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HOW IS THE PROPHET ISAIAH PRESENT
IN THE LATTER HALF OF THE BOOK?
THE LOGIC OF CHAPTERS 40–66
WITHIN THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

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It is an exciting time in the study of the book of Isaiah. In an effort to comprehend the significance of the book as a whole—if such there be—readers are having to go to school again and ask very fundamental questions.[1] Some older students insist from time to time that a shift of focus is wrong-headed and only indicates a failure to follow through more rigorously with the original methods of form and redaction criticism. Others proceed apace as though the shift toward reading Isaiah as a full collection were not taking place at all, or at most involved a final adjustment or two once work on independent sections had been satisfactorily completed. In this case, one might ask if the reflection that results is still largely determined by the persistence of an approach tied to investigating Isaiah as three discrete, evolving sections—even ones that now might potentially have something to do with one another.[2] In any event, for all readers of Isaiah it is a time of constant course adjustment, as one master theory is proposed here,[3] while there several alternative and more modest essays are set forth.[4] A shift toward "unified" readings has produced more, not less, in terms of exegetical proposals for comprehending that unity.

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[1] Christopher R. Seitz, "The Divine Council: Temporal Transition and New Prophecy in the Book of Isaiah," *JBL* 109 (1990) 229–47.

[2] See my remarks in "On the Question of Divisions Internal to the Book of Isaiah," in *SBL 1993 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993) 260–66.

[3] Among others, Edgar W. Conrad, *Reading Isaiah* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); Christopher R. Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition* (BZAW 171; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1988); H. G. M. Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).

[4] Peter Ackroyd, "An Interpretation of the Babylonian Exile: A Study of 2 Kings 20/Isaiah 38–39," *SJT* 27 (1974) 329–52; idem, "Isaiah 36–39: Structure and Function," in *Von Kanaan bis Kerala: Festschrift für Prof. Mag. Dr. Dr. J.P.M. van der Ploeg O.P. zur Vollendung des siebzigsten Lebensjahres am 4. Juli 1979* (ed. W. C. Delsman et al.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag,

Modern hermeneutical theory has reminded us of the commonsense warning that our exegetical findings are likely to be determined by the questions we are asking of the text. One reading the Pentateuch in search of longitudinal sources will be inclined to read the statement in Exod 6:3b not as a circumstantial clause in a larger unit concerned with how God intends to make himself known in the events of the exodus (Exod 6:5–7) but instead as confirmation that one source disagreed with another over how God had theretofore made use of his proper name. To ask, How is Isaiah present in chaps. 40–66? could be to raise a question extraneous to the book's own presentation, and one that only proceeds from the modern critical preoccupation with what is or is not authentic in this book, so far as Isaianic authorship is concerned. However, two warrants for asking the question can be put forward. First, the question is by no means a modern one only, but formed part of the deliberations of so-called precritical exegesis, even when in a muted or more occasional guise. Second, the question need not involve anything like a concern for what is "authentic" in Isaiah (what did such a term ever really mean?), but instead only seeks to understand how or if the figure of Isaiah is maintained in these twenty-seven chapters.

For purposes of illustration and to anticipate the discussion that follows, Isaiah could be regarded as a figure of the past, therefore to be treated as such in chaps. 40–66 in ways we can identify exegetically; or Isaiah's voice could be regarded as lying behind or above the material that follows chaps. 1–39, where he had played a more visible role. In this latter case, the precise *way* the Isaianic voice is resident in chaps. 40–66 might well be very nuanced, akin to pseudepigraphic models or with a more general sense of Isaianic "aegis." But what is significant is the degree to which these models can be differentiated, even as they both seek to understand Isaiah as a meaningfully organized sixty-six-chapter totality.

It would be helpful at this point to consider briefly three earlier efforts to deal with this same issue of Isaiah's presence in chaps. 40–66. This will give us a sample of the range of premodern attitudes toward this matter, which in turn provides a context in which to assess modern efforts to describe Isaiah's unity as this involves the persona of the prophet Isaiah in the latter chapters of the book associated with him.

1982) 3–21; David Carr, "Reaching for Unity in Isaiah," *JSOT* 57 (1993) 61–80; Ronald Clements, "Beyond Tradition-History: Deutero-Isaianic Development of First Isaiah's Themes," *JSOT* 31 (1985) 95–113; Richard J. Clifford, "The Unity of the Book of Isaiah and Its Cosmogonic Language," *CBQ* 55 (1993) 1–17; Rolf Rendtorff, "Zur Komposition des Buches Jesaja," *VT* 34 (1984) 295–320; idem, "Jesaja 6 im Rahmen der Komposition des Jesajabuches," in *The Book of Isaiah* (ed. J. Vermeylen; BETL 81; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989) 73–82; Gerald T. Sheppard, "The Book of Isaiah: Competing Structures according to a Late Modern Description of Its Shape and Scope," in *SBL 1992 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992) 549–82.

I

In Isa 41:25–29 the prophetic voice states that the calling of one from the north was declared "from the beginning . . . and from beforetime" such that now those privy to that declaration can point to it to establish the authority of God. The nations cannot do this. Their gods are not gods but the product of human imagination and highly skilled but vain labor.

Anticipating the objections of C. R. North to an identification of the one called as Abraham,[5] Calvin argues that the one called from the north is Babylon, while the one called from the east is Cyrus (41:25).[6] Calvin knows that the Babylonians were not yet Israel's enemies and that the captivity from which Cyrus would liberate the exiles lay on the distant horizon, so far as Isaiah's own historical context was concerned. One brief section from his remarks will give suitable illustration of the problem he is aware of:

> When he says that he calls him "from the north," as I suggested a little before, he predicts the future captivity of which at that time there was no expectation, because the Jews were friends and allies of the Chaldeans. . . . Who would have thought, when matters were in that state, that such things could be believed? . . . [F]or they happened two hundred years after having been predicted by the prophet. . . . This is a remarkable passage for establishing the full and perfect certainty of the oracles of God; for the Jews did not forge these predictions while they were captive in Babylon, but long after the predictions had been delivered to their fathers, they at length recognised the righteous judgment of God, by whom they had been warned in due time.[7]

Calvin concludes by noting that the remarkable character of this sort of declaration is an indication that Isaiah "did not speak at his own suggestion, but that his tongue was moved and guided by the Spirit of God."[8]

Several significant things are to be observed. First, here and elsewhere in Calvin's commentary we are made aware that rival theories concerning the provenance and form ("predictions") of these chapters existed (viz., they came from the period of Babylonian captivity). Second, Calvin fully recognizes the problem of historicality and temporal distance: when Isaiah spoke, the Babylonians were not Israel's enemies and the Persians were not on the scene at all. Third, the speech of Isaiah would not have made any real sense to his contemporaries, and in fact the intended audience is "posterity, who had actual experience of their accomplishment" and who also would understand that they had

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[5] C. R. North, "The 'Former Things' and the 'New Things' in Deutero-Isaiah," in *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy* (ed. H. H. Rowley; Edinburgh: Clark, 1950) 111–26.

