as the speaker of the quotation is evidence of the Spirit speaking prosopologically. A more thorough examination of early Christian writings demonstrates that there appears to be no correlation between whether a human figure is mentioned alongside the Spirit and whether the Spirit is understood as functioning as a primary speaking agent or as an inspiring secondary agent. To take just one example, Justin at *Dial.* 56.14 names David and Moses alongside of the Spirit when the Spirit speaks in a primary sense, while at *1 Apol.* 39.1 he introduces quotations as just the words of the Spirit when the Spirit functions as an inspiring secondary agent. While

23 Downs, "Prosopological Exegesis," 291.

24 Downs, "Prosopological Exegesis," 290.

25 See, e.g., the perspectives of Justin (*1 Apol.* 36.1), Irenaeus (*Haer.* 2.28.2), Tertullian (*Apol.* 18), and Origen (*Princ.* 4).

Downs asserts that the exclusive assignment of this quotation to the Spirit is significant, he provides no evidence that this is a meaningful difference from other introductory formulas.<sup>26</sup>

In sum, the Spirit's speech in *Eleem. 2*, which has none of the marks of the Spirit speaking in a primary capacity, clearly falls in the category of the Spirit functioning as an inspiring secondary agent, an inspiring function that is in fact highlighted soon after this passage in *Eleem. 4*. Downs thus makes too much of a relatively common phenomenon in early Christian writings in which the authority of Scripture is defended on the basis of its divine inspiration. While his commentary on *Eleem. 2* is still illuminative, it is unclear how even a successful appeal to prosopological exegesis would have added anything to his argument beyond what an appeal to the divine inspiration of Scripture would have done; Downs does not demonstrate how it might matter that the Spirit speaks as its own distinct divine *persona* rather than as a mere inspiring force. On the methodological level, this points to the need to address the distinction between the two ways in which the Spirit can relate to the words of Scripture when it is suggested that a passage should be interpreted as the prosopological speech of the Spirit. Particularly in light of the discontinuities between Tertullian and Cyprian with respect to their pneumatologies, one must exercise extra caution in not reading Tertullian's understanding of the Spirit and his method of prosopological exegesis into the writings of Cyprian.

However, had Downs wished to demonstrate that Cyprian, like Tertullian before him, could portray the Spirit as a primary speaking agent in its own right, *Eleem. 2* is not the strongest place to start. Although the vast majority of Cyprian's references to the Spirit's speech follow the pattern of the Spirit functioning as an inspiring secondary agent,<sup>27</sup> there is at least one text in which the Spirit does appear to speak theodramatically from its own person more along the lines of what Tertullian presented in *Prax. 11*.<sup>28</sup> In his *Letter 63*, Cyprian presents a eucharistic theology, with passages from the Old Testament illuminating the significance of this sacrament. As he works his way through

26 The same objections also apply to Downs's additional purported examples of prosopological exegesis in *Eleem. 4* and *5*. The latter example does not even have an actual quotation that the Spirit speaks but is in fact rather a summary of the Spirit's inspiring function.

27 See, e.g., *Bono pat. 22*; *Demetr. 17, 20*; *Dom. or. 5*; *Fort. 10, 12*; *Hab. virg. 1, 13*; *Laps. 10, 27*; *Mort. 11, 23*; *Unit. eccl. 8, 10, 16, 24*; *Zel. liv. 8*; *Ep. 3.2, 4.1, 10.2, 59.5, 59.20, 63.5, 67.9, 69.5, 70.2, 73.6*. In *Unit. eccl. 4* and *Ep. 69.2*, the Spirit speaks in the person of Christ.

