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## THE AUTHOR'S EXEGETICAL METHOD AND SPEECH IN HEBREWS

To claim that the word of God is efficacious is not to assert something new. After all, according to the biblical account, it is with a word that God brings the world into being. When he says, “Let there be light,” there is, and it is good. With a word God establishes an explicit relationship with humanity. In John’s Gospel, the Word *is* God, and the Word becomes flesh. Divine discourse in the New Testament is primarily that of the historical Jesus. But Hebrews opens with the revelation that Jesus *continues* to speak:

God, who formerly spoke to our ancestors in the prophets, in these last days speaks to us in the Son [ἐν υἱῷ]. (1:1–2)

God speaks through the teaching as well as the being of Jesus, but the latter is defined in part through the speeches of the Father and the Spirit. The God of Hebrews is the God who speaks (*der sprechende Gott*).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the God who speaks in Hebrews is a God identified as three distinct speakers: Father, Son, and Spirit.<sup>2</sup> Each one speaks words attested in scripture in a new context, and each one offers a distinct contribution to the argument of the Epistle to the Hebrews. This book will provide an overview of the contribution of these speeches to the argument of Hebrews as a whole and the characterization of these divine speakers who occupy a place of primacy in the epistle.

<sup>1</sup> This phrase is owed to Knut Backhaus (see *Der sprechende Gott: Gesammelte Studien zum Hebräerbrief*, WUNT 240 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008]); however, despite the relevance of the title, this monograph exhibits little overlap with the topic of this thesis, apart from a fascinating essay entitled “Gott als Psalmist.”

<sup>2</sup> This thesis will refer to “God” when he appears distinct from the Son and Spirit as the “Father” despite the fact that this is not Hebrews’ primary designation. This is primarily for clarity, but also has warrant in the references to Jesus as “Son” in “God’s” divine discourse in Hebrews 1 and 5, as well as two references to Jesus as “Son” in Hebrews 7. Hebrews depicts a conversation between Father and Son.

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In the pages that follow I will demonstrate that the author of Hebrews uses divine discourse – the speech of God – in Hebrews to develop his characterization of God and by extension his broader argument. Each chapter in this book will highlight the distinct speech of one character and show how the author of Hebrews constructs the speech of that divine participant in a relatively consistent way. In other words, grouping the speeches by speaker, rather than chronologically, highlights the patterns within the author's use of this feature. The speakers each play an individual role in the author's encouragement of his community, and they each have a clear conversation partner within Hebrews. The Father and Son speak primarily to one another. The Spirit speaks to the community.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 discuss the major speeches by each speaking character within Hebrews 1:1–10:18. There I explore the text form of the quotation in view in Hebrews and its relevant manuscript tradition in Greek versions of scripture. Then, I locate the quotations within their context in Hebrews, aiming to alleviate any disjunction caused by a more thematically structured inquiry. My decision to focus on the first two major sections of Hebrews, in accordance with the tripartite model often attributed to Wolfgang Nauck,<sup>3</sup> is due to the relative consistency within those two sections that is not found within the final third of Hebrews. In the first section, the Father speaks (1:5–13); then the Son (2:12–13); then the Spirit (3:7–4:11). The speeches conclude with a significant exhortation on the powerful word of God and the high priest Jesus (4:11–16). In the second section, the cycle of the Father (5:5–6; 7:17, 21; 8:7–12), Son (10:5–7), and Spirit (10:16–17) speaking repeats.<sup>4</sup> This section also concludes with a major hortatory turn (10:19–25). The consistency in order and content will be highlighted with each speech. After all, one of the distinct aims of this book is to show that the author has not merely peppered his epistle with divine discourse: these speeches are crucial to his argumentation.

<sup>3</sup> “Zum Aufbau des Hebräerbriefes” in Walther Eltester (ed.), *Judentum, Urchristentum, Kirche: Festschrift für Joachim Jeremias*, BZNW 26 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1960), pp. 199–206.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Malcolm first pointed out these speech cycles to me. See “God Has Spoken: The Renegotiation of Scripture in Hebrews” in Matthew R. Malcolm (ed.), *All That the Prophets Have Declared: The Appropriation of Scripture in the Emergence of Christianity* (West Ryde, Australia: Paternoster, 2015), pp. 174–81.