[6] Against most modern interpreters, however, Calvin regarded the figure stirred up earlier in the chapter (41:2) as Abraham (*Calvin's Commentaries. 3: Isaiah* [Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers and Authors, n.d.] 544–64).

[7] Ibid., 562.

[8] Ibid.

been warned for some time. This understanding of Isaiah's speech is familiar from the presentation of the latter chapters of Daniel, with the exception that there the element of unrecognizability to contemporaries and Daniel himself is specifically noted in the portrayal (Dan 8:17, 27; also 7:15, 28; 10:14), while for Calvin it need play no role in the case of Isaiah for his own interpretation to gain conviction.

But there is another problem. Although 41:25 might with some effort be understood as a prediction, fully veiled for Isaiah's contemporaries, the force of the passage turns on Israel's future capacity to declare that something spoken beforehand has now come about. To make another loose comparison with Daniel, this is a little like both producing the dream and interpreting it (Daniel 2), since not only is the prediction made, but its future force in establishing God's authority vis-à-vis the nations is also foreseen, a force that demands the prophecy's prior utterance. Calvin is prepared to accept such a reading as proof of the extraordinary character of Isaiah as a conduit for the Holy Spirit. But this is stretching the plain sense of the material in a way that has no Daniel-like explanation. Especially the declaration in 41:26 about the long-standing character of the prophecy concerning Babylon and Persia would be difficult to square with Isaianic address to contemporaries, on any reading and on any account of the inspired character of Israel's prophetic witness. For a prediction to be valid, it must have been uttered meaningfully to contemporaries; yet it cannot at the same time carry weight as having been uttered long ago to special witnesses, whose posterity can claim to know something no one else knows.

One might be prepared to entertain Calvin's proposal under slightly different conditions, but then the gap between Isaiah and Daniel would have to be fully closed. That is, the effort could have been made to depict Isaiah as the authorizer of this passage in Isa 41:25–29, in something of the same sense that Daniel is the authorizer of speech directed to another day in the presentation of that book. But it seems to me that here we have identified the exact difference between these two presentations. The passage in question does not appear directed to a future audience, as is the case in Daniel; nor is its incomprehensibility to Isaiah or his contemporaries mentioned, as in Daniel; and finally, its very success at persuasion demands a contemporary audience for whom the appearance of Cyrus has some probative force, as such, but primarily *as having been announced from long ago.* The lack of consistency in Calvin's method and the influence of other factors, especially the NT's plain sense, can also be detected when at 49:1–7 the first-person voice ceases to be that of Isaiah and becomes that of Christ, again in a passage with no actual "predictive" character.

I would be grossly misunderstood if these remarks were taken as criticisms of Calvin's failure to engage an objective, historical-critical approach, such as would emerge beyond his own day. My concern here is with understanding how Calvin answers the question we have posed, How is the prophet Isaiah present

in chaps. 40–66? Neither should his lack of consistency be taken as a fatal flaw, for that would beg the question of what is meant by consistency as a good unto itself, or imply that every reading can bracket out every other theological context as an equal good unto itself. In answer to the question we are posing here, the prophet Isaiah, for Calvin, remains resident in chaps. 40–66 in a fairly direct sense, though he must also share the stage with Christ as well as with audiences beyond his own day. Isaiah does not just hover around in some indistinct sense, nor is Calvin appealing to an Isaianic aegis under which the prophecies of chaps. 40–66 circulate or derive their claim to be taken seriously as God's word.

An alternative to this picture of Isaiah's role in chaps. 40–66 seems to appear in the Targums, through the effort to explicate the extremely terse opening command to a plural audience (40:1).[9] The question of who is being addressed by this double charge to comfort may in fact impinge on the question of Isaianic voice in the chapters that follow. The Targums gloss the verse with "O ye prophets" and therewith supply the object of the charging. While it remains unclear who actually speaks this initial charge on behalf of God, what may be suggested by the supplying of an object for the command is that the voices which then speak up (v. 3 and v. 6) are these same prophets who have been addressed. If this reading of the targumic gloss is correct, we may be witnessing a transition from the voice of Isaiah, strictly speaking, as the voice behind the literature, to other new voices, those of unnamed prophets. Yet this remains unclear.

Interestingly, Calvin too speaks of "the Prophet" (Isaiah) commissioning "new prophets" in v. 1, "whom he enjoins to soothe the sorrows of the people by friendly consolation."[10] But that that is the end of it is made clear almost immediately in his interpretation of the first-person voice (so LXX) in 40:6. Here God's voice charges the prophets in general, and Isaiah is the one who responds, "What shall I cry?" And we have seen from Calvin's exegesis at other points that Isaiah's is the voice that continues to speak throughout these chapters, addressing contemporaries, posterity, and pointing ahead to Christ's mission.

Another earlier interpreter, Ibn Ezra, may give us a sense of what the Targums were driving at and how they likely represent a different approach from that of Calvin concerning the Isaianic voice—quite apart from his christological readings.[11] Ibn Ezra is aware of the Babylonian context of the material, yet he cautions the reader against drawing wrong conclusions from this. He frequently refers to "the prophet," but it is not entirely clear who is meant—that is, an independent and new voice behind the material or someone referred to

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[9] See my brief discussion in "Divine Council," 230.

[10] *Calvin's Commentaries,* 523.

[11] *The Commentary of Ibn Ezra on Isaiah* (ed. M. Friedlander; New York: Philipp Feldheim, n.d.; 1st ed., London, 1873]).

within the oracles themselves. In neither case is Isaiah the prophet the obvious referent. It would appear that Ibn Ezra is aware of the problem of Isaianic voice in chaps. 40–66, because of historical distance and the character of the material in these chapters, but unlike Calvin he does not resolve the problem by an appeal to prediction. Instead he changes the subject. These chapters are also as much about Ibn Ezra's own day as they are about matters in the Babylonian period.

II

Before turning to modern interpreters to inquire how the prophet Isaiah is viewed as present in chaps. 40–66, it is important to register that for about a century such a question would have made no sense at all. Bernhard Duhm, for example, was prepared to argue that at one time chaps. 40–55 never even circulated in connection with Isaiah at all and that when they were first combined with an extant prophetic collection, Jeremiah and not Isaiah was chosen. [12] Such was the fully artificial and external nature of the connection of this material to Isaiah, when that eventually occurred. The first part of his theory, viz., that chaps. 40–55 (and 56–66) once had no connection at all to Isaiah, has dominated the discussion until the recent period, and it remains a very popular conception. It should also be noted that for many interested in comprehending the unity of the book of Isaiah, the place of the prophet Isaiah himself plays only a minor or thematic role. [13] The answer to the question posed would be self-evident: he is not present but belongs to the presentation of chaps. 1–39 only. The book does not grow toward "unity" or "disunity" in relationship to the figure of the prophet. On this view, it is taken for granted that chaps. 40–66 are at too great a temporal distance from chaps. 1–39 to be conjoined under a single Isaianic perspective, even one fictively constructed (as, for different purposes, such a perspective is achieved in the book of Daniel).

