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Who is Isaiah's Servant? Narrative identity and theological potentiality

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Abstract

The question 'Who is the Servant?' is one which remains a debated topic among many interpreters of Isaiah 40–55. This article seeks to address the same question with the aid and perspective of narrative identity. Narrative identity, as explicated by Ricoeur and Frei, is a means of understanding a character within a literary plot, or real life, as displayed in a narrated sequence of events. A person's identity, especially within literature, is the constancy of the self in the tortuous events of a narrated sequence over time. This article seeks to adjudicate the question of the Servant's identity by observing the character of the Servant within the plot of Isaiah 40–55. The conclusion drawn is that the Servant is the unique means of God's reconciliation of both Zion and the nations. Also, the divine action and description of YHWH and the Servant begin to bleed in such a way that the Servant can be described as a unique member of the divine identity.

Introduction

Much debate has centred on the question 'Who is the Servant of Isaiah 40–55?'[1] Some, no doubt, might even question the validity of the query. With Luther they might affirm the awkwardness of the prophetic speech and literature, concluding that any precise definition would surely be a guess at best. Others may be more definitive in their answer. The Servant is Israel; any other reading is nothing more than a Christian imposition onto the Hebrew scriptures. More recently, as exemplified with Wilcox and Paton-Williams, Childs and Seitz, a movement has been noted in the drama of Isaiah 40–55, a movement from the Servant as Israel to the Servant as an individual who takes on the role of Israel as restorer of Zion and light to the nations. Thus, neither the emphasis on Israel's special role in God's redemptive economy

[1] A form of this article was delivered to the Biblical Studies Seminar at the University of St Andrews in the spring of 2004. Many thanks to those who offered insights and constructive criticism – namely, Bruce Longenecker, Jonathan Pennington, Ian Warrit, Matt Morohl, Steve Mason and Don Collett.

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nor the highly individual language attributed to the Servant after Isaiah 48 is lost. The Servant is Israel, the Servant is an individual.[2]

The purpose of this article is not to review the current state of scholarship on this issue. If one were to attempt this, a description of the epistemological and methodological presuppositions of the interpreter would at least need to be explored. The answers one gives to the question pertaining to the Servant's identity are at least highly influenced, if not in a sense determined, by the aims and methods of the interpreter, e.g. historical task, literary task, theological task (though these are not necessarily mutually exclusive). The aim of this study is admittedly theological and literary. The same, age-old question is being asked, 'Who is the Servant?' – but from the perspective of the Servant's narrative identity. In other words, the question is, at least from one perspective, answered by the description of the Servant in the narrative movement of Isaiah 40–55.

A brief account of narrative identity: Ricoeur and Frei

Without giving a full-orbed treatment of the philosophical and theological issues related to narrative identity, it seems appropriate to give an overview of narrative identity as it relates to the project at hand. For it is the manoeuvring between agent and action, or between the 'who' and the 'what', that gives purchase to the concept of identity or identification. The question of narrative identity, especially as it relates to literature, and in this case, the biblical story, presses beyond the *what* question – ontic questions pertaining to nature – to the *who* of narrative identity as presented in the temporal flow of a narrative sequence. Thus, the description of a character's identity is made more readily available as one begins to look at the sequence of actions the character performs literarily as a display of the person's character.

Though several scholars, mostly theologians, have made express use of the category of narrative identity, I will briefly examine only three: Bauckham, Ricoeur and Frei.[3] Attention turns first to the recent use of narrative identity by Richard Bauckham in his small, but rich, work on christology, *God*

[2] Brevard Childs, *Isaiah* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001), p. 385.

[3] Notably, Robert Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002); Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998), ch. 1; David Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999); Ronald F. Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), chs 5 and 6; Kevin Vanhoozer, 'Does the Trinity Belong in a Theology of Religions? On Angling in the Rubicon and the "Identity' of God"', in *First Theology: God, Scripture, and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002), pp. 45–70.

