The Hidden God of Isaiah 45:15: Whose Voice? Which Meaning?

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by

Richard G. Rohlfing Jr.

Abstract

This thesis provides a fresh answer to a deceptively simple question in the history of interpretation: In what sense is God hidden as confessed in Isaiah 45:15? To answer this question this thesis explores the dynamic relationship between the confession itself, "Surely you are God who hides himself…" (Isa 45.15a), and its interpretation in recent scholarly literature. The present work is, on the one hand, an exegetical investigation of a perennially problematic pericope, Isa 45:14–17, in its immediate literary context of Isa 40–49:13. In chapter two it is demonstrated how divine hiddenness as articulated in this poetry is made more coherent by understanding the often overlooked, yet contextually organic, juxtaposition of the addressee to the divine image (especially in the wider symbolic discourse of the Mesopotamian *Mīs pî* ritual). On the other hand, this thesis is a meta-critical reflection and hermeneutical case-study on the moves interpreters make *towards meaning*, to answer the question, "Whose voice are we hearing?" while rendering a contingent construal of divine hiddenness. The ambiguous referential features of this pericope are shown to be constructive, serving to place the audience/reader within an experience of relational dislocation and estrangement. This opens up a way of understanding Isaiah 45:15 that stresses the dynamic relationship between readerly self-involvement in the poetry's progression, which is facilitated by key moments of dialogue in which the twin topoi of blindness/sight and hiddenness/glory figure prominently.

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Abbreviations

Where abbreviations are used, they follow the conventions as set out in *The SBL Handbook of Style*, Second Edition (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2014). Where I have used my own abbreviation for a particular text, I indicate this at the point of its first usage.

Declaration

This work has been submitted to the University of Durham in accordance with the regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It is my own work, and none of it has been previously submitted to the University of Durham or to any other university for a degree.

Statement of Copyright

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אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל מִי יִמְצָא...

אֲנִי מְצָאתִיךְ

1. Introduction

1.1 Contemporary Relevance of Divine Hiddenness

From God's death in Nietzsche's *The Parable of the Madman* to Martin Buber's *Eclipse of God* to Richard Elliot Friedman's more recent *The Hidden Face of God*, the last century and a half has been steeped in questions related to divine presence and absence. An interest in the subject of divine hiddenness, in particular, has found various articulations in biblical, theological, and philosophical studies, each speaking out of a distinctive tradition and guild-ed idiolect.[1] Divine hiddenness exists in dialogue with other theological themes such as divine revelation, at the intersection of twinned topoi such as immanence and transcendence (incomprehensibility, invisibility),[2] and even in relation to Christology, divine judgment, and wrath. These theological associations can also be seen in the "Hidden God" of Pascal, Luther, and Barth, as well as in a great many theologians who play upon their wake.[3]

Pascal, for instance, is commonly quoted in discussions of divine hiddenness as follows:

> …any religion which does not affirm that God is hidden, is not true……*Vere tu es Deus absconditus.*[4]

I would like to draw attention to several moves made in the act of quotation (by Pascal and those who quote Pascal), which also serve to signpost the route taken in this work. The first is a move made by Pascal himself: *Vere tu es Deus absconditus* is taken from the Vulgate of Isaiah 45:15. This

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[1] For a summary of divine hiddenness from the ANE/Hebrew Bible to modern theology and even contemporary popular culture, see "Hiddenness of God" in Dale C. Allison et al. (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, vol. 11: Halah-Hizquni (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 1017–38. For a more thorough mapping of divine hiddenness in the modern and postmodern theological landscape, see Daniel J. Peterson, "The Hidden Heterodoxy of the Hidden God: An Analysis of the Deus Absconditus in Classical and Contemporary Christian Theology," (PhD diss., Graduate Theological Union, 2005).

[2]Mjaaland describes Luther's understanding of the *deus absconditus* as an immanent transcendence, "God hidden in suffering and weakness of the cross." Marius Timmann Mjaaland, *The Hidden God*: *Luther, Philosophy, and Political Theology* (Bloomington, IN: IUP, 2016), 93.

[3] Barth argues forcefully for God's hiddenness as an imperative and positive corollary to disclosure, revelation, and the true knowledge of God (as articulated in his response to what he deems "mystical theologies", in Pseudo-Dionysius and Schleirmacher). He underscores the inadequacy or unsuitability of human agency to apprehend the divine and "the irrevocable otherness" between God and humanity. "It is because the fellowship between God and us is established and continues by God's grace that God is hidden from us." Barth, CD II/1, 188. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics,* 4 Vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956–1975). The hiddenness of God is interpreted by Barth as the paradoxical confession of both judgment and grace, an assertion of revelation and faith, indeed "the *terminus a quo* of our real knowledge of God…the beginning of our cognizance of God." Barth, *CD*, II/I, 192.

[4] References to individual Pensées are abbreviated as "P" followed by the numbering from Blaise Pascal, *Pascal's Pensées* (NY: EP Dutton & Co., 1958/ Salt Lake City, Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, 2006). P. 584. The Pensées are variously ordered, depending upon edition and translation. This Pensée falls as 275 in Honor Levi, *Pensées and Other Writings* (Oxford: OUP, 1995), 81.

is, however, only Isa 45:15a. Pascal does not refer to the continuation of this verse, which reads, *Deus Israhel salvator*. Pascal commonly truncates this verse, for whom the revelation of God *as Deus absconditus* was fundamental to his entire theological vision.[5] It is not, of course, Pascal's purpose to situate the meaning of this locus classicus within its originating context. The second move is a similar truncation made by those quoting Pascal's aphorism. In their act of quoting the above section, or a similar extract, they regularly excise it from its larger whole.[6] The pithiness of the Pensée is often adopted with little attention given to his wider Christian vision for the "Deus absconditus".[7] Whether Isaiah, Pascal, or those quoting both Isaiah and Pascal (like myself), our understanding of "divine hiddenness" is made more dynamic and nuanced within the specific context and conversation in which it figures. The present study engages an ongoing endeavor within contemporary biblical studies to understand the meaning and function of this confession of Isaiah 45:15, locus classicus for much later Jewish and Christian theological reflection, within its originating dialogical and literary-rhetorical environment. Through this engagement, however, this study is attentive to and appreciates the inexorability between such an attempt and contemporary interests.[8]

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[5] The Vulgate form of this verse was taken as a key metaphysical insight for Pascal. See how Pascal, in a passage which ties together the sinful human condition with God's hiddenness, treats divine hiddenness as axiomatic, stating, "this is in fact the name which He gives Himself in the Scriptures, Deus absconditus" (P. 194). God's nature as concomitantly hidden and revealed is didactically related to the human condition in P. 242 (in which, once again, *Vere tu es Deus absconditus* is quoted). See also: P. 517, 585, 556–558. The paradox of "the presence of a God who hides himself" is related to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ as intending to teach humanity "both their corruption and their redemption" (P. 555; see also P. 750 in which he refers to the prophetic preaching of Christ as "a God truly Hidden"). A similarly didactic paradox between hiddenness and revelation is teased out by Pascal in relation to scriptural typologies and ciphers (P. 570, 676–680). For a fascinating investigation of Pascal's "Hidden God," see R. Texier, "Le Dieu caché de Pascal et du Second Isaïe", in *NRT* 111 (1989), 3–23. Texier demonstrates from Pascal's correspondence to Mlle. de Roanne, alongside the Pensées, that Pascal understood Isaiah 45:15 sacramentally. Pascal writes in this letter: "It is this Sacrament that Saint John calls in the Apocalypse a hidden manna; And I believe that Isaiah saw him in this state, when he said in the spirit of prophecy: Truly you are a hidden God… All things cover up some mystery, all things are veils that cover God." As in Aquinas's *Adoro Te Devote,* the Eucharist both conceals and reveals Jesus, the Hidden Deity. Texier devotes considerable time to elucidating the meaning of divine hiddenness for Pascal. The conclusion is that God hides (1) in nature; (2) in the humanity of Jesus Christ; (3) in the Eucharist; and (4) in Scripture. However, Texier also returns to the originating context of Isaiah 45:15 in this essay, concluding that "rigorous exegesis" reveals that "the God of Second Isaiah hides in Israel." The findings I present support this conclusion.

[6] See Paul K. Moser, *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), 1 as illustrative. The quote in its entirety reads, "*That God has willed to hide Himself.*—If there were only one religion, God would indeed be manifest. The same would be the case, if there were no martyrs but in our religion. God being thus hidden, every religion which does not affirm that God is hidden, is not true; and every religion which does not give the reason of it, is not instructive. Our religion does, all this: *Vere tu es Deus absconditus.*" Carroll devotes some attention to Pascal's engagement (albeit jaundiced); Robert P. Carroll, *Wolf in the Sheepfold: The Bible As Problematic for Theology.* (London: SCM, 1997), 59.

[7] Clearly, I am co-trafficking in this excising business. I offer up the previous footnotes as a peace-offering, however paltry, to Pascal's context and conception of the *deus absconditus*.

[8] See Roy F. Melugin, "The Book of Isaiah and the Construction of Meaning" in Broyles and Evans (eds.), *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition* (Brill: Leiden, 1997), 51. Melugin advances a canonical argument for the contemporary use and reappropriation of Isaiah for communities of faith: "…if redactors could construe new meanings for older texts which they were using in new and different contexts which they sought to address, why should we not be allowed to construct interpretations which can speak to us in our own…" This study

1.2 Divine Hiddenness in the Old Testament and Isa 40–48

What many modern philosophers and theologians have taken for granted, that God *is hidden*, ancient Israel expressed with ambivalence, often in bitter grief.[9] Certainly not as theologically axiomatic. And yet, it is stated clearly enough in Isaiah: "Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior." (Isa 45:15) This has the ring of a maxim. So, is it?