28 I say "at least one" because there are two other instances that might possibly rise to the level of the Spirit as a primary speaking agent, though on the whole I think that not to be the case. In both *Dom. or. 35* and *Ep. 76.4*, Cyprian introduces quotations from the Psalter as the words of the Spirit, and the words are spoken either to God, as in the former case, or concerning the Lord, as in the latter. These would seem, therefore, to be ripe as examples of the Spirit providing intra-divine testimony as a primary speaking agent. Both quotations, however, really only make sense as a human being speaking to God, as they focus respectively on prayer and on God's provision of salvation. Given that Cyprian does not have a theology of the incarnation of the Holy Spirit, these passages are both most plausibly read as the Spirit speaking in a secondary, inspiring sense, with the human authors still the primary referents for the words that are being spoken, as in the formulations in *Demetr. 20* and *Fort. 10*.

various Old Testament quotations that reference wine, Cyprian turns to the book of Isaiah and makes the following statement, portraying the Spirit as testifying to the future ministry of the Son: “And so too in Isaiah the Holy Spirit testifies [*testatur*] to the same concerning the passion of the Lord, saying, *Why are your garments and your clothing red, as from the treading of a full and trodden vat?* [Isa 63:2].”<sup>29</sup> Here Cyprian presents the Spirit as testifying to the future ministry of the Son. The dialogical nature of the passage, which can plausibly be interpreted in a theodramatic setting, when combined with a verb (*testatur*) implying some degree of personal agency, makes this a more plausible instance of the Spirit participating in the divine theodrama as its own person. Still, the lack of emphasis on ascribing deity or lordship suggests that even here Cyprian may not intend for us to understand the Spirit speaking prosopologically from its own person. Likewise, later in the same letter, Cyprian criticises those who use water instead of wine in the Eucharist, making the following argument: “And the Holy Spirit in the Psalms is not silent about the mystery of this matter, making mention of the Lord’s cup and saying, *Your intoxicating cup is exceedingly excellent* [Ps 23:5 (LXX 22:5)].”<sup>30</sup> Again, the Spirit appears to be speaking theodramatically to the Son, though without the testifying element that is otherwise the case in the larger pattern of the Spirit’s true prosopological speech, and so again we cannot say with much confidence that Cyprian intended us to read this passage as an example of the Spirit speaking beyond its typical inspiring manner.<sup>31</sup>

This brings us, finally, to the issue of discontinuity between Tertullian and Cyprian. Downs notes that Cyprian’s predecessor Tertullian was “one of the clearest and most influential advocates of prosopological exegesis” and, though he admits that he cannot be certain that Cyprian borrowed the reading strategy of prosopological exegesis from Tertullian, he nevertheless describes the connection between them as “intriguing.”<sup>32</sup> Despite this claim, the question of the influence of Tertullian’s use of prosopological exegesis, particularly on his immediate successors in the Latin tradition, remains open; there is little in the way of evidence to support the notion that Cyprian drew on any of the extant writings of Tertullian, much less *Prax.* 11 in particular.<sup>33</sup> Both the polemical

29 *Ep.* 63.7 (CCSL 3C:396): *Nec non et apud Esaiam hoc idem spiritus sanctus de domini passione testatur dicens: quare rubicunda sunt uestimenta tua, et indumenta tua uelut a calcatione torcularis pleni et percalcati?*

30 *Ep.* 63.11 (CCSL 3C:403): *Cuius rei sacramentum nec in psalmis tacet spiritus sanctus faciens mentionem dominici calicis et dicens: calix tuus inebrians perquam optimus.*

31 Prosopological exegesis from the Spirit seems to play a greater role in *Ep.* 63 than in any of Cyprian’s other extant writings; in addition to the examples above, Cyprian presents the Spirit as speaking in the person of the Father to the Son at *Ep.* 63.4.