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Crucified.[4] Bauckham suggests that too much attention in the history of christology has been placed on the 'What' question – questions pertaining to nature – at the expense of the 'Who' question – questions related to identity. Ultimately, the Jesus described within the narrative accounts of the Gospels and the descriptive passages within the Pauline literature (especially Phil. 2) is an intricate part of the unique identity of God. God's actions and Jesus' actions overlap dramatically in the identity description of both. To gain further purchase on this idea, Bauckham turns specifically to the import of Isaiah 40–55 and the Servant motif as background for this claim about Jesus' unique divine identity. Bauckham states, 'For the early Christians, these chapters of Isaiah, above all, were the God-given account of the significance of the events of eschatological salvation which they had witnessed and in which they were involved.'[5] I will explore and elaborate on Bauckham's contribution in the following section. Bauckham's use of narrative identity is dependent on the philosophical work of Ricoeur and the theological approach of Frei so I will focus first on these two figures.

Within philosophical circles, Ricoeur's work *Oneself as Another* stands at centre stage in the recent discussion of narrative identity.[6] Ricoeur places the discussion of identity, or self-hood, in categories of *ipse* and *idem*. *Ipse* is understood most properly as 'self-hood', whereas *idem* reflects the more static concept of 'sameness'. Within the realm of identity as *idem*, the highest order of signification is that of 'permanence in time'.[7] *Idem*-identity emphasises the unchanging nature of one's self and reflects a more static concept of identity. *Ipse*-identity, on the other hand, reflects no 'unchanging core of the personality' and is not a static category but a dynamic category of self-hood.[8] Ricoeur's category of choice is that of self-hood or *ipse*.

Ricoeur seems allergic to the description of human action under the rubric of 'impersonal event'.[9] The questions 'what?' and 'why?' (*idem*-identity) reflect an attenuated understanding of the agent of the actions or the 'who?' (*ipse*-identity) and so lead to static and impersonal conceptions of identity. In other words, understanding personhood or narrative identity is not best attempted by dislocating queries related to motivation (why?), actions (what?), or agents of actions (who?) from one another, but by understanding these perspectives as interrelated and informing of one another.

[4] Bauckham, *God Crucified*.
[5] Ibid., p. 47.
[6] Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: Chicago Press, 1992).
[7] Ibid., p. 2.
[8] Ibid., p. 2.
[9] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 87.

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Ricoeur moves beyond this attenuation, the separation of the 'what?', 'why?', from the 'who?', by placing the discussion in the realm of narrative. For Ricoeur, personal identity can only be articulated in 'the temporal dimension of human existence'.[10] It is precisely at this point that the dialectic of the *idem* and the *ipse* comes to the fore. Ricoeur states his hypothesis in the following way:

> the polarity I am going to examine suggests an intervention of narrative identity in the conceptual constitution of personal identity in the manner of a specific mediator between the pole of character, where *idem* and *ipse* tend to coincide, and the pole of self-maintenance, where selfhood frees itself from sameness.[11]

It is in the dialectic of *idem* and *ipse* that character is revealed. Ricoeur passes beyond the entrenchment of the self as sameness by placing the self in a temporal narrative, as in a literary novel, where one's character is displayed in different temporal activities with all its discordance and unpredictability. It is within the temporal narrative that character displays itself in different fashions and in different circumstances. Thus, the question of the 'who?' is related to the question of the 'what?' If one is able to answer the question 'who?', then one must be able to analyse and observe the 'what?' of a person's character as displayed over a temporal sequence of events (the overcoming of the opposition of character as sedimentation and identity as self-constancy). Ricoeur emphasises the reciprocating relationship that each of these questions has to one another: the 'who?', 'what?' and 'why?' The guiding principle through the morass of difficulties related to each one of these questions is not to treat them in isolation but to bring them together in a dynamic understanding which is most illuminated by the narrative's revealing of one's identity.