A somewhat related question, however, still remains to be taken up. How, if Isaiah's voice is regarded as a thing of the past, does the material of chaps. 40–66 claim prophetic authority? Is such a thing unnecessary? Or was such a concern addressed in the material's original presentation but removed when the material was placed in this larger Isaianic context? Brevard Childs has spoken about historical traces once embedded in this material ("concrete features") that were then erased (by "canonical editors") so the chapters could serve their present function in the book, which he describes as eschatological.

[12] Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaia* (HKAT 3.1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892). See my discussion in *Zion's Final Destiny,* 1–29.

[13] R. Rendtorff, "The Composition of the Book of Isaiah," in *Canon and Theology* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 164; Peter Ackroyd, "Isaiah I–XII: Presentation of a Prophet," in *Congress Volume: Göttingen 1977* (VTSup 29; Leiden: Brill, 1977) 38.

If the material once made clear under whose name it was spoken, this has been reduced or eliminated precisely so that the chapters could become "a prophetic word of promise offered to Israel by the eighth-century prophet, Isaiah of Jerusalem."[14]

Older interpreters confident about divisions at chaps. 40–55 and 56–66 sought to discover the traditional marker of prophetic authority, the call narrative, within each of these respective sections. It was in this way that the opening unit (40:1–11) took on such prominence in Second Isaiah, while a similar narrative was harder to locate in the case of chaps. 56–66. In an earlier essay for this journal I questioned whether an interpretation of the opening unit as a call narrative for Second Isaiah could be sustained, either on its own terms or now especially in consideration of the larger shape of the book as a whole, where the prophet Isaiah had already been introduced. But I did not suggest that concrete features had been eliminated. They were never there to begin with.[15]

My view then was that a call narrative for Second Isaiah needed to rely on several factors. First, the MT's reading at 40:6 ("and one said," "and he said") needed to be rejected in favor of the LXX and Qumran's "and I said" (though on its own, I suspect this third-person reading could somehow be tolerated as consistent with a call of Second Isaiah). Still, on text-critical grounds I remain unpersuaded that there is any logical explanation for why a shift from an original first person to a third person could have occurred.[16] The obverse is patient of explanation, since it brings our text into proximity with other call narratives where "but I said" captures the objection in the prophet's first-person reaction.

Following the lead of Peter Ackroyd, my second point was that an interpretation of this key unit had to contend with the existence of a "call narrative" for Isaiah in chap. 6—for its own sake but especially in the light of the features they held in common.[17] Rolf Rendtorff also made some important observations here. Both accounts involve commissioning voices commingling with the voice of God.[18] Both are concerned with YHWH's glory. Yet at the same time, the period of iniquity and sin has given way to a new era of forgiveness and reconstitution. Isaiah's "How long?" has received an answer in real, and not just in anticipated, terms (6:11–13).

In addition, I was concerned with the question of the role of the prophet Isaiah that this opening unit might well address. This requires some clarification. Ackroyd had spoken suggestively of a "renewal of the Isaianic commis-

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[14] Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 325.

[15] Seitz, "Divine Council," 229–47.

[16] Compare Carr, "Reaching for Unity," 67 n. 11.

[17] Ackroyd, "Structure and Function."

[18] Rendtorff, "Isaiah 6 in the Framework of the Composition of the Book," iu *Canon and Theology*, 178.

sion" in 40:1–11.[19] But did he mean that Isaiah's voice was being extended into this material, in an obviously editorial and less direct sense than Calvin had envisioned, or that the first commission was being renewed for another? R. Melugin had also seen the relationship between Isaiah 40 and 6, but he regarded the first-person voice of 40:6 as intentionally equivocal, representing Second Isaiah as prophet as well as the people.[20] Finally, David Meade reckoned with a composition of 40:1–11 calibrated to the larger Isaiah tradition and spoke of a "suppression of the prophet's identity" (that is, the voice behind chaps. 40–55) because of an awareness of this larger context in which "he" was to be heard, where Isaiah's voice remained in play. He went on to conclude that 40:1–11 served "the dual purpose of authorizing the message while making it clear that it was not independent of the larger whole."[21]

It is clear from these several examples that one can argue for the composition of 40:1–11 as undertaken mindful of a larger context in Isaiah, and still mean slightly different things. Rendtorff does not take up the question of who is speaking in chaps. 40–55, Isaiah or another, but instead seeks to understand various theological issues that are raised, addressed, modified, or redirected in the larger corpus, based on some obscure process of growth and development not entirely open to explanation and redescription. Ackroyd's essays are somewhat similar in their concern, though he does not sit so loose to redactional description. Melugin would appear to reckon with a new voice being introduced in chaps. 40–55, though one modeled on Isaiah's. Meade is interested in the question of authorization and authority, as a first-order concern, and claims that the text in question authorizes the message to follow. But it remains unclear to me just how it accomplishes that.

In passing it should be noted that Gerald Sheppard has formulated his own view on this matter, attempting to extend what he regards as Childs's pivotal tenet mentioned above—viz., that chaps. 40–66 are to be understood as a prophetic word of promise from Isaiah of Jerusalem—by appeal to what he calls Isaiah's "persona."[22] He quotes with sympathy Delitzsch's earlier reflections on how "Isaiah in 40–66 lacks Ezekiel's 'tangible reality' and 'is more like a spirit without visible form.'" He cites as suggestive Delitzsch's depiction of Isaiah as one who "floats along through the exile like a being of a higher order, like an angel of God."[23] But equally compelling for Sheppard are Delitzsch's acknowledgments that further prophets have emerged in the book (Delitzsch does refer to a Deutero-Isaiah), and that "these later prophets are really Isaiah's

[19] Ackroyd, "Structure and Function," 6.

[20] R. Melugin, *The Formation of Isaiah 40–55* (BZAW 141; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1976) 84, 86.

[21] David Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon* (WUNT 39; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1986) 35.

[22] Sheppard, "Competing Structures," 561–69. He does not refer to my specific treatment of this subject in "Divine Council."