As Samuel Balentine has argued in his classic monograph on the subject, the Hebrew Bible's privileged idiom for divine hiddenness (סתר+פנים) is used not only as an expression of God's judgment, but also to lament an individual or communal separation from God without just cause.[10] In other words, divine hiddenness, at least in the Hebrew Bible, is associated with theodicy.[11] Or, in the words of the analytic theologian Michael C. Rea, "the problem of divine hiddenness, like the problem of evil, is fundamentally a problem of violated expectations."[12] Hiddenness, understood thus, is at the heart of Second Isaiah.[13] I agree with Katie Heffelfinger's articulation of the "intractable problem," or situation reflected by the text, of Second Isaiah being the fractured relationship between Yahweh and the intended audience of this poem, Israel

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contributes to a better understanding of the nature and unavoidability of contemporary use and reappropriation of poetic texts.

[9] Hiddenness language is regularly used in lament psalms to describe God's absence or neglect. Psalm 10 opens by registering Yahweh's remoteness thus: "Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" It is the dire reality of God's hiddenness, however, that actually reveals the true nature of the righteous and the wicked. As the lament continues use of hiddenness language is increasingly in reference to the activity (בַּמִּסְתָּר/ים, vss. 8–9) and ruminations (הִסְתִּיר פָּנָיו בַּל־רָאָה in vs. 11) of the wicked. This state of affairs is immediately responded to with cries in the imperative for God to arise (vs. 10) with the affirmation, "But you do see!" (vs. 14).

[10] Samuel Balentine, *The Hidden God: The Hidden Face of God in the Old Testament* (Oxford: OUP, 1983), v.

[11] "Positively" as in the case of a prophet insisting on the rightness of God's judgment in relation to the sin of the covenant community or nations. Or "negatively" as in the case of the covenant community's insistence that God is "hiding his face" without just cause, a charge that would beckon a theodicean response. The nature of the claim in this biblical context is thoroughly dialogical.

[12] Michael C. Rea, *The Hiddenness of God* (Oxford: OUP, 2018), 25ff. Rea's work offers what he calls a "generically Christian" response to a clustering of arguments against God's existence that has taken shape over the last thirty years under the banner "hiddenness of God". Rea's main dialogue partner is the philosopher J. L. Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006), whose argument Rea finds wanting as it rests on contestable theological assumptions. He seeks to resituate Schellenberg's position from "a referendum on the existence of God" to "the viability of certain ways of understanding the nature of God and God's attributes." Rea, *The Hiddenness of God*, 6. Or, put nicely by Moser: "Questions about knowledge of God's reality always invite questions about what kind of God we have in mind." Paul K. Moser, *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 83. Though Rea offers various proofs in his more apologetic response, one might begin more ironically with the adage of the scientific community, "the absence of proof isn't proof of absence."

[13] I use Second Isaiah and Deutero-Isaiah interchangeably to refer to Isaiah 40–55, though employ the latter more consistently. At times I refer to the author/redactor(s) and or text as "DI". The focus of this work is more specifically on Isaiah 40–48, which is generally recognized as a discrete textual unit. However, the analysis of this present work extends to Isaiah 49:13.

in exile.[14] Divine hiddenness, as expressed in DI, is helpfully illuminated by Heffelfinger's analysis, which relates the centrality of voice in DI to the form and function of lyric poetry. Several further observations from Heffelfinger will help introduce literary and contextual factors inherent to DI that prove important for my discussion of divine hiddenness:

(1) DI, like most lyric poetry, "presents itself essentially as an encounter with a voice;" (2) an encounter with the divine is "primarily what the implied audience" has asked for in its bitter complaint, which is embedded in a divine speech (Isa 40:27); (3) the "overwhelming presence" of the divine voice "is a way of explicitly and structurally answering the complaint of divine absence," that Yahweh has "abandoned, forgotten, or neglected them;"[15] and (4) the vacillation of tonalities in the divine voice (namely comfort/salvation and anger/indictment) reflects the relational fracture as it continues to develop intra-prophecy. In my own reading of Isa 45:15, offered in chapter six, I explicate the relationship between form and function by building on some of these insights as they pertain to the hiddenness of *both* speaking subjects: deity and demos.

1.3 Research Question and Approach

I delimit the aperture of this study's vision to Isa 40–49:13, which I read as one discrete poetic discourse. The reasons for the delimitation of this study are related to observations of a formal and rhetorical nature. Though I use the shorthand "Isa 40–48" in this study (for the sake of ease and in keeping with scholarly convention),[16] I read the first section of Isa 40–55 as a poetic stretch or discourse that opens at Isa 40:1 (נחמו נחמו עמי) and closes with Isa 49:13 (כי נחם יהוה עמו). I favor Roy F. Melugin's identification of the juxtaposition of Isa 40:1–8 and 40:9–11 as reflecting "the structure of chapters 40–55 in miniature." Thus, Isa 40:1–8 relates to the first section of Isa 41–48, whereas 40:9–11 corresponds to the second 49:14ff. Melugin traces themes to substantiate these correspondences. Whereas Jacob–Israel is used throughout the address of Isa 40–48 (and not thereafter), the second feminine singular address in Isa 40:9–11

[14] Heffelfinger employs this language to refer both to the relational rift between Yahweh and Israel as well as to the nature of lyric sequencing, in processing the tensions surrounding the 'intractable problem' to come to an acute realization of it. Katie Heffelfinger, *I am Large, I Contain Multitudes*: *Lyric Cohesion and Conflict in Second Isaiah* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 67–69; 83. I think Heffelfinger's own argument (contra Clifford, for instance) downplays the rhetorical intentions or possibilities of Second Isaiah as lyrical poetry.

[15] Heffelfinger, *I am Large*, 72, 91, 100 (respectively).

[16] There is a near scholarly concensus on the division of DI into two sections, Isa 40–48 and 49–55. Central to this understanding is the recognition of a "Jacob-Israel" and "Zion-Jerusalem" sections, highlighting addressees and the importance of voices. Melugin draws attention to Isa 45:14–17 as an outlier within Isa 40–48's consistent use of Jacob-Israel, though he does not relate this to the confession at v. 15 therein.

"anticipates the last half of the collection," from Isa 49:14 onward.[17] I similarly follow Melugin in reading the hymns at 44:24 and 49:13 as responsive and used to mark a turning point, usually between major sections. Fundamental to my own reading is the understanding that Isa 49:4 is the primary addressee's statement of resolution, rescinding the perspective voiced in the originating charge embedded in the divine speech at Isa 40:27.[18]

We have highlighted the connection between the relational fracture presented by this poetry as well as the centrality of voice to this dynamic. We have also traced the relationship of rhetorical markers of address to the form and structure of the units of DI and how this relates importantly to the delimitations of this study. We now move on to ask the deceptively simple question: In what sense is God hidden as confessed in Isa 45:15? Whose voice do we hear? What is the meaning of divine hiddenness as construed at *this point* in the poetic progression of Isa 40–49? To answer this question this thesis explores the dynamic relationship between the statement itself, "Surely you are God who hides himself…" (Isa 45.15a), and its interpretation in recent scholarly literature. The present work is, on the one hand, an exegetical investigation of a perennially problematic pericope, Isa 45:14–17, in its various rungs of literary context. On the other hand, it is a meta-critical reflection and hermeneutical case-study on the moves interpreters make *towards meaning*, to answer the question, "Whose voice are we hearing here?" while rendering a contingent construal of divine hiddenness. On the one hand, ambiguous referential features of the text will be addressed. On the other hand, readerly activity, the hands at work on the referential puzzle, will be analyzed in ways that illuminate DI's bold claims about God and equally bold claims upon all would-be hearers/readers. By giving attention to the imaginative interaction between this poetic text and its readers, I indicate ways in which the meaning of this text must be understood affectively (how it is at work upon the reader) as well as cognitively (how the reader is at work upon it).[19]

1.3.1. Introducing the "one hand": Exegetical Investigation of Isaiah 45:14–17

"These few verses have continued to perplex commentators regarding form and function."[20] This succinct remark by Brevard Childs concerning Isa 45:14–17 well reflects the grappling of exegetes and interpreters to make sense of this unit in its wider literary context. Difficulties

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[17] Roy F. Melugin, *The Formation of Isaiah 40–55* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1976), 85.

[18] Melugin, *Formation*, 123 notes that 49:1–6 is a response to Isa 40:27–31. I interpret the ועתה of 49:5 and what follows as the voice of those who have been persuaded by the prophetic poetry, are thus reconciled with Yahweh, and who are thus themselves able to become part of the reconciliatory effort of "restoring Jacob to him".

[19] A dichotomy, often assumed or overstated, which merits sustained interrogation.