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As with a number of themes,<sup>5</sup> after the major turn in the discourse in 10:19–25, the author’s use of divine discourse becomes more fluid, and the patterns established in the prior sections appear no more. I will discuss this development in the letter in the final chapter of this book. Let us proceed now to a discussion of the methodology and terminology through which the structure and flow of the project will become clear.

### 1.1 Terminology and Methodology

The author of Hebrews is a reader of scripture who stands within a rich line of readers. This book will situate Hebrews in relationship to contemporaneous literature in two ways: (1) the method through which Hebrews presents scripture as divine discourse and (2) the implications of that method for later developments in Christian theology. This section serves as an introduction to the program that follows and reveals some of my underlying presuppositions about the author’s theology and worldview. I will, first, outline what I take to be the author’s primary reading strategy and trace its progression from classical Greco-Roman education to early Christian literature. Second, I will discuss the potential objection that my construal of Hebrews as a text with three speakers who correspond to the three divine persons in later theology is influenced by an orthodox theological bias. Third, I will discuss the language of “intra-divine” and “extra-divine” discourse as it relates to the chapter titles in my book.

#### 1.1.1 Hebrews’ Reading Strategy for Divine Discourse

Our typical medium of intentional communication is speech. While our actions and demeanor provide additional knowledge about our character, often what we say is what we choose to reveal to the outside world. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Father, Son, and Spirit speak to one another and to the contemporary audience, revealing themselves to any so privileged to overhear or be addressed. With this portrayal, the author of Hebrews allows them to speak for themselves. It is, after all, one thing for the author to say, “Jesus is God and Lord,” but it is another entirely for *God the Father* to say to Jesus, “You are from the beginning, O Lord” (1:10), and “Your throne, O God, is

<sup>5</sup> The most noteworthy example is perhaps the absence of any major discussion of Christ’s priesthood and offering from 10:25.

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forever” (1:8). Similarly, although the author appears to have authority within the congregation to which he is writing, his exhortations cannot muster the force of the Spirit’s insistence: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (3:7). While the fact that the author of Hebrews cites scripture as speech rather than written text has often been noted, the exegetical method used by the author has not been sufficiently examined, which presents a significant challenge because the method that Hebrews utilizes has its own set of underlying assumptions that have been obscured.

The ancient exegetical technique known as “prosopological exegesis”<sup>6</sup> interprets texts by assigning “faces” (πρόσωπα), or characters, to ambiguous or unspecified personal (or personified) entities represented in the text in question.<sup>7</sup> In other words, interpreters identify participants for clarity of understanding. While some have formulated definitions that refer explicitly to the identification of speakers (e.g., Downs),<sup>8</sup> it is necessary also to include the identification of addressees and subjects through this technique. Prosopological exegesis does not merely disambiguate but instead views the text through the lens of a new participant. For example, Justin Martyr

<sup>6</sup> Carl Andresen uses the term “prosopographic exegesis” (“Zur Entstehung und Geschichte des trinitarischen Personbegriffes,” *ZNW*, 52 [1961], 1–39), but Marie-José Rondeau suggests that “prosopological exegesis” should be preferred since “prosopographic” already has an established meaning. See *Les commentaires patristiques du Psautier (IIIe - Ve siècles)* (Rome: Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1985), 2:8, n. 7. Matthew Bates goes a step further by arguing that “prosopological exegesis presupposes the divine *Logos* . . . as the ultimate author” (Matthew W. Bates, *The Hermeneutics of the Apostolic Proclamation: The Center of Paul’s Method of Scriptural Interpretation* [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012], 218). See also Matthew W. Bates, “Justin Martyr’s Logocentric Hermeneutical Transformation of Isaiah’s Vision of the Nations,” *JTS*, 60:2 (2009), 538–55.

<sup>7</sup> This interpretive method is differentiated from the related rhetorical strategy προσωποποιία where an *author* writes from a πρόσωπον. The relationship between the two is clearly demonstrated by Michael Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine’s Early Figurative Exegesis*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), esp. 180. Some rhetorical handbooks define προσωποποιία as only “personification” (e.g., those attributed to Hermogenes and Nicolaus the Sophist), while others make no distinction between ἱσοποιία (“making or imitating characters”) and προσωποποιία. For more on this distinction and an evaluation of proposals that claim προσωποποιία occurs in the NT, see Bryan R. Dyer, “‘I Do Not Understand What I Do’: A Challenge to Understanding Romans 7 as Prosopopoeia,” in Stanley E. Porter and Bryan R. Dyer (eds.), *Paul and Ancient Rhetoric: Theory and Practice in the Hellenistic Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 186–205; Amy L. B. Peeler, *You Are My Son: The Family of God in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, LNTS 486 (London: T&T Clark, 2014), 33, n. 67.