32 Downs, “Prosopological Exegesis,” 287–88.

33 On this point, see further Michael Andrew Fahey, *Cyprian and the Bible: A Study in Third-Century Exegesis*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Hermeneutik 9 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1971), 626, who concludes that his study “proves to a surprising extent Cyprian’s independence from Tertullian in both his choice and interpretation of Scriptural texts, but further investigation needs to juxtapose citation by citation.”

context and the actual quotations themselves are very different between *Prax.* 11 and *Ep.* 63 or any of Cyprian's other writings. As such, and as we have gathered from our analysis above, it appears that Cyprian did not follow Tertullian in presenting the Spirit as a distinct divine person capable of speaking prosopologically through the Old Testament in order to testify to the deity and lordship of the Father and the Son.<sup>34</sup>

There is, in fact, good historical reason for this: Tertullian's problematic support for the New Prophecy, and his view of the Spirit that was inextricably linked with it. To the extent that Tertullian's development of the Spirit as a distinct divine person and its function in testifying to the divinity and lordship of the Father and the Son was intricately tied to his desire to promote and defend the New Prophecy,<sup>35</sup> when Cyprian and other writers in the later Latin tradition were eager to leave behind elements of Tertullian's theology that were tainted with the stain of Montanism, his presentation of the Paraclete and all that went with it would almost certainly be foremost among them. Further evidence for this claim can be found in the more explicitly theological writings of Cyprian's contemporary and opponent Novatian. Drawing on Tertullian's writings,<sup>36</sup> Novatian also expounds a doctrine of God in contrast to that of modalistic monarchianism, but with significant differences. Like Tertullian, Novatian draws on the Johannine Farewell Discourse to present the Holy Spirit as the Paraclete and the Spirit of Truth, but unlike Tertullian, Novatian does not identify the Spirit as a distinct divine *persona*, nor does he employ prosopological exegesis from the person of the Spirit.<sup>37</sup> The most likely reason for why Novatian has reformulated the role, if not

34 Indeed, Cyprian appears to have taken little interest in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in general; cf. Manlio Simonetti, "Il regresso della teologia dello Spirito santo in Occidente dopo Tertulliano," *Augustinianum* 20 (1980): 655–69, esp. 659–61, <https://doi.org/10.5840/agstm198020347>. Michael A. G. Haykin, "The Holy Spirit in Cyprian's *To Donatus*," *Evangelical Quarterly* 83 (2011): 327–28, tries to rebut this position with an appeal to Cyprian's frequent references to the Spirit, but these references are simply not as theological or philosophical as what is found in Tertullian.

35 See further Andrew B. McGowan, "Tertullian and the 'Heretical' Origins of the 'Orthodox' Trinity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14 (2006): 437–57, <https://doi.org/10.1353/earl.2007.0005>; cf. Claire Ann Bradley Stegman, "The Development of Tertullian's Doctrine of *Spiritus Sanctus*" (Ph.D. diss., Southern Methodist University, 1978). The key text for this point is *Prax.* 30.5, which indicates Tertullian's belief that the Spirit's work as "the preacher of the one monarchy and the interpreter of the economy," which Tertullian has demonstrated in *Prax.* 11 with reference to prosopological exegesis, is available only "for those who admit the words of his new prophecy." Over the course of *Prax.*, Tertullian is determined to link the Spirit's role in teaching right doctrine with its role in leading believers into right practice, which for him meant the more demanding praxis promoted by the New Prophecy.

36 Simonetti, "Il regresso," 664; cf. Russell J. DeSimone, *The Treatise of Novatian the Roman Presbyter on the Trinity: A Study of the Text and the Doctrine*, *Studia ephemeridis Augustinianum* 4 (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1970), 42; James L. Papandrea, *Novatian of Rome and the Culmination of Pre-Nicene Orthodoxy*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 106.

37 *Trin.* 29; cf. *Trin.* 16.2–3. On the one hand, it has been argued that Novatian applies the term *persona* to the Father and the Son but not the Spirit, and makes no effort to explain the nature of the relationship

also the nature, of the Spirit away from that articulated by Tertullian is his desire to distinguish himself from his predecessor's embrace of the New Prophecy,<sup>38</sup> which had significantly declined in its appeal in the generation after Tertullian's death.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the evidence from Cyprian and Novatian indicates that Tertullian's association with the New Prophecy generated significant differences between the pneumatology of Tertullian and those of his successors. In appealing to Tertullian's influence on Cyprian, Downs should have therefore been more cautious concerning the extent of continuity between their pneumatological presuppositions and constructs.