[20] Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*. The Old Testament Library (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 351.

abound within the pericope regarding how to relate these verses one to another and with the surrounding context, and this, in turn, has engendered an impressive interpretive spectrum.[21] One of the central difficulties facing the reader is the question: Whose voice(s) are we hearing in these verses? Is there one consistent speaker throughout or are multiple voices present, with a shift in speaker?[22] Attempting to determine the speaker in a given text is, of course, a basic exigency of interpretation. As G. B. Caird has remarked:

> If we wish to understand the sentence, "There is something wrong with the table," we need to know whether the speaker is a housewife in the dining-room, a mason on a building site, a statistician in a computing laboratory or an official of the Water Board. The words "catholic," "orthodox" and "priest" may be used by two speakers in very much the same situation, and yet with a difference of sense because the speakers stand in different traditions.[23]

Many of the components integral to the construction of meaning and the facilitation of imaginative possibilities are conditioned by knowledge of the speaker and the tradition from which he or she speaks. However, especially in poetic prophecy, the speaker or addressee of a statement can be shrouded in ambiguity, making it a knotty process to discern "whose voice."[24] Often, in such difficult interpretive situations, the limits of time and space, the preunderstanding or already-underway reading strategy of the interpreter (their "vision of the text," to use G.T. Sheppard's well-suited phrasing), and an attending impulse to alleviate dissonance leads to insufficient reflection on the merits, plausibility, and ramifications of other plausible readings.[25] This insufficiency is also related to a lack of attention to aforementioned readerly extra-exegetical considerations. But until such considerations are analyzed, and respective voicings given an empathetic hearing, how can the "fit" of a given interpretation be determined and adjudicated with credibility? It is the aim of this project to analyze the diverse voicings of Isa 45:15 which result from DI's inherent poetic ambiguity, to magnify them, and then to constructively tease out interpretive trajectories and implications.[26]

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[21] Several interpreters argue for a reallocation of various verses in the pericope to other areas. Gitay argues placing 45:16–17 after 46:1-2, leaving "Israel's complaint" to be answered by vs. 18ff. Yehoshua Gitay, *Prophecy and Persuasion: A Study of Isaiah 40-48* (Bonn: Linguistica Biblica, 1981), 193.

[22] Further difficulties and ambiguities will be adumbrated later in this introduction.

[23] G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 50.

[24] This takes place in narrative contexts as well; though rarely, if ever, to the same extent.

[25] Quoted in Roy F. Melugin, "The Book of Isaiah and the Construction of Meaning" in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition* (Brill: Leiden, 1997), 39.

[26] The magnification process here implies the symbiosis of available voices from within the world of the text (nations, exiles, and prophet/glossator) with voices of representative interpreters. In the words of David Clines, "…the more readings, the more stereoscopic our picture…" David J. A. Clines, *Job*. 1-20. Word Biblical Commentary, 17 (Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1989), xlviii. Unlike Clines, however, I evaluate a diversity of existing

1.3.2 The Pernicious Pericope: Isaiah 45:14–17

Before we introduce the various voicings of Isa 45:15, however, we turn our attention to the pericope itself. Even a cursory parallel reading of Isa 45:14–17 in scholarly translations of the Bible reveals a difference of interpretation regarding speaker, evidenced by the placement of quotations (bolded below):

NRSV	NJPS
14a Thus says the Lord: The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Ethiopia, and the Sabeans, tall of stature, shall come over to you and be yours, they shall follow you; they shall come over in chains and bow down to you. 14b They will make supplication to you, saying, **"**God is with you alone, and there is no other; there is no god besides him.**"** 15a Truly, you are a God who hides himself, 15b O God of Israel, the Savior. 16 All of them are put to shame and confounded, the makers of idols go in confusion together. 17 But Israel is saved by the Lord with everlasting salvation; you shall not be put to shame or confounded to all eternity.	14a Thus said the LORD: Egypt's wealth and Nubia's gains and Sabaites, long of limb, shall pass over to you and be yours, pass over and follow you, in fetters, bow low to you,14b And reverently address you: **"**Only among you is God, There is no other god at all! 15a You are indeed a God who concealed Himself, 15b O God of Israel, who bring victory! 16 Those who fabricate idols, all are shamed and disgraced; To a man, they slink away in disgrace. 17 But Israel has won through the LORD triumph everlasting. You shall not be shamed or disgraced in all the ages to come!**"**

The reader can observe that in the NJPS *Tanakh* (right), the quote extends from vs. 14b through vs. 17. This, then, attributes vs. 15 to the nations. However, in the NRSV (left), the quote closes just before vs. 15. This communicates either a move to a new speaker or a resumption of the prophetic voice. The speaker in vs. 15 is no longer posited as the three subject nations. Yet let us raise an even more fundamental question: What factors have determined the use of quotation marks at vs. 14b in either translation in the first place? Pursuing this very

readings from one broad reading tradition before offering my own reading from that same tradition. By so doing I discover a text-readerly dimension that I believe is more inherent to lyric poetry.

question in the marginal notes of the Jewish Study Bible, Benjamin Sommer comments on vs. 14: "Alternatively (and contrary to the quotation marks in NJPS), these words may be spoken by God to Cyrus, rather than by the African nations."[27] Sommer does not mention, however, that this requires reading the pointing of the MT's (among *you*) not as it stands בָּךְ (2fs) but as בְּךָ (2ms).[28] In order to better appreciate these and other ambiguous features of the Hebrew, the MT follows:

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה[14]

יְגִיעַ מִצְרַיִם וְסֹחַר־כּוּשׁ וּסְבָאִים אַנְשֵׁי מִדָּה

עָלַיִךְ יַעֲבֹרוּ וְלָךְ יִהְיוּ אַחֲרַיִךְ יֵלֵכוּ בַּזִּקִים יַעֲבֹרוּ

וְאֵלַיִךְ יִשְׁתַּחֲווּ אֵלַיִךְ יִתְפַּלָּלוּ אַךְ בָּךְ אֵל וְאֵין עוֹד אֶפֶס אֱלֹהִים׃

אָכֵן אַתָּה אֵל מִסְתַּתֵּר אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹשִׁיעַ׃[15]

בּוֹשׁוּ וְגַם־נִכְלְמוּ כֻּלָּם יַחְדָּו הָלְכוּ בַכְּלִמָּה חָרָשֵׁי צִירִים׃[16]

יִשְׂרָאֵל נוֹשַׁע בַּיהוָה תְּשׁוּעַת עוֹלָמִים לֹא־תֵבֹשׁוּ וְלֹא־תִכָּלְמוּ עַד־עוֹלְמֵי עַד׃[17]

A range of emendations which seek to clarify the relationship between the preceding verses, particularly the Cyrus Oracle of 45:1–7, and vss. 14–15 have been suggested. For instance, B. Duhm, following August Klostermann, suggests reading the אַתָּה (you, nom. masc. pronoun) in v. 15 as אִתָּךְ (with you, 2fs) – or even אִתְּךָ (with you, 2ms), depending upon whether one sees the antecedent as Jerusalem or the exiled community, on the one hand, or Cyrus, on the other.[29] For the purposes of the present discussion, however, it will suffice to note that the MT without such emendation allows for a transition of speaker and even addressee between vss. 14 and 15. A possible transition of speaker depends, in part, on how one takes the אָכֵן fronting vs. 15. Despite the load-bearing interpretive weight of this textual feature, commensurate attention is rarely given to the particle. For this reason I include an excursus discussing the features of this particle at the end of this chapter in order to anticipate and better facilitate the evaluative remarks in later chapters.

Given the theological gravitational pull of v. 15 in the history of interpretation it is rather common for the relationship between vv. 14–15 and vv. 16–17 to receive less consideration. Two further difficulties appear to influence interpreters' avoidant tendencies here: first, there is

[27] Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler. *Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 876.

[28] In this reading, the verse's five preceding prepositions with 2fs pronominal suffixes would also need to be read as 2ms. Sommer's alternative voicing, with its inherent אל תקרא ("do not read thus") vis-à-vis the *nikkud* helps introduce an unavoidable readerly involvement that will be explored throughout this work.

[29] This emendation is also suggested in the critical apparatus of the BHS.

the trouble in deciding whether to hear the speaker at v. 15 continuing on into vv. 16–17, or whether to see another transition, often a resumption to the prophetic voice. Alongside this there is a struggle to find thematic coherence between the respective sections of this pericope. In this Beuken (chp. 5) provides fruitful reflection.[30]

The last exegetical feature that will receive sustained attention in this study is how interpreters parse the relationship between Isa 45:19 and Isa 45:15. Isaiah 45:19 states:

NRSV	MT
I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, "Seek me in chaos." I the Lord speak the truth, I declare what is right.	לֹא בַסֵּתֶר דִּבַּרְתִּי בִּמְקוֹם אֶרֶץ חֹשֶׁךְ לֹא אָמַרְתִּי לְזֶרַע יַעֲקֹב תֹּהוּ בַקְּשׁוּנִי אֲנִי יְהוָה דֹּבֵר צֶדֶק מַגִּיד מֵישָׁרִים:

Due to the same root (סתר) being used at v. 15 and v. 19 interpreters must decide how to understand this relationship: is 45:19 responding back to v. 15 in some form of rebuttal? Or, is a different point being made altogether at v. 19? How one understands the use of בַסֵּתֶר as well as תֹּהוּ here will have bearing on how one understands a connection to the previous pericope. To what degree are these read as references to idols? (cf. the use of תֹּהוּ at Isa 44:9 and the use of בַסֵּתֶר in Deut 27:15).

1.3.3 Introducing the "other hand": Hermeneutical Case Study

In chapters three to five of this thesis I juxtapose two interpreters who offer a voicing of v. 15 by the same (or similar) speaker. In each case the pair are theologically interested (one might even say invested) interpreters for whom Isaiah is, in some meaningful sense, Christian scripture. The interpreters, in each pairing, come from ostensibly similar backgrounds.[31] The

[30] As does J.L. Koole, *Isaiah III* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1997), 469–71.