<sup>8</sup> David J. Downs, “Prosopological Exegesis in Cyprian’s *De Opere et Eleemosynis*,” *JTI*, 6:2 (2012), 279.

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uses this technique to consider Jesus not only as the speaker of Psalm 22:1 on the cross, as presented in the Synoptic Gospels, but also as the “I” in the entire psalm:<sup>9</sup>

And when the prophetic Spirit speaks from the person of Christ [ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ Χριστοῦ], it is proclaimed in this way: . . . “They cast lots for my garment and pierced my hands and feet, but I lie down and sleep and rise again because the Lord has helped me.” And again, when he says, “They spoke with their lips; they shook their head, saying, “He must save himself.”” (1 Apol. 38.1, 4–6)<sup>10</sup>

In the base text, the “I” is unidentified, which provides Justin with the interpretive freedom to assign this text to Christ. He uses the psalm to illuminate Christ and his humanity: “the exegete is led to distinguish that which Christ says as a human and to analyze the elements of his personality.”<sup>11</sup> Although the word “exegesis” implies a lengthy discussion of the text, that often is not the case, particularly in the earliest examples; an interesting aspect of this phenomenon is its relative brevity. Simply by assigning a text a new “face,” a dialogical relationship is established where the text assumes previous knowledge of the character, and the character is thus illuminated further by the text. Thus, when the author of Hebrews presents the Father saying to Jesus, “You are my Son; today, I have begotten you” (1:5), he is both illuminating scripture and teaching his audience about Jesus – the Son of God.

The formula exhibited by the quotation above (ἀπὸ προσώπου. . .) along with the parallels in Latin and with other prepositions occurs several times in Justin’s writing, as well as in other writers of this time. Although Christ is a common “face” in prosopological exegesis, this technique is by no means limited to christological readings. Justin describes several modes of “hearing” prophecy:

But when you [plural] hear the speech of the prophets spoken as from a character [ὡς ἀπὸ προσώπου], you must

<sup>9</sup> The Gospels also portray Jesus as the “I” throughout, but through allusions – a sort of “narrative” prosopological exegesis.

<sup>10</sup> Hebrews also uses this technique to interpret Psalm 22:22 as spoken by Jesus. These citations of Justin are translated from Miroslav Marcovich, ed., *Justin Martyr’s Apologiae pro Christianis*, PTS 38 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> “[L]’exégète est amené à distinguer ce que le Christ dit en tant qu’homme et à analyser les éléments de sa personnalité” (Rondeau, *Les commentaires patristiques*, 2:10).

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not consider it to be spoken from the inspired themselves, but from the divine Word who moves them. For sometimes he declares the things that are to come as one who foretells the future; other times it is proclaimed from the person of God the Lord and Father of all; other times from the person of Christ; and other times as from the person of the people answering its Lord and Father. (*1 Apol.* 36.1–2)<sup>12</sup>

When Justin assumes his readers will “hear” speech “from a character,” he assumes that they too will see the disjunction or ambiguity in these texts. He shows that prosopological exegesis can occur with divine or human participants. These modes are intended to provide *examples* of the ways that his readers could interpret these texts – these are not the only perceivable characters. So with this statement Justin is both reading these texts and teaching others how to read. The underlying assumption of the latter is key. If Justin thinks they will hear the words “from a character,” then he assumes that prosopological exegesis is something that most of his readers will also be able to practice. But how? Some clues might be found in Greco-Roman educational practices.

1.1.1.1 *Classical Precedents for Prosopological Exegesis*

Prosopological exegesis, fully developed in patristic authors, likely has some roots in classical rhetorical training (for authors) and literary criticism (for readers). Authors at this time were expected to create characters with a unique and consistent “voice.” In the rhetorical exercises (*progymnasmata*) attributed to Theon, for instance, the author praises Homer for “his ability to attribute the right words to each of the characters he introduces” (sec. 1).<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the exercises attributed to Hermogenes outline how one might imitate a known character:

you will preserve what is distinctive and appropriate to the persons imagined as speaking and to the occasions, for the

<sup>12</sup> In *Dial.* 36.38, the Holy Spirit speaks “either from the person of His Father or from His own person” (ἢ ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ πατρὸς ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἰδίου). This seems to counter Michael Slusser’s suggestion that “the Holy Spirit does not appear as an interlocutor” (“The Exegetical Roots of Trinitarian Theology,” *TS*, 49: 3 [1988], 476).