[23] Sheppard, "Competing Structures," 568.

second self." It is not clear to me that Sheppard's citing of Delitzsch is to his best advantage, since he [Sheppard] emphasizes the voice of Isaiah's "persona" throughout.[24]

Several additional questions could be raised at this point, but one thing seems clear. A shift toward understanding Isaiah as a work with its own integrity has not produced a consistent understanding of how the prophetic voice extends throughout, or if it does. Chapter 40 has emerged as important in this regard, not only because it stands on an important temporal and literary boundary but also because it introduces new, anonymous voices who are charged by God to comfort Zion. Moreover, if it is indeed a composition calibrated in some sense to what precedes in the larger Isaiah tradition, then we are confronting not some abstract or external principle of prophetic authority or *persona* but one that the literature has taken up of its own accord, self-consciously, and, we might also conjecture, of theological necessity.

The question to be raised is the degree to which chaps. 40–66 take up within their own presentation the matter before us, namely, the voice of Isaiah and the possibility of new voices appearing. It may well be the case that "Isaiah" is a spirit that inhabits all sections of the book and that indeed one might call him its "author" in a very basic sense. But that need not preclude, as Delitzsch himself recognized, other prophets appearing in these latter chapters, who reckoned themselves as "second selves" of Isaiah as well as proclaimers of a new thing, never before heard (42:9; 44:19; 48:6–8). Under such conditions, the "persona" of Isaiah would have to be very differently conceived: not as a "voice" unifying the entire collection but as the one whose original vision was intended for contemporaries, but also for generations beyond his own (so 8:16–22; 29:11–12; 30:8). As we shall hope to show, these generations include new prophetic voices that appear in the course of the book's own unfolding, so that the former things might at last be attached to their intended referent and that new things might also be proclaimed, filling to fullness and overflowing the legacy of Isaiah.

If this is what is meant by the "persona" of Isaiah extending across all sixty-six chapters, that may indeed capture what the book intends. Yet this should not mislead us into looking for a presentation keyed to a single prophetic voice, since

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[24] "The prophetic *persona*, in this sense, is far more related to an internal realism integral to the syntax that parses the human voice(s) of the canonical text itself than it is to any capacity of this representation or lack of it to refer to some unknown person(s) outside the text, available according to ordinary norms of history. The prophetic 'voice' in these chapters follows immediately after a description of Isaiah speaking a word from God about Babylon to Hezekiah in chapter 39:5–6. In contrast to Seitz, a canonical approach may regard the 'voice' of the *persona* of Isaiah as one of the most significant devices in the presentation of the whole prophetic book as a singular, human witness to God's Word. It offers, among other things, a corrective to the tendency, both left and right, to harmonize literarily and structurally the disparate human traditions in the book . . ." (Sheppard, "Competing Structures," 569).

the very character of prophecy in this book demands deafness before hearing, prediction before fulfillment, former things uttered before their latter end transpires. For all of these the passage of time and the emergence of new generations are required. Isaiah, prophet or persona, is not exempt from this passage, even as the word spoken by God through him will not return empty but will accomplish that for which it was purposed (55:11), not in spite of but necessitated by time's inexorable march, which leaves no human voice untouched.

Moreover, if it fails to register a distinction between the prophet Isaiah and a word bequeathed to posterity—a distinction registered at several points in chaps. 1–39—then the term "persona" should be avoided altogether. Isaiah's "persona" is not extended into chaps. 40–66 except as his word finds vindication and extension through new voices, perhaps even Isaiah's "second selves," to use Delitzsch's phrase. It is the word of God that stands forever, not Isaiah or his "persona" abstracted from that word.

III

Bind up the testimony, seal the teaching among my disciples.
    I will wait for the LORD who is hiding his face . . .
To the teaching and to the testimony!
    Surely for this word . . . there is no dawn. (8:16–17, 20 RSV)

And now, go, write it before them on a tablet,
    and inscribe it in a book,
That it may be for the time to come. (30:8 RSV)

In an essay published in 1955, D. R. Jones underscored the significance of these two passages for understanding the growth of what he termed "the traditio of the oracles of Isaiah of Jerusalem."[25] More recently, Edgar Conrad has called attention to these two texts (as well as to 29:11–12) as pointing to the process by which the book of Isaiah has developed, not just as "traditio" reworked for a new day but as an actual fixed text opened for a new generation, described in 43:8 as "the people who are blind, yet have eyes, who are deaf, yet have ears." The earlier circumstances of 6:9–11 are annulled. Conrad even suggests that the references to crying aloud in the opening unit (40:1–11) may shade off into the realm of "calling forth," as in reading, in this case, the "vision of Isaiah" bequeathed to posterity. Again the circumstances of 29:11–12 are reversed.[26]

Following the lead of Frank Cross and others, I argued for an interpretation of 40:1–11 as a commissioning from the heavenly council.[27] The various

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[25] D. R. Jones, "The Traditio of the Oracles of Isaiah of Jerusalem," *ZAW* 67 (1955) 226–46.

[26] Conrad, *Reading Isaiah,* 117–68.

[27] Frank Moore Cross, "The Council of Yahweh in Second Isaiah," *JNES* 12 (1953) 274–77.

voices were modeled on the entourage familiar from Isaiah 6 (and other such scenes), and in fact the text would prove too obscure if one did not understand that the earlier commissioning scene was being presupposed by the author. Rather than being about the "call" of Deutero-Isaiah, the text served the purpose of moving us from the authorized word of Isaiah into a new dispensation, with prophecy itself in a new mode. As such, the text betrays its "agony of influence," as Isaiah's word of judgment is recalled, by an anonymous voice, in vv. 6–7; but it also moves us forward, as the decree from the divine council is for comfort, forgiveness, an end to a period of service, and the appearance of God's glory. That too is part of what Isaiah has bequeathed to posterity (comfort, 12:1; sin, 1:4; 5:18; 22:14; 30:13, and forgiveness, 27:9; 33:24; YHWH's glory, 6:3).[28]

While the scene utilizes elements from the commissioning of Isaiah in chap. 6—and Rendtorff, Ackroyd, and Melugin had identified their own linkages—it is not clear how we are to interpret this borrowing in terms of the detail in 40:1–11. I argued before that the voices were heavenly and that the third-person voice in v. 6 ("and one said") "belongs to any individual member of the heavenly council."[29] We could infer this on the basis of Isaiah 6, where the seraphs speak to one another, and on the basis of other such scenes (in Zechariah, Job, 1 Kings 22). At the same time, however, I argued that the voice was closely attached to the mundane realm as well, specifically to Isaiah the prophet and his prior prophecy; it served as "a precis of one important dimension of Isaiah's prophecy" viewed from a later perspective.[30] I remain persuaded that the text must be interpreted in the light of other texts now found in chaps. 1–39. To bracket out this context in the name of traditional form-critical analysis would be to forfeit the proper interpretive clues without which the text cannot make its intended sense. I am less persuaded that the form of a heavenly council commissioning, such as we find it in chap. 6, has been borrowed without modification of its details. Once the linkage has been made, the form begins to go its own way.