[31] Goldingay and Seitz (chapter three); Brueggemann and Balentine (chapter four); Westermann and Beuken (chapter five). Goldingay and Seitz are both ordained in the Anglican communion. Brueggemann and Balentine are Christian interpreters, both with rhetorical-critical and constructive-theological interests; both are ordained and both have had long teaching careers at seminaries in the south of the United States. Beuken and Westermann are continental scholars (though Beuken is Dutch-Catholic and Westermann is German-Lutheran). In all cases we would be remiss to generalize interpretive proclivities based on one's faith tradition or country of origin. To the reader who justifiably registers the limitations in surveying exclusively white, male, Christian interpreters of the late twentieth century: That the limitations of time, resources, and "data," constrained my own hearing of voices was regularly and painfully obvious to me. At one point I seriously considered attempting a more social-scientific approach in gathering reader-response data. As will be clear to any insightful reader, the eventual shape of the work owes as much to pragmatism as methodological savvy. Still, the upshot of surveying those with ostensibly similar backgrounds and literary-theological interests, highlights the degree of interpretive diversity that could exceed an expectation for something closer to univocity.

logic of the selection criteria, both overall and in each chapter, is analogous to the desire in the sciences to set every aspect up in an experimental environment as similarly as possible for each participating subject.[32] Indeed, we will find that between the chapters and within each respective chapter, similarities do not equate to univocity of meaning regarding divine hiddenness as confessed in Isa 45:15. The text's ambiguous referential features, the openness of the lyric poetry which invites readerly participation and multiplicity of meanings, is such that various construals of divine hiddenness can be found even from the *same* interpreter.[33] We will briefly consider this phenomenon now in the works of Brevard Childs and Arnold B. Ehrlich.[34]

In a section presenting the "Structure, Form and Content" of Isa 45:14–17, Childs sees a change of speaker from v. 14 (nations) to v. 15 where he notes, "the voice of the exiles is then heard…as a response to the events surrounding Cyrus."[35] However, in his exposition of the passage several pages later, he takes the view that v. 15 is "the prophet's reflection on this strange outcome" in which "the prophet marvels that the hidden ways of God made known in history could not be foreseen, but remain entirely the exercise of God's completely free will."[36] To my mind, the only way to reconcile these two statements, so close together, is to assume that Childs regards the prophet to be speaking as an exile on behalf of the exiles.

We also find vacillations on the meaning of this verse in the writings of Arnold B. Ehrlich (though not in relation to his identification of the speaker). Frequently both illuminating and overlooked as an exegete, Ehrlich is no less so in his multiple engagements with this passage. In what seems to be his first engagement, he is already outlining a fascinating reversal of opinion regarding his understanding of the meaning of "hiddenness":

> Formerly I stated that the meaning of אל מסתתר was "a seeing god, who cannot be seen." However, I presently change my view, because if this were so, these gentiles would be speaking like one of the theologians of our present day, and because מושיע is juxtaposed to מסתתר. Now it appears to me that

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[32] It is my genuine hope that readers from other interpretive traditions/communities will find this work enriching, despite the selection and juxtaposition of Christian interpreters with literary-rhetorical and theological interests as something of a "control group". The bookending of this analysis with rather different Jewish scholars (1.3.3 and 6.2), alongisde my own reading (6.3 and conclusion), itself indebted as much to literary and poetic theory as to biblical scholarship proper, should signal that this project in Isaiah *as* Christian Scripture attempts to be *as* dialogical as the poetic prophecy itself.

[33] Texts regularly mean differently to the same individual when read over time through different experiences and circumstances. I have noted a significant shift, for instance, in the way I read texts, individuals, and institutions since becoming a father to my three children. For a wry reflection on the effects of time and experience on one's appreciation and understanding of a text, see Mark Alan Powell, *Chasing the Eastern Star: Adventures in Biblical Reader-Response Criticism* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 13.

[34] We will observe comparable dynamics in John Goldingay and even Samuel Balentine.

[35] Childs, *Isaiah*, 351–52.

[36] Childs, *Isaiah*, 355.

> אל מסתתר is god who has hidden his face from his people. The gentiles state this and then conclude that the god of Israel is savior since they knew that Yahweh had hidden his face from Israel thus far, but now they have seen His salvation which saved them. And according to these things this passage is brought into translation as: you are a God, who until now has withdrawn from them; but now displayed as the helping God of Israel.[37]

Here is a tacit admission from Ehrlich that his previous position made the gentiles sound like "one of the theologians of our present day." Though Ehrlich seems to assume some distance between himself and such contemporary theologians, the erstwhile gloss was *his own*. He then relates his move to a rendering of divine hiddenness which, though unstated, is probably thought to be more authentic to the originating context. Ehrlich posits the participles מושיע and מסתתר contrastively, taking them as a temporal-experiential shift in the God-Israel relationship.[38] Ehrlich interprets this verse as the nations observing and commenting on Israel's experience of divine displeasure (absence) in the immediate past up till the present moment ("you are a God who until now has withdrawn *from them*"). But now it seems they palpably perceive and declare that Israel's deity is coming to His nation's aid.

It will suffice for our introductory purposes here to state that this tensive or contrastive relationship rendered disjunctively in Ehrlich (thus far / but now; until now / but now) is a product of poetic parataxis and parallelism. As David Clines observes:

> Because the relationship of the two lines within the couplet is not predetermined, the reader is more fully engaged in the process of interpretation, a more active participant in the construction of meaning, than when a text presents itself in more straightforward linear fashion.[39]

Inherent within the dyadic construction of the Hebrew poetic couplet is a corollary invitation to the reader to take up the question: What is the nature of *this* juxtapositional

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[37] Arnold B. Ehrlich, מקרא כפשוטו :והוא מקרא מפורש ושום שכל / *Mikrâ ki-Pheschutô: Die Schrift nach ihrem Wortlaut. Scholien und kritische Bemerkungen zu den heiligen Schriften der Hebräer*, Dritter Theil. Die Propheten. (Berlin: M. Poppelauer's Buchhandlung, 1901), 107. Translation from modern Hebrew and German is my own. I was unable to find reference to Ehrlich's "formerly stated" position.

[38] Here he assumes his reader will understand what Yahweh hiding "his face from Israel" means. It is also somewhat surprising that Ehrlich does not refer to the fronting אָכֵן of v. 15 as contributing to his understanding of the verse's movement from a former understanding to a new realization.

[39] David A. Clines, "The Parallelism of Greater Precision: Notes from Isaiah 40 for a theory of Hebrew Poetry" (Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry, 1987), 77–100. Reprinted in David A. Clines, *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967–1998*, Vo. 1. JSOTS: 292 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 336.

relationship?[40] The appearance of paratactic parallelism is a beckoning to the would-be wiser: "riddle me this…" The very form, only seemingly simple and straightforward, stands as an open question. The reader cannot sit idly by; one is immediately and personally involved.

We see the above described "question" is not closed, but continues to intrigue Ehrlich. Text works on the reader as the reader works on the text. The result is a rather different understanding of the verse from his earlier work in Hebrew, though he does not signal further development in his own thinking here:

> An אתה ist nichts zu bessern, denn die Anrede ist an JHVH. Dagegen muss man מסתתר in מַסְתִּיר = schützend ändern. Nur dieses past als Parallele zu מושיע.[41]

Ehrlich first argues that an emendation from *attah* to *ittah* improves nothing since the address is to Yahweh. Here he has moved away from his earlier confidence in the contrastive juxtaposition between מסתתר and מושיע. Though he previously argued for the logic of God's hiding his face (הסתיר פנים), here Ehrlich argues that only an emendation from מסתתר to מַסְתִּיר – which he takes as "protect" – would be fitting in parallel to מושיע. Though Ehrlich's suggestion might be discounted on text-critical grounds,[42] it opens up a vista onto something, even beyond the slippery referential features of the text, about the text-reader relationship in the riddling capacity of poetic parataxis.

At this point one might naturally inquire as to how many different voicings have been identified for v. 15 in the history of interpretation? Table 1 below lists possible speakers and addressees (*numbers* relate to speakers in left column; *letters* relate to addressees in center column). These are then brought together to reflect the moves of representative interpreters (in column at right). This presentation is intended to be suggestive and heuristic (not exhaustive); a tool to understand the range of options for "voicing" v. 15. Whereas Table 1 provides a bird's eye view of the history of interpretation, Table 2 represents my own distillation of these interpretive options into three main categories of voicing. These then serve to constitute the organization of the body of this study, before I present my own reading (chapter 6). As can be seen from the right hand column of Table 1 (Interpretive Options with Representative Interpreters) the

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[40] For a discussion of the movement from selection to combination of "word pairs" or "dyading", see D. Clines, "Parallelism," 332–334.

[41] Arnold B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur Hebräischen Bibel: Textkritisches, Sprachliches und Sachliches.* Vierter Band: Jesaia, Jeremia. (Leipzig, 1912), 166.

[42] Few follow Ehrlich in this interpretive move. Shalom Paul tips his hat to Ehrlich. Kissane follows him, but avoids his opinion on the other emendation. He translates v. 15, "Truly, with thee is a protecting God, the God of Israel is a savior." Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah* , 83ff.

Nations (1) and the Prophet (3) to Yahweh (A) are the most common voicing of v. 15. Though almost unheard of over a century ago, the voicing of v. 15 as exilic Israel (2) addressing Yahweh has gained serious traction.

Table 1.