<sup>13</sup> George A. Kennedy, ed., *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric*, SBLWGRW 10 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 4. The translations of Theon and Hermogenes are all replicated from Kennedy.

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speech of a young man differs from that of an old man, and that of one who rejoices from that of one who grieves. (sec. 9)

Based on the characters' "distinctive" and "appropriate" elements, students could practice their skills with "speech in character" exercises. Some prompts from the exercises attributed to Libanius are:

What would Achilles say over the dead Patroclus?

What words would Odysseus say to the Cyclops when he sees him eating his comrades?

What words would a eunuch say when he falls in love?

After each of these prompts, Libanius offers a short example of the sort of speech to be expected.<sup>14</sup> If part of the education of that time included creating or imitating characters, then by extension might it also include identifying them?

Identifying which character was speaking was an instinctual part of engaging with dramas at this time. Ancient editions were written in a very basic form, lacking "identification of the various speakers, stage directions of all sorts, descriptions of the scenes, etc."<sup>15</sup> It was assumed, therefore, that the readers would be able to infer this information themselves. Moving beyond a mere mental note, at some point readers began to write these details "in the margins and between the lines" of their own copies to simplify use.<sup>16</sup> Typically, identifying characters was straightforward, but disagreements are attested. In the *Scholia*, a compilation of readers' notes on these texts (from *σχόλιον*, "comment, interpretation"), occasionally a justification for why a speaker fit a certain piece of dialogue was written next to the identification of the speaker.<sup>17</sup> This suggests that the reader felt obligated to justify the identification of a particular character over another (likely based upon elements similar to those noted above in the Hermogenes handbook).<sup>18</sup> Although a direct line

<sup>14</sup> See Craig A. Gibson, ed., *Libanius's Progymnasmata: Model Exercises in Greek Prose Composition and Rhetoric*, SBLWGRW 27 (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> René Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work: Terms and Concepts of Literary Criticism in Greek Scholia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 338. See also pp. 338–43 for a more thorough discussion of this background.

<sup>16</sup> Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work*, 338.

<sup>17</sup> For example, in *Scholia vetera in Aristophanis Ranas* 1149–1150. See Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work*, 339.

<sup>18</sup> A further complication with regard to these ancient dramas was the absence of a cast (or *dramatis personae*). The reader, not the author, supplied this as well. See Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work*, 238.

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from this to prosopological exegesis cannot be drawn, it appears that ancient readers were trained to identify and resolve ambiguities regarding speakers based on their knowledge of the characters acting within the narrative.

Another relevant reading technique evidenced in the *Scholia* is called “solution from the character” (λύσις ἐκ τοῦ προσώπου).<sup>19</sup> When an author was perceived to contradict him/herself, the readers found it necessary to resolve the tension by looking for another speaker. Porphyry, the third-century philosopher, notes that he was not concerned by these so-called contradictions because he reasoned that another voice took over:

No wonder [there are apparent discrepancies] when in Homer different things are said by different voices. Whatever is said by the poet in his own person should be consistent and not contradictory. All the words/ideas he attributes to the characters are not his, but are understood as being said by the speakers. (on *Il.* 6.265)<sup>20</sup>

So in addition to identifying speakers when changes were indicated (which was often supplied in the text), readers looked for other character changes as indicated by inconsistencies. If a character was speaking in an uncharacteristic way, then it seemed plausible, or perhaps even necessary, to the readers to find a more suitable speaker. These practices among the literary critics to identify ambiguities and tensions in their texts provides a useful parallel for readers that I will discuss in later portions of this chapter. Christian interpreters perceived ambiguities (within a base text being quoted) and tensions (within the way it was usually interpreted) and resolved them by finding a new, more suitable speaker. While this formal training (and its terminology) might be confined to the elite in society, it is likely that these principles would dissipate to the wider public, which is why Justin can assume that his readers would be able to use prosopological exegesis also.

<sup>19</sup> This is also known as “solution from the poet” (λύσις ἐκ τοῦ ποιητοῦ).