It was my thesis that the chief concern of the text involves extending Isaiah's word into a new day, and that also means—at least potentially—raising a question of human agency. Is Isaiah present and speaking, or another? Typically in prophetic books a call narrative answers such questions by having the prophet autobiographically describe God's address to him, his response, and God's further instruction, cleansing, preparation, and commission. Such was the position of those who held that here Deutero-Isaiah was being called, in his own "prophetic book" (chaps. 40–55). Yet in this text virtually all autobiographical perspective is lacking. It is in part for this reason that one could assume, in

[28] See Rendtorff, "Composition."
[29] Seitz, "Divine Council," 245.
[30] Ibid., 241.

an earlier day, that the Isaiah already called in chap. 6 remained at work here—
such was Calvin's reading, if not also Sheppard's, in a more sophisticated form.[31]
Yet, instead of this autobiographical perspective we have God's voice, anony-
mous voices, and a final charge involving Zion. Even that remains somewhat
unfocused temporally, since it involves a reaction to God's own activity, not yet
undertaken (vv. 9b–11).

One striking feature of the unit, again not notable in call narratives, is the
way the unit breaks into subsections, with the second two closed by reference
to God's speech or word (v. 5, "for the mouth of the LORD has spoken it"; v. 8,
"the word of our God will stand forever"). I would argue that this is not rhetori-
cal flourish or a reference to God's present speaking within a heavenly—or
earthly—council, with which the voices top off their own proffered speech.
The text does not say this as it is presently arranged: divine address appears in
vv. 1–2, and then other voices speak up, in seeming response, with no further
return to God's address as such. Rather, with these closing refrains reference is
being made to *known, previously uttered* words of God, matters already spo-
ken. This is why in the case of the second, seemingly despondent voice, no spe-
cific divine rebuttal or correction appears in explicit form. In response to this
divine charge, human speech *is* indeed ephemeral, such that if "one said, what
shall I cry?" the answer would have to be,"inadequate—all flesh is grass and its
best effort like the flower of the field." And not just the proclaimers but also the
recipients of divine speech are like grass of the field, as we know from chaps.
1–39. No new speech is inaugurated by God in this unit. The word of our God
as already spoken is what will stand forever, as the note in 30:8 had announced
in the days of Isaiah.

In the case of the first voice, where no hesitation occurs, the voice pro-
claiming draws for the content of the proclamation not on inspired utterances
from his or her own breast. The command to comfort does not come with a
requirement of proper psychological state or creative endowment, but rather
the citing of what "the mouth of the LORD has spoken." In this case, search for
Deutero-Isaiah's "call" has created a misleading environment, since "call" is
concerned with origination, the beginning of a content, from God to freshly
authorized prophet. But that is not called for here. The first voice, in respond-
ing to the charge to comfort, quotes what the mouth of the LORD had already
spoken, in the vision of Isaiah. Chapter 35 contains most of the relevant con-
tent, a summation of the prophet's scattered, previously uttered language of
hope and restitution (1:26; 6:13; 8:18; 11:16; 12:1–6). Incidentally, this may also
explain the placement of this chapter *prior* to the narratives of chaps. 36–39: to
make it clear that the promise of the LORD's return to Zion, such as that refer-
enced in 40:3, was prophecy from Isaiah, of old, uttered prior to the events of

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[31] See n. 24 above.

Zion's deliverance and not just in an editorially motivated "bridge" linking discrete and fully independent sections of the book.[32]

The final unit (40:9–11) consists of new charges, now to a herald of good tidings. Reference to God in the third person would suggest that another anonymous voice is again speaking here. But in some respects the effect of the opening exchange has been to relativize such a distinction. In what follows, God will speak directly, with no evidence of human agency. But there is a reason for this, unrelated to whether the "persona" (Sheppard) or concrete person (Calvin) of Isaiah is resident here. Throughout appeal is made by God to what has *already* been revealed to Israel (40:21, 28; 41:27; 43:10; 44:8), and it is on this basis that YHWH, Israel's named God, is God alone, since the capacity to establish providence over history is something God's rivals cannot do. Israel is in a position to state something about her own history as well as extramural affairs, like the calling of Cyrus, while others have no such recourse, and in this consists the demonstration of her own unique status and destiny. Again and again God insists that the "former things" are not just a sufficient but also a particularly compelling testimony to Israel's election. All this turns on there having been "former things" to begin with, and among these is the prophetic word of Isaiah concerning the call of Cyrus (41:25 and 13:17; 21:2).

The reason no new prophet appears, or Isaiah, is that God is here referring Israel to what Isaiah had spoken beforehand and, alongside that, to what Israel's past history was intended to reveal, for its own sake and in conjunction with God's word to Isaiah, at this particular juncture in time and then for all posterity. There could be no better example of emergent "canon consciousness" than what these opening chapters of "Second Isaiah" portray, that is, a sense that the prophetic word, and the word of God, is now constituted and freshly communicated through a past record to which public reference can be made, by Israel, for Israel's own sake and for the sake of God's effective rule over all creation. This is truly prophecy in a new mode, and something like this is suggested in the opening chapter of Zechariah as well:

> And the prophets, do they live forever?
> But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants
>   the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers? (1:5–6 RSV)

What is central to the opening unit of Isaiah 40–66—the appeal to God's word once spoken—is maintained in the same manner in the chapters that follow, especially 40–48. That constitutes their governing force and gives explanation for why no new prophet, or Isaiah, is depicted as speaking. Isaiah the prophet does speak, of course, but not as a "persona." He speaks through the

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[32] Compare Odil H. Steck, *Bereitete Heimkehr* (SBS 121; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1985).

word he had spoken in a former time, a word that God reminds Israel it did not then heed. But now because forgiven, Israel can with opened ears and eyes comprehend matters whose "latter end" even the prophet Isaiah could not previously understand (see especially 21:1–4).[33]

I pointed out in my earlier essay that these opening chapters (40–48) are not entirely devoid of autobiographical reference. There is, of course, the voice that speaks in 40:6; it is not clear if this is a celestial voice or a representative voice more generally.[34] This voice states that no new human word can effect the change God calls for in the opening unit (vv. 1–2). The second voice is, however, equipped to speak a word, by citing God's word spoken through Isaiah (vv. 3–5). As discussed above, the material that follows is essentially divine speech from a trial setting, where God defends himself on the basis of testimony to which Israel alone has recourse. This involves Israel's record in respect of the creation (40:12–31), the call of Abraham (41:1–13), succor in the wilderness (41:14–20), the prophetic prediction of Cyrus as defeater of Babylon (41:21–29). In chap. 42, reference to the blind and deaf servant (42:18–20) recalls an Israel familiar from chaps. 1–39 (especially 6:9–10). Yet this servant has now been punished, as Isaiah had foreseen, burned and burned again by YHWH's wrath (42:25), imagery again reminiscent of chap. 6 (v. 13).