## Conclusion

Having considered how both primary sources and recent scholarship have attested to the complexities in distinguishing between the different forms of the Spirit's speech, this article put forward a means of determining when the Spirit functions as a primary speaking agent and when it functions as an inspiring secondary agent, with the former endowing the Spirit with a sufficient degree of personhood to make its speech truly prosopological in nature. Applied to Downs's study of prosopological exegesis from the Spirit in Cyprian's *De opere et eleemosynis*, this article clarified that the examples cited by Downs are not, in fact, representative of prosopological exegesis, which highlights the need for caution in applying the insights of research into prosopological exegesis with respect to the Spirit and the importance of having clearly articulated criteria for identifying when the Spirit indeed speaks from its own person within the divine theodrama. The significance of this distinction becomes clear when we compare the views of the Spirit articulated by Tertullian and Cyprian. For his part, Tertullian utilised

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between the Spirit and the Father and the Son. The lack of any explicit statement identifying the Spirit as a divine person is, therefore, a strong indication that Novatian did not understand the Spirit as such. For this position see Simonetti, "Il regresso," 657–59. On the other hand, other scholars have argued that Novatian's description of the Spirit's activities seems to presuppose the Spirit is a divine person. For this position, see Russell J. DeSimone, "The Holy Spirit according to Novatian *De Trinitate*," *Augustinianum* 10 (1970): 360–87, esp. 364–65, 376–79, <https://doi.org/10.5840/agstm19701025>; Papandrea, *Novatian of Rome*, 108–109. I find Simonetti more persuasive, but in any event even DeSimone ("Holy Spirit," 380) concludes that "Novatian failed to cull what was profoundest in [Tertullian's] works."

- 38 This position is most fully articulated by Simonetti, "Il regresso," 663–67. Papandrea (*Novatian of Rome*, 108) dismisses this possibility on account of Novatian still saying "more about the Spirit than would have been required to refute the alternative Christologies of his own time," but the continued presence of a significant role for the Spirit still allows for its status to be downgraded relative to what Tertullian had described. DeSimone ("Holy Spirit," 380) allows for the possibility of Novatian needing to distance himself from Tertullian's Montanism as the reason for his less explicit statements concerning the divine personhood of the Spirit.
- 39 The findings of the Synod of Iconium (ca. 230–235 CE) against the "Cataphrygians" were likely in part responsible; they are reported in a letter from Firmilian to Cyprian ca. 256 CE, included in collections of Cyprian's correspondence as *Ep.* 75.

prosopological exegesis to identify the Spirit as a distinct divine *persona*, even as he obscured the literary origins of this term in favour of a more explicit claim regarding the inner life of God.<sup>40</sup> In other words, Tertullian's identification of the Holy Spirit as a distinct divine *persona* within the Trinity serves as a landmark point of connection between earlier prosopological exegesis from the person of the Spirit in the divine theodrama to the more fully developed notion of the Trinitarian persons or hypostases in post-Nicene theology.<sup>41</sup> If, therefore, we seek to have an accurate accounting of how prosopological exegesis shaped the emergence of Trinitarian theology, much less the Holy Spirit's place within that, we must be clear on what instances of early Christian readings of the Old Testament do—and which do not—contribute to this particular theological trajectory. By setting out clear methodology for identifying when the Spirit truly speaks prosopologically from its own person in the divine theodrama, this article serves not only as a corrective to Downs but as a signpost for all future scholarship seeking to engage with this issue.

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40 Ernest Evans, ed. and trans., *Tertullian's Treatise against Praxeas: The Text Edited, with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 46: "When Tertullian uses *persona* in *Prax.* 11, possibly the dramatic sense is in mind, but it is no longer prominent, and we have reached the point where we are almost ready to speak of three Persons." On Tertullian's understanding of the Trinitarian persons, see further Eric Osborn, *Tertullian: First Theologian of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 130–33, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511582882>.

41 See further Bates, *Birth*, 36–40.

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