<sup>20</sup> Translation via Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work*, 116; see also James I. Porter, “Hermeneutic Lines and Circles: Aristarchus and Crates on the Exegesis of Homer,” in Robert Lamberton and John J. Keaney (eds.), *Homer's Ancient Readers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 79.



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### 1.1.1.2 Analogous Interpretive Practices in Jewish Exegesis

Similar phenomena are also present in Jewish exegesis. Susan Docherty's work on *The Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews*<sup>21</sup> compares the exegetical methods found in Hebrews with those in "post-biblical Judaism and Christianity,"<sup>22</sup> concluding that many of the categories observed in later exegesis are also found in Hebrews 1 and Hebrews 3–4 (the chapters relevant to her inquiry). While many of Docherty's conclusions on Hebrews 1, which she frames as "axioms," are helpful for understanding this section in Hebrews, one is particularly relevant for this discussion of prosopological exegesis (quoting Docherty):

(viii) One of the exegetical techniques employed most frequently in Hebrews chapter 1 is the precise specification of a speaker and/or addressee who is left ambiguous in the scriptural source.<sup>23</sup>

This axiom reflects observations by Alexander Samely on rabbinic exegesis. For example, he notes:

Prominent among [a variety of targumic interests] is an interest in the personal identity of speakers and addressees who are left anonymous in the Hebrew . . . The solutions given to some of [the passages surveyed], however, allow us to formulate the concern in more precise terms, namely as "Who of the biblical figures of the Pentateuch is it? . . . The targumic identification does not merely add a speaker's identity to the biblical narrative, it points to wording similarities of two separate and independent passages of the Tora."<sup>24</sup>

Thus, according to Samely, interpreters work to identify unspecified participants, but do not freely identify the "speakers and addressees who are left anonymous in the Hebrew." They have two constraints: (1) the characters must be available to them within the Pentateuch,

<sup>21</sup> Susan E. Docherty, *The Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews: A Case Study in Early Jewish Bible Interpretation*, WUNT II 260 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Docherty, *Old Testament in Hebrews*, 143.

<sup>23</sup> Docherty, *Old Testament in Hebrews*, 178.

<sup>24</sup> Alexander Samely, *The Interpretation of Speech in the Pentateuch Targums: A Study of Method and Presentation in Targumic Exegesis*, TSAJ 27 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 19.

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and (2) some verbal parallel must be present to establish the link. Though these principles are not identical with those found in the proposed classical precedents for prosopological exegesis, we do see a “cast list” of sorts as well as a search for some objective means of connecting a named character to the anonymous speech elsewhere. Further, and most importantly, we see an interpreter identifying participants for clarity of understanding.

Additionally, we see some early examples of something rather similar to prosopological exegesis in Qumran literature, particularly in 11QMelchizedek. Several times an ambiguous participant is identified, for example:

it is the time for the “year of grace” of Melchizedek, and of [his] arm[ies, the nat]ion of the holy ones of God, of the rule of judgment, as is written about him in the songs of David, who said: “*Elohim* will [st]and in the assem[bly of God,] in the midst of the gods he judges” [Ps 82:1]. (11QMelch II, 9–10)

And the messenger i[s] the anointed of the spir[it] as Dan[iel] said [about him: “Until an anointed, a prince, it is seven weeks.” [Dan 9:25]. (11QMelch II, 18)

... in the judgment[s of] God, as is written about him: [“Saying to Zi]on: your God rules.” [Isa 52:7] [“Zi]on” i[s] [the congregation of all the sons of justice, those] who establish the covenant, those who avoid walking [on the pa]th of the people. And “your God” is [. . . Melchizedek, who will fr]e[e them from the ha]nd of Belial. (11QMelch II, 23–25)

Though the text is fragmentary, the introductory formulas where each identification is signaled are extant and intact.<sup>25</sup> Elsewhere in Qumran literature, the identification of participants provides the passage with contemporary relevance. For example,

And as for what he said to David: “I [shall obtain] for you [rest] from all your enemies” [2 Sam 7:11]: (it refers to this,) that he will obtain for them rest from a[l]l the sons of Belial those who make them fall, to destroy th[em on account of] their [sins]. . . (4QFlor 1 I, 21)

<sup>25</sup> The final example is exceptional because “your God” is not necessarily ambiguous in Isaiah; however, as will be discussed below, the author of 11QMelchizedek differentiates between אֱלֹהִים and אֱלֹהֵימָם.