Speaker (v. 15)	**Addressee (v. 15)**	**Interpretive Options with Representative Interpreters**
1) Nations in vs. 14 (Egypt, Ethiopia, Sabeans)	A) Yahweh	**1.A**: Ibn Ezra; J. L. Koole, Goldingay, Seitz; Shalom Paul, Ehrlich **1.B**: Baltzer **1.C**: Duhm **1.D**: Jerome, Cyril of Alexandria
2) Exilic Israel	B) Cyrus (emended)	**2.A** Balentine, Brueggemann, Dijkstra, Childs (partially?)
3) Prophet	C) Jerusalem or Zion/ Exiles (emended)	**3.A**: Song of Songs Rabbah; Beuken, Luther, Pilkington; Childs **3.D**. Eusebius, Tertullian, Hippolytus
4) Gloss or Interpolation	D) Pre-incarnate Christ (see pre-modern commentaries)	**4.A**: Westermann, Blenkinsopp
5) Cyrus		**5.A.** Watts

Table 2.

Chapter	**Speaker (vs. 15):**	**Representative Interpreters**
Chapter 3	Nations / Cyrus	John Goldingay; Christopher Seitz (Nations)/ James Watts (Cyrus)
Chapter 4	Exilic Israel	Walter Brueggemann; Samuel Balentine
Chapter 5	Glossator / Prophet	Claus Westermann (Gloss) / Wim Beuken (Prophet)
Chapter 6	Hidden Speaker	The proposal of this study

Thus, the streamlining of interpretive diversity into representative readings looks like the following: In Chapter 3 I have joined the majority reading of the **Nations** to Yahweh (speaker 1, Table 1) with the seemingly outlier reading of **Cyrus** to Yahweh (speaker 5, Table 1). The logic of bringing these two speakers into the same categorical voicing is further explained in chapter 3. In chapter 4 I give significant attention to the "minority report" of **Exilic Israel** to Yahweh (speaker 2). Chapter 5 joins the Prophet's apostrophe to Yahweh (3) with a reading that sees v. 15 as the **Glossator** (speaker 4). In chapter six I concurrently build on and fruitfully subvert aspects of this very process of mastering the referential puzzle, to locate the speaker. Indeed, I argue that the inability to locate the "hidden speaker" is a feature of the poetry's means of transforming the hearer/reader into a speaking subject. As Table 2's distilled and categorized interpretive options are the result of textual ambiguity,[43] the present work is interested in moves *interpreters* make to *identify* (with) the speaker en-route to a contingent construal of divine hiddenness. One implication of this is that commentaries and articles, "secondary literature," become "primary" as the readerly co-production of meaning is analyzed.

The approach of this thesis to its subject is thus literary-critical. It is important to state, however, that this approach was not predetermined from the outset. Rather, as I grappled with Isa 40–48 over the course of several years, the approach presented itself as most fitting to the text and the monumental current of its interpretive "afterlife."[44] In fact, it may be instructive to draw up a crude summary of my research findings in a way similar to the hard sciences: The genesis of this project lay in the simple observation that there are a proliferation of proposals among interpreters for the identity of the speaker of the famous "hidden God" passage in Isa 45:15. The realization of interpretive polyvalence is, of course, only the ground floor in understanding what and how a text means.[45] Yet I assumed at the outset, perhaps naively, that by

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[43] Or, indeterminacy, if we follow Cosgrove's pragmatic definition of indeterminacy as "the recurring interpretive situation in which I perceive there to be two or more reasonable but competing interpretations, that is, two or more mutually exclusive interpretations that are plausible/defensible on the basis of a rigorous application of the same methods or what I judge to be appropriate competing methods." Charles H. Cosgrove, *The Meanings We Choose: Hermeneutical Ethics, Indeterminacy and the Conflict of Interpretations*, JSOTS, 411 (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 5.

[44] It is from the text itself that "we infer its poetics," as Menahem Perry and Meir Sternberg argue in their close reading of the David and Bathsheba story. Translation from the Hebrew in Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 13. The nature of the subject-matter determines "how knowledge of it is to be developed and tested, for method and subject-matter are not to be separated." Thomas F. Torrance, "Science, Theology and Unity," *Theology Today 21* (1964): 150. My use of the term "afterlife" here is indebted to S. Chapman's description of a written text freed from its initial context and open to new "associations in additional contexts" Stephen Chapman, "Theological Interpretation as a Traditional Craft" in Andrew T. Abernathy (ed.), *Interpreting the Old Testament Theologically: Essays in Honor of Willem A. Vangemeren*, 115.

[45] Powell, *Chasing the Eastern Star*, 11.

giving each "voice" or "voicing" sustained exegetical attention, an adjudication between the options could take place. However, I began to infer from prolonged analysis of this text an inherent resistance to such interpretive closure. This was itself revealing. This textual openness led to the concomitant observation of the interpreter's inevitable self-involvement. As Jim Adams describes:

> The manifold suggestions and debates over the various unidentifiable entities occurring throughout chs. 40–55 strongly suggest that they are intentionally elusive and ambiguous. Accepting and embracing the tensions, oddities, and difficulties raised by the final form of the text and reading it as it presently stands, an openness appears that naturally draws in the addressees/readers and invites them to identify with and become self-involved with it.[46]

Whereas Adams's work is a thoroughgoing application of speech-act theory which highlights the performative nature of Isa 40–55 and focuses specifically on the self-involving nature of the servant passages, this study illustrates the self-involving text-reader dynamics by probing recent scholarly engagement on Isa 40–48, most specifically Isa 45:14–17. I agree with Adams's assertion that the "central illocution of Isaiah 40–55…is…the Cyrus event," whose perlocutionary intention is "the audience's confession of Yahweh alone."[47] In Isa 45:15 we find a seeming candidate for such a confession breaking out from within a discourse otherwise crowded by divine and prophetic utterance.

In earlier sections of Isa 40–48 the identity of the speaker and addressee are at times less ambiguous. The character of textual ambiguity at Isa 45:15 which ostensibly hides the speaker, is in another sense revealing. That is, the nature of "God's hiddenness" is linked inextricably to the reality of the speaker *as hidden*. I argue that the upshot of the ambiguity, which is evidenced by a notable slippage (even slipperiness) of referential features after the unveiling of Cyrus in 45:1–7, is performative in nature, demanding the involvement of the hearer/reader while simultaneously destabilizing and re-fabricating aspects of personal and communal identity. This study is,

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[46] Jim W. Adams, *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40–55* (LHBOTS; New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 16–17. The relationship between textual "openness" as an outworking of ambiguity and readerly participation is articulated along somewhat different lines in Wolfgang Iser's theory of Leerstellen, or "empty places," which he describes as a readerly filling of gaps. In this, as in later text-world theory, the reader is responsible for rendering a text's coherence by furnishing the links and associations between textual units. A text's omissions create dynamism. Put more succinctly: "…the literary text needs the reader's imagination, which gives shape to the interaction of correlatives foreshadowed in the structure by the sequence of the sentences." (282) See Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: a Phenomenological Approach", *New Literary History*, Vol. 3, No. 2, On Interpretation: I (Winter, 1972), 279–299.

[47] Adams, *The Performative Nature*, 16.

therefore, interested in the interpretive acts in which the plausible historical speakers are located, the process by which this confession is identified by interpreters.

What this means in practical terms is that the assigning of a voice by the interpreter becomes something of a cipher for their own personal and performative involvement. Thus, Christopher Seitz is Christianly constrained to read the confession of 45:15 as the gentile nations. In many ways, by coordinating his interpretation with his other writings, we will come to understand that this voicing is as much Seitz's as it is an echo from the ancient Near East (chapter three). As Mark Powell has argued, "variant interpretations are obtained through empathy choice" as much as cool-headed and careful exegesis.[48] The slippage that we have seen in Ehrlich, we will see play out differently in the work of Samuel Balentine (chapter four). It is not merely that they, as all other interpreters, have trouble identifying who the speaker is. Rather, as will be seen in Balentine's oeuvre, the performative context changes, and so with it, the way the verse is inflected. This readerly-responsive reality is highlighted further in Claus Westermann's voicing of v. 15 as an "Amen Gloss" (chapter five).

Thus far I have briefly laid out the theme of divine hiddenness in theological discourse, biblical studies, as well as in Isa 40–48. I have introduced this "two-handed" project, ultimately arguing for the inevitability of self-involvement in the readerly construction of meaning. As I will argue more fully in chapter six, this reality is also related to the form of this confession as well as the poetry and imaginative landscape of Isa 40–48.

1.4 Outline of Chapters

In chapter two I suggest a putative reconstruction for *a* world behind the text. As Roy Melugin has argued cogently regarding scholarly conceptualizations of unity for the book of Isaiah, "all reconstructions of the Isaianic traditions should be understood as pictures of the past painted by scholars…the construction of the historian."[49] Melugin's argument for scholarly visions or constructions of Isaiah's unity applies as much to my own efforts to understand both from within and without Isa 40–48 the driving concerns of this literature. I will argue in chapter two that the reader/hearer is indeed "teased to find coherence," related to the idol-fashioner passages (so often bracketed out) and a subtle juxtaposition of idol fashioners with Yahweh as Israel's fashioner.[50] I will examine this juxtaposition, internal to DI, against the Mesopotamian

[48] Mark Alan Powell, *Chasing the Eastern Star*, 21.

[49] Melugin, "The Book of Isaiah and the Construction of Meaning", 41.