In the midst of this passage (42:18–25) we have a brief first-person reference in the penultimate verse, and it stands out for its singular character amidst lengthy divine speech.

> Who gave up Jacob to the spoiler,
>   and Israel to the robbers?
> Was it not the LORD, against whom we have sinned? (42:24 RSV)

This constitutes a corporate confession, similar in form (and possibly function) to Jer 3:24–25. The shift to the third person in the second half of the verse makes it clear that the objects of God's actual historical judgment lie in the past, and the final verse depicts that judgment in succinct terms. This brief glimpse at a confession might explain the shift that occurs in the next chapter, where the people who are blind *yet have eyes,* and who are deaf *yet have ears* (43:8). As many have noted, this amounts to a clear reversal of the circumstances of Isaiah's addressees. A new day is breaking forth on the other side of Isaiah's "How long?"

In the chapters that follow it is the call of Cyrus and the defeat of Babylon

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[33] On the significance of this passage, see my treatment in *Isaiah 1–39* (Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993) ad loc.

[34] I wish to thank an STM student at Yale Divinity School, Naoto Kamano, for sharing his very insightful paper with me, "New Prophecy is not Actually New: Canonical Function of Isaiah 40:1–11 Reconsidered." Kamano makes several good observations in this response to my *JBL* (1990) essay.

that take center stage. Reference is frequently made to Israel's own special counsel in these matters. In these events God is confirming the word of his servants (44:26), declared of old (45:21), accomplishing his counsel in Cyrus (46:11), and performing his purpose on Babylon (47:14). Israel alone can bear witness that they knew about these things long ago, even when they have failed to make proper acknowledgment, then or now.

At the same time, God also mentions new things, which have no history of prediction. "Before they spring forth, I tell you of them" (42:9); "Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth" (43:19); and "From this time forth I make you hear new things, hidden things which you have not known . . . before today you have never heard of them" (48:6–7). Since this prophecy cannot be related to the authorized word of Isaiah, or any other chapter of Israel's sacred history, already on record, the previous explanation for why no prophetic figure is being depicted in these chapters begins to fall to the side. This would present a problem were it not for the fact that at precisely this moment, a first-person voice emerges in 48:16. And then in chap. 49, what could in fact be classified a "call narrative" appears (49:1–6). Could it be that we are seeing a new speaker for new things, "created now, not long ago" (48:7)? That is at least one possible explanation for the convergence of these several factors in the text at this juncture.[35]

The unit in which this initial first person singular voice speaks runs from v. 14 through v. 16. The opening call to assemble is a familiar one. Also familiar is the way the exact referent is unclear, here and throughout the unit. The references to calling and prospering in v. 15 would be consistent with God's commissioning of Cyrus, and the references to victory over Babylon in v. 14b likewise commend this interpretation, as does the final unit of the chapter (vv. 20–22), where servant Jacob is liberated from Chaldean exile. That this was announced of old, and not in secret (v. 16), is also consistent with the calling of Cyrus as prophesied by Isaiah—something that cannot be revealed by "them" (v. 14a). In the final line, the introductory וְעַתָּה would appear to distinguish between something that had obtained—the calling of Cyrus by Isaiah—and something now in force: God's sending "me and his spirit." It is also consistent with the sort of transition to "new things" underscored so effectively in 48:6–8. What remains unclear is whether the spirit mentioned here in connection with an individual is related to the spirit with which God endows the servant in 42:1 (נָתַתִּי רוּחִי עָלָיו).

As mentioned, a nearly classic call narrative appears in 49:1–6, even allowing for the curious reference to "Israel" in v. 3. There is no dearth of autobiographical detail here. Certain language is distinctly reminiscent of the call of Jeremiah, for example, being called from the womb. Moreover, the reference

to a career involved with "the nations" (49:6) was one that figured prominently in Jeremiah's call, and its peculiarity in light of the book's content has long bothered commentators.

Yet there is one feature that seems inconsistent with a call narrative, whether it be that of Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, or another. That is the lack of a serious, *present* encounter with the divine. Instead, the prophet—if we are entitled to call him that—provides as it were a reminiscence. What was said to Jeremiah in direct speech (Jer 1:5) is recollected by this figure using indirect speech (49:1). The objection lodged by the prophet in v. 4 involves not his unfitness for the task, as with Jeremiah or Moses, or his uncleanness, as with Isaiah. It appears to involve a perception that labor already spent has been for nought. The actual charge from God, which again is reported through the prophet's own brokering, comes in v. 6, where we learn that the prophet has an additional, not an initial, vocation, over and above what he has *already been about,* namely, a mission to Jacob/Israel. This is fully consistent with the perspective of v. 4. So the unit is not so much the account of a call as a report of one who had been called, and who is here commissioned for a new task.

We are now beginning to circle a constellation of related issues whose gravity is difficult to escape. Is there to be found in these chapters a series of discrete "servant poems"? Does this series end at chap. 53? Are the poems in meaningful relationship to one another, such that one could speak of movement, development, culmination? If there is meaningful development across all the poems or a part of them, does this disturb the possibility of organization and development in the chapters as a whole, since their positioning as a cycle is curious? What is the scope of each individual poem and why in all but the last does it appear that further remarks are made *in extenso* (42:5–9; 49:7; 50:10–11)? To raise the question of the servant's identity before these questions are addressed only leads to confusion, as the history of interpretation bears witness.[36]

I am here arguing that yet a further consideration needs to come into play that may shed light on these other questions, if not on the servant's identity. This involves the matter under discussion, namely, how Isaiah is present in chaps. 40–66. In the opening chapters (40–48) Isaiah is present through his word once spoken, which is cited along with further testimony of old ("former things") to establish God's sovereignty and Israel's election. The prophetic "voice" behind these chapters remains hidden, *of necessity,* so that a word already spoken might bear witness to God's prophetic purpose, a purpose frustrated by deafness and blindness, delayed, but inexorably accomplishing that

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[36] See most recently R. G. Kratz, *Kyros im Deuterojesaja-Buch* (Forschungen zum Alten Testament 1; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1991); and Odil H. Steck, *Gottesknecht und Zion* (Forschungen zum Alten Testament 4; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1992).

for which it was sent. The prophet's "persona" is replaced by the testimony of God's word already sent forth.