Hans Frei's particular interest in narrative as a means of identification centres on a different set of concerns than those held by Ricoeur. Charles Campbell places Frei's seminal work, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, in the context of Frei's seeking to overcome the impasse between historical-criticism and theology.[12] A literary approach, as exemplified in *Identity*, is able to offer a theological reading of scripture, a reading historical-criticism has kept at bay.

In *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, Frei uses contemporary philosophy in an *ad hoc* fashion as he seeks to understand Jesus Christ's identity and presence. Frei

[10] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 114.

[11] Ibid., pp. 118–9.

[12] Richard L. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 15; Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1975).

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does not allow any one particular philosophical system to rest in a hegemonic relationship to theology.[13] Recognising the subservient role philosophy takes to theology, Frei takes his cue from Karl Barth.[14] One must use certain philosophical categories when coming to the text or in describing Christian theology; however, these categories are tools of description which never take the place of the logic of belief.[15] This logic of belief is located in the gospel story itself, in gospel as narrated event. Therefore, any philosophical schema used is subservient to the gospel story. As Frei states, 'The meaning of the doctrine is the story; not: the meaning of the story is the doctrine.'[16]

My particular purpose in exploring Frei's framework of christology is to understand his contribution to the discussion of identity as a narrated event – for Frei this question is most pertinently related to the identity of Jesus Christ. Identity is defined as the core of a person's being. 'Like spokes to the centre of a wheel', one's identity is the centre toward which everything else is ordered.[17] In short, 'Identity is the specific uniqueness of a person, what

[13] Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, pp. 15–16.

[14] Hans Frei, *Types of Christian Theology* (New Haven, CT: Yale Press, 1992), ch. 6, esp. p. 81. John Webster, leaning on Barth as well, makes similar statements regarding theology and modern hermeneutical theory. For Webster, modern hermeneutical theory must be viewed as a tool to do the job. Anything other than this functional use of hermeneutical theory presses beyond the theological account of the task of Christian theology/exegesis. John Webster, 'Hermeneutics in Modern Theology', in *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), pp. 71–2.

[15] Frei, *Types*, pp. 85–7.

[16] Ibid., p. 90. Statements such as the one quoted above have brought Frei and George Lindbeck under critiques such as the following by John Webster: 'Whilst no serious Christian theologian will ignore Frei's warnings against the transformation of literary description "into an explanatory scheme using abstract concepts and categories" (p. 125), *some* such scheme is, I believe, indispensable. However "second-order", however analytic of the primary narrative presentation of Jesus, Christological categories such as substance, nature, an- and enhypostasia are, handled properly, a way of identifying what is happening in the narratives, without supplanting them or making them into illustrations of a conceptual scheme. They have, moreover, proved themselves capable of facilitating protest against the very thing which Frei himself disputes: the reduction of Christology to Christian spiritual or moral experience.' John Webster, 'Response to George Hunsinger', *Modern Theology* 8 (1992), p. 130. See also George Hunsinger, 'Hans Frei as Theologian: The Quest for a Generous Orthodoxy', *Modern Theology* 8 (1992), pp. 103–28. In conversation with Lindbeck, though appropriate in the discussion with Frei, Brevard Childs expresses the danger of an overemphasis on 'intratextuality' at the expense of the text's character as witness to something beyond itself (Brevard Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (London: SCM Press, 1984), p. 545).

[17] Frei, *Identity*, p. 37.

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really counts about him, quite apart from both comparison and contrast to others.'[18]

Though Frei does not use the categories of *ipse* and *idem* in his discussion of identity, he does refer to the dialectical tension between these two conceptual categories in the defining of one's identity. One's identity is the composition of all that makes that person unique ('sameness' if you will). The tension comes, for Frei, in what he terms an 'identity crisis'. A crisis of identity comes when a person acts in disjunction with his or her past.