[50] My argument pertains more to Isa 40–49 than it does 49–55.

cultic ritual for the renovation of a divine statue, in the *mīs-pî* / *pīt-pî* texts. This chapter will also provide a significant framework, or thick description, for my own reading in chapter six.

In chapters three–five I present an analysis and evaluation of the exegesis of representative interpreters for the three most common voicings of Isa 45:15. In each section, in addition to philological and historical considerations, I consider the interpreters' overall "vision" of Isaiah and DI specifically: which intertexts are privileged and why; what epi-exegetical factors might be at play.

Chapter three analyzes the confession as voiced by the three African nations mentioned in Isa 45:14. This chapter engages the work of John Goldingay and Christopher Seitz as representative interpreter for hearing v. 15 as the "voice of the nations." I then turn to extend this interpretive trajectory by exploring the question, "Is Cyrus also among the prophets?" Hearing Cyrus as speaker of this verse is a somewhat neglected option in the history of interpretation. I suggest several possibilities for this disinclination, despite this reading making good sense in its literary and historical context. In this section I suggest how entertaining the possibility of Cyrus as speaker invites various intertexts. Finally, I question how this reading might be more organic to a Jewish canonical construal, as Cyrus literally has the last word therein (2 Chronicles 36:23).

After discussing Walter Brueggemann's voicing of v. 15 in relation to contemporary concerns, chapter four turns to the work of Samuel Balentine as representative interpreter for hearing the confession as "voice of exilic Israel." This chapter will draw on the detailed discussion of the restrictive adverb אָכֵן at the end of this introduction, in order to demonstrate the possibility of a move to a different speaker. After evaluating Balentine's work, I offer an intertextual reading of this verse in light of the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32 in its canonical context) that might inform Israel as speaker of v. 15 in new ways.

Chapter five presents the voice of the prophet (i.e., a resumption from the quoted voice of the nations to the voice of the prophet), an interpretation strongly supported throughout the history of interpretation.[51] This chapter also discusses the interpretation of Claus Westermann, who reads this verse as an "Amen gloss" interpolated by a later scribe. I suggest that a tension between disciplinary exegetical constraints acting upon Westermann alongside his desire to read this verse christologically contribute to his interpreting this verse as "gloss". This chapter then

[51] Christine Pilkington asserts, for instance, that, "The statement can only make sense if it is taken by the prophet speaking representatively of exilic Israel." Christine Pilkington, "The Hidden God in Isaiah 45:15," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 48 (1995), 295–96. Though this may be one of the better readings for multiple contexts, my findings push back both in the dizzying array of speakers posited by interpreters (what sense is "made") and also in interrogating the process of by which the lyric poetry of Isaiah pressurizes the reader towards self-involvement and invocation.

engages the detailed exegetical work of Wim Beuken as representative interpreter for hearing this verse as the "voice of the prophet." Beuken's approach is important in either directly addressing or alluding to dramatic progression/reading seriatim and self-involvement of the reader.

In chapter six I juxtapose the work of post-Holocaust Jewish theologian Eliezer Berkovits with the reading of Wim Beuken from chapter five. By attending to Berkovits' theologically-inclined philosophy of Jewish history and his articulation of the meaning of Israel in relation to Yahweh (and His hiddenness), the way is prepared for my own constructive contribution to reading Isaiah 45:15. This builds on the interpretive work of Balentine and the approach of Beuken while learning from the reading strategies of Katie Heffelfinger and Jim Adams. My reading seeks to tie the content of the confession (a hidden God) to the ambiguous form of the text as given (hidden speaker) and both of these to a reading strategy that seeks to connect the confession to the wider discourse's rhetorical effects. The sequential reading experience locates the reader within a relational dislocation in specific ways through the proliferation of voices. This reading sees coherence between vv. 14–15 and v. 16–17 as well as to v. 19 without pressing for a perspicuity which does damage to what I argue are the text's intentions: positioning the reader within a poetic progression from relational fracture to reconciliation. As such we should not seek relief from the ambiguity at this juncture (45:15). Rather we should allow it to produce what is organic: the possibility for continued misunderstanding between the divine speaking voice and implied addressee/reader: of a talking past one another.

Ultimately, the aim of this study is not to take God's hiddenness off the table (the theological axiom does not seem likely to budge). Rather, this study reveals the participatory and affective dimensions of this poetry, which furnishes imaginative resources commensurate to the texts' imaginative demands. Only in this way can the confession at v. 15 be experienced by the reader with the specificity of the textual world's relational dislocation.

Isa 40–49:13 invites the *reader* to become the intended audience: to take ownership of the originating lament embedded in divine speech at Isa 40:27, to experience agency within this relational dislocation between deity and demos, by becoming a speaking subject, a witness. In this movement from relational alienation to reconciliation the twin topoi of blindness/sight and hiddenness relate to both the claims of the implied audience and the divine speaker, which are focalized into a progression of speech acts. In this progression the ironic paves the way to the irenic. This reading underscores the image-fabricator/image relationship as imperative to understanding the divine voice's fabricating, re-fashioning or re-creating the hearer to become Israel, to display His splendor, to see itself aright in relation to Yahweh: the locus of divine

activity through immanent deliverance, and thus, the functional equivalent of the image/ *ṣalmu* of Babylon. This is one overarching implication of the poetic progression. It is this to which the audience has been blind. It is this that it finally sees at 49:3-4 and becomes Israel.

Excursus 1: Word Study on אָכֵן

How interpreters understand the paratactic relationship, the "thought rhyme," between the freighted participles in Isa 45:15 is only one of several interlocking textual ambiguities in this passage. This excursus reviews a further ambiguous feature of the text which we will encounter throughout this study. Here we will look at the salient features of the particle אָכֵן as they bear upon an interpretation of Isaiah 45:15.[52]

Waltke and O'Connor discuss אָכֵן alongside אַךְ as one of several restrictive adverbs which have an intermediate sense, "between negative and emphatic adverbs: they are often essentially negators of continuity between clauses, and they highlight the special status of the clause they occur in."[53] This characteristic helps us understand some of the difficulty in translating the אָכֵן in Isa 45:15: should the translator render with an emphatic sense, "Surely," "Truly," "Indeed;" or with an adversative sense: "Nevertheless," "But, in actual fact," or something similar? Israel Eitan summarizes the sense as "an exclamation to emphasize the unexpected."[54] Rashbam makes a similar observation when commenting on the אָכֵן at Genesis 28:16: "Thus every אָכֵן in the scriptures has the meaning אַךְ כן – indeed it is thus, and not as I had expected."[55] Is this a bit of exegetical fancy or easy overstatement to establish a principle for this puzzling particle? This analysis seeks to know whether we might agree with the Rashbam and Eitan?

First, the contexts in which we find אָכֵן occurring are as follows:

1) Occurrences in narrative [4/18]

2) Occurrences in poetic-prophetic discourse [14/18]

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[52] אָכֵן is regularly discussed as an adverb. As in many languages Hebrew words classed as adverbs often function in multiple ways, demonstrating fluidity between part-of-speech boundaries. As Waltke and O'Connor note, because of the inherent difficulties of Hebrew adverbs, many grammars entirely pass them up. I could find no mention of אָכֵן in Arnold and Choi's *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, either in the section on adverbs or in the discussion of restrictive clauses. Similarly, there is nothing in R.J. Williams' *Hebrew Syntax*. The only references to אָכֵן in Joüon-Muraoka's *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* is the use in Gen 28:16, found in their treatment of asseverate clauses (580).

[53] Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O'Conner, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2018), 668. The authors also refer to the אָכֵן as one of a number of "so-called demonstrative adverbs," which are grouped into morphological classes. אָכֵן is in a group with אך, כה, and כן. They refer to demonstratives, generally, as "deictic words," which "point out or call attention to someone or something." 306.

[54] Ludwig Köhler, Walter Baumgartner, Johann Jakob Stamm, et al (eds.), *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2001), 477. cf. Israel Eitan, "Hebrew and Semitic Particles Comparative Studies in Semitic Philology", *AJSL* 44:3, 197. Note that in the *DCH* it is taken as emphatic, not adversative. David J.A. Clines (ed.) *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, Vol. 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 248.

[55] Michael Carasik, *The Commentators' Bible: The Rubin JPS Miqra'ot Gedolot: Genesis* (Philadelphia: JPS, 2018), 254–55.

2a. Uses in the idiom: אָמַרְתִּי (I had reckoned X) … אָכֵן (but in fact Y) [7/14]

2b. Other uses in poetry-prophecy [7/14]

Occurrences in Narrative

Three of the four narrative occurrences of אָכֵן can be treated together (Gen 28:16; Ex 2:14; 1 Sam 15:32) with the fourth as something of an outlier (1 Kings 11:2). In each of the first three אָכֵן is found fronting a direct speech clause in a context of dialogue. It wouldn't be completely correct to describe the אָכֵן as signaling the move to a new speaker since the narration does this by supplying "And X said…" Yet, in each of these narrative examples we find אָכֵן fronting statements *after a transition to a new speaker*. In Genesis 28:16 there is a shift from Yahweh's dream-speech to Jacob's speech. In Exodus 2:14 there is a shift from the speech of the Hebrew-in-the-wrong to that of Moses. In 1 Sam 15:32 there is a shift from the speech of Samuel to that of King Agag.