Nevertheless, the references to "new things" never before spoken increase in frequency once the blind and deaf Israel begin to hear and see the significance of the "former things." In 48:16 we see what may be the signature of the voice at work in these chapters. Then in the second and third "servant poems" (49:1–6, 7; 50:4–9, 10–11) we find clear and uninterrupted first-person speech. A similar speech form is attested in 61:1–4, 10–11. It appears that a first-person voice is in fact being identified, and clearly. The first-person poem that lies closest to the signature of 48:16, namely, 49:1–6, 7, also picks up the theme of something new now to be announced. The voice in the poem reflects on a career that has a distinct history (49:4). The fresh charge from God in v. 6 likewise speaks of a career involving Jacob and Israel. Yet in addition to that the servant will have a task vis-à-vis the nations: "it is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob. . . . I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth" (49:6). The final extension (v. 7) also makes this clear.

If this is a correct interpretation of the temporal perspective of 49:1–7, what are we to make of it? References to frustration and futility do not neatly comport with the presentation of chaps. 40–48; it is not as though the speaker of that material is reflecting in 49:1–6 on a difficult career, evidence of which can be seen in what precedes. There we have eyes opened where once they were blind. As we have seen, the unit assumes many of the features of a call narrative, but then it goes its own way. The individual announces to the nations ("you coastlands" and "peoples from afar") that he was called by God in the womb (49:1). This claim had a different effect in the opening chapter of the book of Jeremiah. There God himself tells a young Jeremiah, in direct speech, that he has a present task as prophet to the nations for which he had been consecrated at birth (Jer 1:5). The book does not open with Jeremiah announcing that he had been called at birth for a task (that God must reveal to him) and that it had required great fortitude (we learn that only as the book unfolds). Our passage sounds more like an interim report, with a fresh charge being delivered, than the initial call of a prophet.

To the degree that the opening chapters (Isaiah 40–48) bring into prominence God's prior word, the "author" of this material remains hidden. No "I" appears until 48:16. Yet when what looks like a prophetic figure does emerge, there is the same measure of dependence on past testimony, not only in form but also in substance. A record of prophecy as Israel has known it appears to lie behind this unit, in the same way as Isaiah's word and Israel's history in creation, wilderness, and exodus were former things to which the author of chaps. 40–48 made reference. This servant understands his own mission in a larger context of prophetic witness, which has been difficult and seemingly futile, though trust in God has not been destroyed (49:4b). In my judgment, this ser-

vant comprehends his own vocation in reference to past prophets, such as Jeremiah—but not Jeremiah at the moment of call, with a vocation, a charge, and a career still ahead. This servant's mission picks up where Jeremiah left off, at the end of his career. That is, it is a mission based on all prior prophecy at its own potential end point and dissolution. The servant takes his bearings from the history of God's dealings with Israel through his servants the prophets, including a history of seeming unfulfillment, delay, even failure. This servant carries Israel's history with prophecy in him and, in so doing, is "Israel" in a very specific sense. So it is stated in that curious phrase in 49:3: "You are my servant; (you are) Israel in whom I will be glorified."[37]

Moreover, it would be possible for those examining the record, including this servant, to conjecture that Jeremiah's specific vocation as a prophet to the nations (Jer 1:5, 10) was not fully accomplished—even bracketing out a discussion as to what such a mission entailed in the first place. Jeremiah not only pours out lament to God for a seemingly frustrated vocation to Israel (chaps. 12–20); he finds himself at the end of his career in a defeated and overrun capital (chaps. 37–39), then to be hauled off to Egypt against his will (chaps. 42–44) with no final chapter providing resolution, either in respect of Israel or the nations. The mantle of painful witness is simply handed over to another (chap. 45). Prophecy has returned from whence it came, to the place God had said Israel could not return without curse (Deut 17:16). Prophecy's future is by no means clear.[38]

Furthermore, to the degree to which the wider history of prophecy had a vocation involving the nations (within this corpus see Isa 2:1–5; 11:9; 13–27; 34–35), one could conjecture that that similar vocation still lacked sufficient, obvious fulfillment. Indeed, the content of the vocation may require for clarification Israel's coming into conjunction with the nations in a particularly direct way in the first place. For that the events of 587 represented a painful possibility. At this moment Israel stands in a position with the potential to contemplate what was meant by God's calling Jeremiah to be a prophet to the nations, or by Isaiah's speech concerning the destinies of kingdoms beyond Israel's compass.

The first section of this material (chaps. 40–48) is chiefly concerned with how God's word spoken through Isaiah and elsewhere is coming to fulfillment within Israel's circle of comprehension. The period of blindness and deafness is over. God's past word can now be heard to new effect. From chap. 49 on another aspect of past prophecy emerges alongside this always central concern, namely, how that word was to realize its intended effect on the nations of the world. This does not involve a resolution of the problem of chaps. 40–48, which

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[37] Peter Wilcox and David Paton-Williams, "The Servant Songs in Second Isaiah," *JSOT* 42 (1988) 79–102.

[38] Christopher R. Seitz, "The Prophet Moses and the Canonical Shape of Jeremiah," *ZAW* 101 (1989) 3–27.

is a specifically intramural one (viz., word grounded in past testimony, over against Israel's reception of it). The focus shifts now to the servant, Israel, with a vocation to the nations. In this role the servant is not just one more individual prophet in a long line of prophets stretching back to Moses; the servant is that history of prophecy individualized, especially in respect of that history as still awaiting fulfillment. The fulfillment of the former things has been pointed to, but for the final consummation of these a new thing is required. This servant will bring to fruition God's destiny for Israel and for the nations, about which questions persist (49:4) and press for resolution different in kind from anything at work in chaps. 40–48.

To the question, How is the prophet Isaiah present in chaps. 40–66? we would respond thus: in word, in chaps. 40–48, and in person in chaps. 49 and following—but not by himself. Isaiah, together with his fellow "servants the prophets" running all the way back to Moses, is represented by the servant who speaks up in chap. 49, reflecting on hard labor, futility, yet trust in the one who called from the womb. Ironically, Delitzsch's suggestion that Isaiah "is more like a spirit without visible form" in chaps. 40–66 is not far off the mark, though for reasons he was not contemplating. The servant is here commissioned for a new task involving an old but unfulfilled vocation to the nations. We learn that the fulfillment of this vocation will transform Israel itself and will finally ask that Israel put on the mantle of prophecy as has the servant in these chapters ("this is the heritage of the servants of the LORD," 55:17). We had a foreshadowing of this in the book of Jeremiah, where the transmission to a new generation, in the figure of Baruch, is an integral part of the book's presentation (especially chaps. 36 and 45). Likewise in the book of Isaiah, the reference in the next first-person poem to the servant being given the tongue of a לִמּוּד (50:4) has long been associated with Isaiah's "taught ones" in 8:16.[39] So within this book's presentation there is also a furtherance of the office through a new generation, represented by the servant, and, beyond him, "the servants" (54:17; 63:17; 65:8, 9, 13, 14, 15; 66:14).[40] "Canon consciousness" would then involve not just a shift from historical prophet to a written testimony through which he can continue to speak. It would involve as well a transformation of generations newly addressed by that testimony, until they take on the likeness of those who went before and finally in their own person, through God's grace, bring to completion the work begun in others.