> A person may arbitrarily and artificially reconstruct his past or suppress it altogether. Identity, without this type of crisis, means that a person is one and the same over a period of time, that there is a connection or unbroken relationship between the past and present experience of the same self.[19]

Frei, in a manner distinct from but similar to Ricoeur, presses beyond the identity as sameness construct by placing identity in the context of narrative.

First, Frei offers an 'intention-action' description. 'For a person is not merely illustrated, he is *constituted* by his particular intentional act at any given point in his life.'[20] The 'intention-action' description gives purchase to the question 'what?' and is demonstrated in the narrative account of one's life. Second, Frei moves to the 'who?' question and locates the answer to it in a person's 'self-manifestation'.[21] In Ricoeur's terminology, this is the character of the agent in the narrative or that aspect of the person demonstrated in the stability of habit-formation or the sedimentation of character. An overlap with Ricoeur's concerns is evident in Frei. The 'intention-action' aspect highlights the narrative element of a person's identity demonstrated temporally; whereas the character of a person is the stable part of the person's identity (the overcoming of the *ipse*/*idem* polarity).

Frei takes this model of 'intention-action' and 'self-manifestation' and addresses his particular concern of the bifurcation of Jesus' actions from his intentions in the recent historical Jesus quests. For the 'Questers', a focus on Jesus' self-understanding became the key to understanding the historical Jesus.[22] For Frei, the question, 'What was he like', can only be answered by the descriptor, 'Look at what he did on this or that occasion. Here he was characteristically himself.'[23] Like Ricoeur, Frei stresses that plot

[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.., p. 38.
[20] Ibid., p. 44.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., p. 89.
[23] Ibid., p. 91. It would be interesting to note the divergent approaches of Frei with someone like N. T. Wright who is rather committed to an orthodox understanding

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is subservient to character. 'A person *is* what he *does* centrally and most significantly.'[24] Thus, one's identity, particularly that of Jesus, is found in the enactment of intentions. The one illumines the other and both are necessary for the identification of a person in a narrative sequence. It is in the narrative event that the singularity of the person's character is revealed in different manifestations yet with a 'self-constancy' that can be pointed to and said, 'That is so and so with their own unique identity'. How then does this understanding of the organic relationship between a person's identity and a person's actions in a narrative sequence inform our understanding of the identity of the Servant? To this I now turn.

The Servant's narrative identity

It is within the redemptive drama of Isaiah 40–55 (66) that God's gracious acts of forgiveness and restoration are manifested in new and dynamic ways.[25] YHWH's eyes of redemption are firmly placed on Israel while at the same time YHWH's hand of reconciliation is beginning the centrifugal movement of restoration to the nations (Isaiah 49:6). The figure of the Servant appears in this context of God's new act of redemption and is described in the narrative with rather astounding character descriptors. Most notably, Bauckham observes the intertextual link between Isaiah 52:13 and Isaiah 6:1.[26]

> See my servant shall prosper; he shall be *exalted and lifted up*, and shall be very high. (Isaiah 53:13, NRSV)

> In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, *high and lofty*; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. (Isaiah 6:1, NRSV)

In both verses the terms 'raised and exalted' (ונשא רום) are predicated on a particular subject. In Isaiah 6:1 the subject is YHWH and in Isaiah 52:13

of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Surely Frei would question the validity of a move to reconstruct the historical Jesus on the basis of held aims and intentions which do not flow from the realistic narrative itself but from the reconstructed world of Second Temple Judaism. This was *the* conversation piece of the Scripture and Theology seminar at the University of St Andrews during the autumn term 2002. Many in the seminar tended to land on Frei's side.

[24] Frei, *Identity*, p. 92. See also John David Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), p. 161.

[25] C. R. Seitz, '"You are my Servant, You are the Israel in whom I will be glorified": The Servant Songs and the Effect of Literary Context in Isaiah', *Calvin Theological Journal* 39 (2004), pp. 117–34.

[26] Bauckham, *God Crucified*, pp. 50–1.

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the subject is the Servant. In other words, the language used uniquely to describe YHWH in Isaiah is 'raised and exalted' language.