In the first two narrative examples, and probably also in the third, the speech is uttered in a state of shock, fear, or awe. We find a response which is directly related to newly acquired information which upsets a previously held supposition. For instance in Gen 28:16, as in the Rashbam's discussion, Jacob responds in wide-eyed wonder to the presence of Yahweh over against his previous knowledge ("and I did not know it"). Similarly, in Ex 2:14 Moses' response uttered in fear owes to the sudden new (to him) knowledge that his murderous act is not a secret (as he had previously thought). 1 Sam 15:32 is a more difficult text and, for that reason, a precise understanding of אָכֵן therein can only be conjectural.[56] The use of אָכֵן in 1 Kings 11:2 is even more an outlier both positionally in the clause as well as in trying to ascertain its function.[57] Its

[56] We observe in 1 Sam 15:7–9 that, in contrast to the rest of the people, Agag was seized alive and that Saul and the people took pity upon him or spared him (וַיַּחְמֹל שָׁאוּל וְהָעָם עַל־אֲגָג). If we work from this context and the English of 15:32 ("surely, this is the bitterness of death!") it is possible to understand King Agag's words uttered in shocked recognition in contrast to what he had previously held to be true (that his life was being spared). However, from the Hebrew of 1 Sam 15:32 there are two problems: First, translators are divided on how to render the hapax מַעֲדַנּוֹת (fettered, trembling/haltingly, or cheerfully; cf. *HALOT*). Secondly, the content of Agag's words is somewhat smoothed over in English translations (perhaps following the LXX). In the MT some account must be given for the perfect 3ms verb in אָכֵן סָר מַר־הַמָּוֶת. Perhaps, as Alter construes, Agag is musing to himself, surprised to see Israel's holy man before him and reckoning, "Ah, death's bitterness is turned away!" Robert Alter, *Ancient Israel: The Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings: A Translation with Commentary*, 327.
It is possible to envision Agag summoned, not knowing the reason why, fearing his death, then seeing the prophet and making this statement as a correction of his original assumption (that he would perish). Though there is ambiguity and the two possibilities above stand in some tension, the function of the אָכֵן in each can be understood along Waltke and O'Connor's lines of "a sudden recognition in contrast to what was theretofore assumed."

[57] The textual apparatus of BHS notes that the LXX translates here as μὴ = פֶּן. Though this could be offered as support to strengthen this use as an outlier, the rendering of אָכֵן in the LXX is bewilderingly diverse [εἰ in Ex 2:14,

use seems generally emphatic or asseverative, however, and falls within material that may be viewed as the reported speech of the LORD (perhaps from the Torah; cf. Deut 7:1–3; 17:17).

Occurrences in poetic-prophetic discourse

2.a) Of the eighteen occurrences of אָכֵן fourteen are found in poetic-prophetic contexts. Additionally, half of the occurrences for אָכֵן within poetic discourse are structured in the following idiom: אָמַרְתִּי… (*I had reckoned X…*) / אָכֵן… (*but, in fact Y…*). This expression lays out an original premise, perspective, or assumption which is either corrected or shockingly overturned by new knowledge or the unexpected. Examples of this somewhat formulaic use are in Psalm 82:6, Isa 49:4, and Zeph 3:7.[58] Moberly describes this use as correcting a faulty supposition, "by a better and more accurate realization."[59] Naturally, the position of אָכֵן in these examples is medial, marking the transition from the original perspective or supposition (X) to the more accurate appraisal or reality (Y).

The rhetorical effect of many of these examples is to build up a natural enough expectation within the hearer and then to expose it as false or overturn it. It is meant to be jarring. For these examples, outside of Jer 8:8 possibly, there is *no move to a new speaker*. In fact, much of the pathos or rhetorical effect of the idiom would be emptied if a move to a new speaker were introduced. It should be noted, however, that in each case the context can be understood as dialogical,[60] with movement between multiple speaking voices or directions of

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Sam 15; ἀλλα in Job 32; δια τοῦτο in Ps 66, Isa 49:4; δὲ Ps 82:7; γὰρ Isa 45:15; πλὴν in Jer 3:20, Jer 3:23b; ὄντως Jer. 3:23a; ἄρα γε Jer 4:10; not translated in Gen 28:16, Zeph 3:7; and, of course, the LXX does not include Isa 40:7c].

[58] In addition to these examples other occurrences of the idiom can be found in Job 32:7–8; Ps 31:23; and Jer 3:19–20 as well as what I consider a slight variation in Jer 8:8.

[59] R.W.L. Moberly, *The God of the Old Testament: Encountering the Divine in Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 115. This pattern was also noticed by Brown, Driver, Briggs who note that אָכֵן emphasizes a contrast "esp. after אָמַרְתִּי" in order to express "the reality, in opp. to what had been wrongly imagined." Francis Brown, et. al *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon (*Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 38.

[60] The setting of Ps 82:6–7 is most likely the divine assembly mentioned in vs. 1. The psalm seems to contain several speaking voices or, in the very least, makes transitions to different addressees. As in Ps 31 what follows is an imperative, though this time to God! The speaker here is unclear. McClellan has recently summarized the options as "YHWH, El, the psalmist, or the community of worshipers." in Daniel McClellan, "The gods-complaint: Psalm 82 as a Psalm of Complaint"," *JBL*, 137, no. 4 (2018): 836.
We will note the dialogic progression in detail for Isa 49:4 in chp. 6. Baltzer, helpfully italicizes the shifts between speakers at Isa 49:4: vs. 3: *he said to me*; vs. 4: *But I said*; vs. 5 *But now YHWH says…* Jer 3:19–20 is in direct address to the nation (note the 2nd person verbs). The idiom in Zeph 3:7, as in Ps 31 and Ps 82, is directly followed by the turn to an imperative.

address. Where as in the other six examples the idiom is in the first person, in Jeremiah 8:8 we find the form, "How can you say X…"…"When, in fact Y"[61]

The אָכֵן seems to signal the resumption to the prophetic voice to contradict a (dishonest) statement which is attributed to someone else, in this case the inhabitants of Jerusalem (the addressee). The position or perspective of the addressee seems to be taken up here temporarily for rhetorical purposes.

2.b.) Of the other occurrences of אָכֵן in poetic/prophetic discourse all but one example (Psa 66:19) are found in Isaiah 40–55 and Jer 2–9.[62] Isa 45:15 falls into this somewhat more eclectic grouping. In each of the three Isaianic examples, (Isa 40:7; Isa 45:15; Isa 53:4) the identity of the speaker is unclear. Whereas it is possible to construe a shift of speaker in Isa 40:7, this seems less likely for Isa 53:4. In what follows I discuss Jer 3:23 before moving on to the Isaianic examples.

Jer 3:23

The double use of אָכֵן in Jer 3:23 is without parallel in the Hebrew Bible.[63] As in almost all other examples the context is dialogical. This double use of the adverb in 3:23 is part of a communal confession, most likely in direct address to Yahweh, which follows closely upon the idiomatic use of אָכֵן in 3:19–20. The progression and cohesion may be elucidated by outlining the likely shifts in speakers:

Yahweh (3:19–20): I thought (אָמַרְתִּי) how I would set you among my children, and give you a pleasant land, the most beautiful heritage of all the nations. And I thought (אָמַרְתִּי)

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[61] אֵיכָה תֹּאמְרוּ חֲכָמִים אֲנַחְנוּ וְתוֹרַת יְהוָה אִתָּנוּ אָכֵן הִנֵּה לַשֶּׁקֶר עָשָׂה עֵט שֶׁקֶר סוֹפְרִים
How can you say, "We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us," when, in fact, the false pen of the scribes has made it into a lie?

[62] In fact, half [9/18] of all the occurrences of אָכֵן are found in Isa 40–55 and Jer 2–9. Though I focus on these prophetic examples it is worth noting several features of Ps. 66:19: First, the context is confessional. The psalmist in vs. 16 (as in vss. 5 and 8) calls out the hymnic imperative "Come and hear…and I will tell you what he has done for me." The use of אָכֵן is a contrasting of a hypothetical situation with the actuality of the Psalmist's experience: "If I had viewed iniquity in my heart, the lord would not have listened; אָכֵן [but, in fact] God has listened (and thus, it should be deduced that there is no iniquity in my heart!)" An even more textured and provocative (and admittedly Protestant) reading would *allow* for the possibility of iniquity in the Psalmists heart, leading to even greater surprise in the confession's use of אָכֵן to note "But, in fact…" (despite my previously held view that God only listened to the perfect), he has listened to me!

[63] Though the possibility of dittography seems plausible, this was not noted in Jan de Waard's textual-critical treatment of this verse. The doubling of אָכֵן here may just as well be interpreted as emotively expressing just how "turned around" Israel is.

you would call me, My Father, and would not turn [לֹא תָשׁוּבוּ] from following me. But (אָכֵן) as a faithless wife leaves her husband, so you have been faithless to me, O house of Israel, says the LORD!

Prophet (3:21): A voice on the bare heights is heard, the plaintive weeping of Israel's children, because they have perverted their way, they have forgotten the LORD their God:

Yahweh (3:22a): Return, O faithless children [שׁוּבוּ בָנִים שׁוֹבָבִים], I will heal your faithlessness.

Israel (3:22b–3:23): Here we come to you; for you are the LORD our God / *for indeed* (אָכֵן) the hills are a delusion, the orgies on the mountains / *for indeed* (אָכֵן) in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel.