The question of this servant's specific identity may also find an answer in our proposal. The obscurity is not an intentional "device" or a function of our historical distance from the first audience or author's circumstances. The rea-

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[39] Jones, "Traditio," 233.

[40] W. A. M. Beuken, "The Main Theme of Trito-Isaiah: The 'Servants of YHWH,'" *JSOT* 47 (1990) 67–87.

son we cannot identify the servant in these poems is that he has taken on the mantle of prophets who have gone before, and in that role he is no one who could be particularized without reference to that prior history. He is not another individual prophet in a long chain of prophets. He is God's servant, and in that role he sees himself and his vocation as bringing to completion God's word spoken to the prophets of old. He gets out of the way in a manner different from that conjectured for chaps. 40–48: he is the culmination of prophetic Israel, whose testimony he takes up and whose suffering he willingly embraces, in order that that testimony and that suffering might effect what God wills for Israel and the nations. Alongside the transition from *prophet* (Isaiah) to *prophetic word* in chaps. 40–48, one sees in chaps. 49 and following a transition from *prophets* to *servant* and then *servants*. We are in a new dispensation, because of the emergence and authoritative force of a written prophetic record, from which God's word still presses for fulfillment.

In my judgment, the servant who is described in 49:1–7 and 50:4–9 was an actual historical figure as well as the prophetic voice at work in these chapters (40–55). That is, more is at work in these passages than literary representation for the purpose of resolving prophecy's complex legacy. Furthermore, in my view a genetic relationship exists between this voice and the servant who speaks in the first person in 61:1–7, and for this and other reasons a new description of the relationship between chaps. 40–55 and 56–66 is called for.[41] In the first-person account of 50:4–9, an individual describes a vocation of suffering and affliction not unlike that of Jeremiah or of many other figures in Israel's experience. Prophecy is being described in a way that comports with what we know from Israel's record of it, including its unclear completion according to God's designs for it. A real figure, who is the speaker of God's word in the sections surrounding these descriptions, here understands his suffering as consistent with and the culmination of prophecy as it has taken form in Israel's past. What is less clear is whether this same figure is being described, now in a lengthy and detailed third-person report, in the dramatic fourth poem (52:13–53:12). My view at this juncture is that the same figure is being described, now by other servants (54:17), who reflect on the significance of the servant's death. The narrator of 52:13–53:12 is one of the servants who joins in the plural confession found at 53:1–6.

Failure to identify the stricken servant, whose mission is confessed to have such enormous consequences, gives one pause; it is anonymity of a nature different from what has obtained for the first-person voice we have been focusing on thus far. In constructing the record of past figures, to what is reckoned banal

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[41] See my remarks in "On the Question of Divisions," 265–66. I have been persuaded by the work of Beuken on this transition from servant to servants (see preceding note).

go no names, not to the consequential. Yet within this account the central concern, arguably, is for consequentiality (52:15; 53:4–6) as well as for the posterity who will encounter and acknowledge this servant's accomplishment (53:11).

In the light of these factors, one must ask if the refusal to identify is in this case deliberate[42] and somehow part of the accomplishment of the servant, as the narrator has interpreted it. That narrator has himself rejected identification, consistent with the servant's own deference to a prophetic record still in force and still pressing for fulfillment. In the case of the stricken servant about whom he is bearing poignant testimony, his ignominy in life (53:2–3) is corroborated by the faceless character of his sacrifice, the effects of his service obliterating his particularity as a named individual, along lines traditionally conceived for Israel's prophets and great figures. Moses' grave is unmarked because his legacy lies elsewhere (the written Torah), and this constitutes his true and most enduring memorial; this servant's identity remains hidden that his chief accomplishment, the removal of sin, might emerge as his fundamental legacy. The anonymous first-person voice here joins with others to testify to an anonymity even more purposeful than his own. As the narrator records it, the sacrifice of the servant is complete. It extends to his very identification for posterity. His exaltation consists of his complete self-surrender, literally, on behalf of the servants and in obedience to God's will. Whatever else the servant's mission accomplishes, it begins with the awareness that this servant's identification is not the key to his activity and its consequences for posterity. Such identification has been deliberately withheld from the record.

This is a retraction of the prophetic persona different in kind and effect from what we have been tracing thus far. But it is similar in that the record of the servant's achievement has been aggrandized precisely through the decision—we are arguing it was deliberate—*not* to attach the record to a specific person in history, and not to include as part of his legacy his name.[43] Precisely in its commitment to silence, within the fabric of this moving scene of obedience and sacrifice, is constituted the eschatological power of the servant's accomplishment. The rich history of this text's interpretation bears this out, even when pursued for reasons extraneous to the account's own compelling form and content.

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[42] For other reasons, several modern interpreters (Clines, Westermann) have also regarded the failure to identify as deliberate, or at least a caution to exegetes not to press for details the text has not chosen to supply. See D. J. A. Clines, *I, He, We, They—A Literary Approach to Isa 53* (JSOTSup 1; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1976); Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–55* (Philadelphia:Westminster, 1969).

[43] Note the resemblance to the depiction of the mysterious voice with which this material begins, "and one said, 'What shall I cry?'" (40:6).

IV

Many specific issues of exegesis have been passed over in an effort to reflect on this and other key passages in the book of Isaiah from the standpoint of the prophet's presence in the collection to which his name has been attached. Nowhere is this more true than in the poem now under discussion, whose specific details and presentation have given rise to a variety of reconstructions and further questions for consideration. (Did the servant actually die? To what does a "grave with the wicked" refer? Does the servant "sprinkle" the nations in 52:15, and, if so, is this a cultic notion? What of the references in 53:2 to his growing up like a young plant? What is the servant's accomplishment vis-à-vis the nations?)[44] Furthermore, it has been difficult to identify the servant with Israel because of the peculiar details of the account. So too an eschatological figure would appear to be ruled out because the report is retrospective, not prospective, in character.[45] But this is not the place to pursue these matters in detail; for that a commentary treatment is required.[46] My concern in this essay has been to understand the way chaps. 40–66 consciously take up the matter of prophetic agency, as central to their presentation and dramatic movement. This involves in the first instance the prophet Isaiah, but also prophecy more broadly conceived, as we have seen in the case of the servant and servants in chaps. 49–66. If the contribution of the present essay is to shift the way we have thought about this issue in the book of Isaiah, that will be enough. Greater precision and further clarification will then come in due course.

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[44] For a typical treatment, see either Clines (*I, He*) or R. N. Whybray, *Thanksgiving for a Liberated Prophet* (JSOTSup 4; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978).

[45] The eschatological force we are identifying is of a different nature altogether.

[46] See my forthcoming commentary in the *New Interpreters Bible* series.