Isaiah 52:13 LXX chooses the term 'glorification' (δοξασθήσεται) for the 'greatly exalted' (גבה מאד) of the MT. Elsewhere in Isaiah the prophetic word has emphasised twice over that YHWH's glory belongs to none other than himself (Isaiah 42:8; 48:11). 'I will give my glory to no other'. Yet in Isaiah 52:13, the Servant is narratively depicted as one who is sharing in what belongs to YHWH alone, that is, his glory. Wilcox and Paton-Williams observe, 'Throughout Isaiah 1–66, the adjectives "exalted", "lifted up" and "very high" are virtually technical terms, applied almost exclusively to Yahweh.'[27] Wilcox and Paton-Williams tread lightly on this observation, 'The implication is not necessarily that the servant is Yahweh, or even divine; but there *is* an implication here that the servant's work is Yahweh's work, and the language used to make the point is daring, to say the least.'[28] Bauckham, on the other hand, comes to the much more startling conclusion, 'The Servant in both his humiliation and his exaltation, is therefore not merely a human figure distinguished from God, but, in both his humiliation and his exaltation, belongs to the identity of the unique God.'[29] It could be said like this: the narrative description of God's unique acts and attributes in the book of Isaiah are now being attributed to the Servant in such a way that the identity of the two bleed onto one another. The narrative identity of the Servant and of Yahweh act in a perichoretic relationship.

Von Rad gives a helpful summary of the Servant's narrative identity when he describes the Servant's actions in the following way: 'he cleanses, he bears sickness, carries sorrows, chastisement is laid upon him, his stripes heal, he makes his life a substitute, he makes righteous, he pours out his life, he acts vicariously'.[30] Coupled with these actions are the observations already given by Bauckham that the Servant is in some sense – for Bauckham 'is' – caught up into the identity of God himself as one who is 'raised and exalted' (Isaiah 52:13). God's actions and means of redemption are carried out by the Servant who is both restorer of Zion and Light to the Nations (Isaiah 49:1–6) and the narrative descriptions of both YHWH and the Servant, again, are intricately linked.

What is striking is that one finds the Servant's narrative identity in a sense developing from active agent (42:1–4; 49:1–6) to passive agent (50:4–6;

[27] Peter Wilcox and David Paton-Williams, 'The Servant Songs in Deutero-Isaiah', *JSOT* 42 (1988), p. 95.
[28] Ibid., p. 95.
[29] Bauckham, *God Crucified*, p. 51.
[30] Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 2 (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 257.

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52:13–53:12). Responding to the cry for justice from the people in Isaiah 40:27, YHWH announces the role of his Servant as one who will bring justice to the nations. The so-called 'servant songs' are not treated in form-critical isolation – à la Duhm – but are placed firmly in the contextual movement of the narrative. Thus, the movement from the emphasis on the former things to the new things marked in Isaiah 48 begins to centre on God's work with the Servant.[31] Isaiah 49:1–6 reveals a commissioning of one who will minister not only to Israel but also the nations at large ('is it too small a thing for you?' Isaiah 49:6). This is the active work of the Servant as God's special agent of reconciliation. The Servant is commissioned with a task to be carried out.

The new work of God's activity takes a paradoxical twist in the narrative. No longer is the Servant's work described as active but passive. The Servant is identified as one who trusts God in the midst of the suffering imposed on him by others (Isaiah 50:4–6) and is characterised by his obedience to the divine summons even when the summons leads to humiliation, suffering and ultimate defeat (Isaiah 53).[32] It is in this passive movement of the Servant's giving of himself vicariously for others that God's means of forgiveness and reconciliation reaches its zenith. It is also in this context of vicarious sin-bearing and defeat that the Servant is described with YHWH language, 'raised and exalted' (Isaiah 52:13).[33]

The Servant's mission is God's mission (Isaiah 49:1–6); the Servant is God's means of redeeming his people and drawing in the nations. One catches a glimpse in the narrative identity of the Servant of a figure whose entire being and reason for existence is to carry out obediently the will of God's redemptive purposes (Isaiah 50:4–10). The language used to describe the Servant's obedient and passive actions are extraordinary when thought of as being tied to a human personage. However, as Isaiah reminds us, this is the astonishingly new, redemptive act of God. The Servant is God's unique means of redemption for both Zion and the nations of the world.

[31] Again, see Seitz, 'You are my Servant'.

[32] In the LXX, that most slippery of entities, the Servant is ultimately led to death: ἤχθη εἰς θάνατον (Isaiah 53:8).

[33] One cannot help but be reminded here of Barth's small print section, 'the judge who was judged', in *CD* IV/1, pp. 224–8. See also the discussion of *Stellvertretung* in German scholarship (namely, Janowski and Hofius) by Daniel Bailey, 'The Concept of *Stellvertretung* in the Interpretation of Isaiah 53', in W. H. Bellinger, Jr. and W. R. Farmer (eds), *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), pp. 223–50; Bernd Janowski, 'He Bore our Sins: Isaiah 53 and the Drama of Taking Another's Place', in B. Janowski and P. Stuhlmacher (eds), *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources*, trans. D. P. Bailey (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 48–74; Otfried Hofius, 'The Fourth Servant Song in the New Testament Letters', ibid., pp. 163–88.

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The Servant's actions lead to ultimate rejection and possible death, resulting in a righteous offspring (Isaiah 53:10) who carry out the faithful activity of the Servant in suffering and anticipation of the new creation (Isaiah 57:1; 61:1–4; 65:13–17).

Questions pertaining to the exact personage behind the 'Servant' theme in Isaiah 40–55 are nigh impossible to answer from a historical standpoint. The language used to describe the Servant is 'cryptic and veiled' with the intention of remaining historically diffuse.[34] All of the exegetical will-power summoned will not necessarily clear up this historical question of particularity. It could be said that, from a textual perspective, questions pertaining to the historical background of the text have been intentionally veiled so as to point to something greater in God's divine economy. The canonical intentionality of the text is eschatologically loaded as it moves beyond the historical context alone to its greater use as witness to the coming action of God for Israel and the nations.[35]

A recent nuanced reading of the identity of the Servant is given by Seitz who argues that the 'obscurity' of the language is not due to any particular 'device'. 'The reason we cannot identify the servant in these poems is that he has taken on the mantle of the prophets who have gone before in a long chain of prophets.'[36] Seitz states that the Servant described is an actual historical figure, more precisely, the prophetic voice at work in these chapters (40–55).[37] The Servant's identity is veiled because his particular identity is in a sense swallowed up by the 'culmination of prophetic Israel, whose testimony he takes up and whose suffering he willingly embraces'.[38] I concur with Seitz regarding the culmination of the prophetic tradition residing on this figure of the Servant. However, to argue closely for the Servant's identity as that of a prophet behind the book seems to go beyond the witness itself. In short, the witness is silent.[39]

[34] Claus Westermann, *Isaiah* 40–66 (London: SCM Press, 1969), p. 93.

[35] Brevard Childs, 'Retrospective Reading of the Old Testament Prophets', *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 108 (1996), p. 376.

[36] Christopher Seitz, 'How is the Prophet Isaiah Present in the Latter Half of the Book? The Logic of Chapters 40–66 within the Book of Isaiah', in *Word Without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 190.

[37] Ibid., p. 190.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Childs, commenting on Isaiah 53:2–3 states, 'The figure who is portrayed appears in every way to have been a historical personage'. At the same time, the language begins to transcend a simple historical reconstruction (Childs, *Isaiah*, p. 414). D. J. A. Clines has moved to a more reader-orientated view of Isaiah 53. He concurs with Westermann's view of the intentionality of the veiled language. Clines argues that the enigmas of the poem were intended to 'create another world, a world indeed that is recognizably

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Again, the historical questions pertaining to the identity of the Servant remain elusive and left to the realm of hypothetical reconstruction. It is *not* here being stated that historical particulars have no abiding theological relevance and must be caught up into a divine *kerygma* of sorts. Without doubt, Isaiah 40–55 was born out of a historical circumstance and historical criticism continues to serve in the exploration of this reality.[40] What is being stated is that our brokering of this difficult question, 'Who is the Servant', needs to be answered through the textual lens itself. And the lens is quite opaque for the historically driven interpreter, while, on the other hand, the lens is rich theologically in the narrative description of the Servant as intricate member of the divine economy. Robert Jenson, commenting on Isaiah 49, makes a similar point.

> So much at least is clear: whatever may have been in the mind or minds of the author or authors of this text . . . followers of the risen Jesus were only conforming to the actual statement of the text when they took it as applicable to their Lord. For the text presents an historically unfilled template, indeed a template unfulfillable by anyone who lives only within the parameters of this age, of history as it now proceeds. To fit that template

our own, with brutality and suffering and God and a coming-to-see on the part of some, but not a world that simply once existed and is gone for good. The poem's very lack of specificity refuses to let it be tied down to one spot on the globe, or frozen at one point in history: it opens up the possibility that the poem can become true in a variety of circumstances – that is its work' (D. J. A. Clines, 'Language as Event', in R. Gordon (ed.), *This Place is Too Small for us: The Israelite Prophets in Recent Scholarship* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), p. 172). Though raising questions pertaining to the logic of prophecy, Clines's proposal is interesting and takes into account the poetic implications of the fourth servant song. However, the fluidity of its application may press the passage beyond its own abilities. Gerhard von Rad argues against the servant as historical figure position. Von Rad believes the biographical frame, especially that of the fourth servant song, cannot hold the picture of a historical personage. 'The picture of the Servant of Jahweh, of his mission to Israel and to the world, and of his expiatory suffering, is prophecy of the future, and, like all the rest of Deutero-Isaiah's prophecy, belongs to the realm of pure miracle which Jahweh reserved from himself. It is, of course, probable that Deutero-Isaiah included a number of his own experiences during his prophetic ministry in his picture of the Servant. That is not to say that he and the Servant were one and the same person' (Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 2, p. 260).

[40] One should resist the reductionistic move of relegating meaning to the text's historical sense alone. See, Neil B. MacDonald, 'Illocutionary Stance in Hans Frei's *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: An Exercise in Conceptual Redescription and Normative Analysis*', in *After Pentecost: Language & Biblical Interpretation: Scripture & Hermeneutics Series*. Bartholomew Craig, Colin Greene, and Karl Möller (eds) (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2001), Vol. 2, pp 312–28.

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> to someone is to say that this particular Israelite brings Israel back to the Lord and that just so this person is Israel thus brought back, to take her final mission to the nations.[41]

Jenson's emphasis overlaps with Bauckham's in that both are looking at the description of the Servant in the narrative movement of the text itself. The conclusion drawn by Jenson, in the description of the Servant in Isaiah 49, and by Bauckham, observing especially Isaiah 52:13, is that the Servant's narrative identity – retrospectively and eschatologically reread – points to a divine identity that at a minimum hints at later trinitarian formulations.

Conclusion

God was in the Servant reconciling the world unto himself and that agent of reconciliation is a member of the very unique identity of that self-same God. To read Isaiah 40–55 as an eschatological pointer to the new dynamic of God's reconciling of all things unto himself is not a misreading of Isaiah but an understanding of the inner logic of the witness as pointing beyond itself to an eschatological reality. In this light, it is little wonder that Christians have read Isaiah 40–55 as a descriptor of God's reconciling activity by means of Jesus Christ.

[41] Robert Jenson, 'The Bible and the Trinity', *Pro Ecclesia* 11 (2002), pp. 334–5.

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