Though the double אָכֵן in vs. 23 is often translated with the emphatic or exclamatory "Truly," the immediately previous and rhetorically charged use of the adverb in Yahweh's address alongside the introduction to Israel's repentance in 3:21 helps demonstrate that the adverbial shades of meaning are concurrently exclamatory (perhaps even a sudden realization as in Gen 28) *and* rectifying the previously held false perspective or supposition. Though it may be possible to construe either one or both of the clauses beginning with אָכֵן in vs. 23 as marking the shift to a new speaker or a resumption to the prophetic voice this is made less likely by the continuation of the use of the pronoun "we" in the more prosaic 3:24–25. Similarly, it is uncertain what such a shift in speaker might add to the interpretation.

Isa 40:7

Isa 40:7 is found in a context of dialogue in which there are shifts between speakers. How one understands such transitions, as well as the possible identity of speakers, rests on other interpretive considerations.[64] Goldingay and Payne, for instance, put forth a hypothesis in which 40:7b (beginning at the אָכֵן) constitutes a shift in speaker. A labeling of the *dramatis personae* in this reading would look as follows:

Commissioning voice (vs. 6a): A voice says, "Cry out!"

[64] Goldingay and Payne reflect on Isa 40:1–11's lack of specificity regarding speakers, "The fact that we remain unsure of person addressed as well as of speaker draws attention to the fact that even here the passage focuses on what is said rather than on who speaks. It is the message, not the messenger, that is being introduced (Westermann). It is the word of God that counts, not the declarer of the word (*Seitz)." John Goldingay and David Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40-55 (*London: T & T Clark, 2006), 80.

Objection to commissioning voice (6b-7a): And I say, "*How* shall I cry out?[65] / All flesh is grass and all its fidelity is as that of a wild flower / Grass withers, a wild flower wilts – when Yahweh's breath blows on it"[66]

Rebuttal to objection by commissioning voice (7b-8f): "Surely (or, 'Yes, in fact') grass is what the people are / Grass withers, a wild flower wilts / But the word of our God will stand forever."

In this reading though the heart of the rebuttal is vs. 8, the response begins at the אָכֵן.[67] Goldingay and Payne argue for this beginning of the rebuttal in the following ways: First, they note that the adverb אָכֵן commonly notes an emphatic beginning to a new statement. Secondly, they find vs. 7b more rhetorically fitting as a transition to v.8, as "the transition from objection to response would need such a signal."[68]

In summary, the אָכֵן clause of Isa 40:7 is analogous to Isa 45:15 in that not only is the speaker unclear, but also in the difficulty to understand how the verse relates to what comes before or after. Some take the clause to be a continuation and elucidation of what comes before it in 40:7; others take it to signal the beginning of a shift of speaker; while others, at least since J.B. Koppe in the eighteenth century, see the clause to be the interjection of a glossator. We will return to this discussion in various ways in chapters 3–6 (especially with the interpretation of Claus Westermann). Given the dialogical context, one of the latter two options seems the more likely. As such, in either case, there is a shift of speaker.

Isa 53:4

4 אָכֵן חֳלָיֵנוּ הוּא נָשָׂא וּמַכְאֹבֵינוּ סְבָלָם וַאֲנַחְנוּ חֲשַׁבְנֻהוּ נָגוּעַ מֻכֵּה אֱלֹהִים וּמְעֻנֶּה׃

3 He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.

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[65] Clearly the interpretive work is already under way in my translations. In this reading the מה of מה אקרא usually translated as "What [am I to cry out/preach]?" is rendered "How [am I to preach]?" seeing that the condition and commitment of the people is like a withering weed blasted by Yahweh's wind? That is, according to Goldingay and Payne, "'All flesh is grass' is grounds for skepticism about the possibility of proclamation." Goldingay and Payne, *Isaiah 40–55*, 82. Berges argues similarly: "*Das hebr.* מָה *hat hier kein pronominal (was?), sondern adverbiale (wie?) Bedeutung*…Gen 28,17; Ex 10,26; Num 24,5; Ps 119,97; Ez 19,2; Ijob 26,2; HALAT 522f…" Ulrich Berges, *Jesaja 40–48* (Freiburg: Herder, 2008), 80.

[66] Westermann interprets this as prophetic counter-cry based in the lament tradition which, "perfectly gathers up all the vanquished nation's lamentation and sheer despair" who "speaks as one whose own thoughts are those of the vanquished nation that no longer believes in the possibility of any new beginning" Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*. The Old Testament Library. (London: SCM Press LTD, 1969), 40–41.

[67] Merendino understands the אָכֵן to signal a new speaker both here and in Isa 45:15. For his remarks on Isa 40:7 see Rosario Pius Merendino, *Der Erste und Der Letzte: Eine Untersuchung Von Jes 40-48 (*Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), 52.

[68] Goldingay and Payne*, Isaiah 40–55,* 84.

[4] אָכֵן he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.

This example, similar to Jer 3:19–23, illustrates how the emphatic and restrictive or corrective uses of אָכֵן should not be held as mutually exclusive. Shalom Paul, for instance, translates the אָכֵן as "yet," referring to it here as both "exclamatory and contradictory."[69] Though the identity of the speaker is not completely clear it is likely to be the same as that in Isa 53:1–3. That being said, as we have seen in other examples there are a number of possible shifts in speaker both before and after this (52:13; 53:1; later in 53), and four different perspectives or personae, as in the title of David Clines literary study of Isaiah 53, *I, He, We, and They*. What is often understood with the use of אָכֵן, in tandem with the introduction and repetition of the pronoun "we," is rather a confession of a dramatic change of mind. Westermann, for instance, understands the perspectival shift from the pronoun "he" (51:1–3) to the emphasis on "we" (53:4–6) as a move to "the confession on the part of the men who had changed their opinion."[70] This אָכֵן, then, together with other contextual factors functions similarly to the idiomatic אָמַרְתִּי אָכֵן / signaling the shift from a once held view, now deemed faulty or in need of correction, to a new position.

Conclusion

The above investigation of the biblical material has shown several important features of אָכֵן and how it functions within various contexts. First, we have seen that the adverb is most often used in contexts of dialogue. Secondly, we have seen that in both narrative and poetic (2b, the "non-idiom") uses אָכֵן *may* contribute to signaling the shift from one speaker to another. Third, the use of אָכֵן often signals the shift from one perspective or supposition to another (2a), or, in slightly different terms, signals a sudden, perhaps shocking, new realization (Isa 53:4, Jer 4:10; Gen 28:16, Ex 2:14). We find, accordingly, that the Rashbam's principle with which we opened our discussion has real merit in its attempt to capture the function of the adverb. Lastly,

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[69] Shalom Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, *Translation and Commentary.* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 404. Baltzer (following Beuken) notes that the entire chain of argument for vss. 4–6 begins with אָכֵן which "as an exclamation emphasizing the unexpected" can be rendered "truly," but can also imply the strongly antithetical "yet." David Clines and W. Beuken render the adverb "yet" here: David J.A. Clines, *I, He, We, and They: A Literary Approach to Isaiah 53* (Sheffield, JSOTS, 1976), 12; W. A. M. Beuken, *Jesaja, deel 2A.* (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1979), 214. The JPS Tanakh also translates the adverb here as "yet."

[70] Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 262. Christopher Seitz reads similarly (see chapter 3). See also: James Muilenberg. *The Interpreter's Bible the Holy Scriptures in the King James and Revised Standard Versions with General Articles and Introduction, Exegesis, Exposition for Each Book of the Bible. Vol. 5*. (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1952), 621.

this analysis gestures towards the need to nuance an understanding of אָכֵן which overly dichotomizes its sense as *either* emphatic or restrictive/adversative.[71]

This discussion will be drawn upon in the following chapters to help us evaluate the various decisions made by interpreters. For instance, Goldingay (chapter 3) leans away from the Hebrew text here and towards the LXX, though noting the poetic paralleling of אָכֵן to the אך in v. 14. Balentine (chapter 4) underscores how the fronting of אָכֵן along with the 2ms personal pronoun in this confession serve to disrupt and signal a "sudden shift in speaker and addressee."[72] For Westermann (chapter 5) the אָכֵן is correlated with what he sees as a similar occurrence at 40:7, which is taken as the interpolated response of a reader. In my own reading (chapter 6) I suggest that the אָכֵן allows for (though does not necessitate) the shifting to a new speaker by the interpreter. Similarly, since contextual factors in Isaiah 45:9–15 do not relieve the interpreter of ambiguity regarding whether the sense of אָכֵן is either emphatic/asseverative or adversitive/restrictive, I maintain that it likely retains the essence of both.

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[71] Note Waltke and O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 670: In their discussion of אך and אכן, it is stated that *unlike* אך the אכן "reverses or restricts what *immediately* precedes" (Italics in the original). They also state that אכן is *similar* to אך in that it "has a general emphatic sense." Yet, it must be remembered that אך also contains both asseverative and restrictive senses. See Clines (ed.), *DCL*, 238–239. The inability to account for this ambiguity, or possible blending of both senses in these adverbs can be seen in Waltke and O'Connor's treatment of Isa 45:15 which fails to register that what *immediately* precedes the אכן of v. 15 is a statement fronted by אך in v. 14! Rather than dealing with what immediately precedes (as they do in their treatment of Isa 49:4 and Isa 53:3–4 to show how the two adverbs are not alike) here Waltke and O'Connor jump back three verses (over ten clauses). Yet, in their presentation of the material the progression from Isa 45:12 to 45:15 is made to look straightforward and organic:

> "I made the earth," [says YHWH and it might be thought that YHWH would therefore be visible,]…but [that is not so–] you are a god who hides himself. Isa 45:12, 15

Yet, why would the אכן of v. 15 not be in response, as in the other examples, to what immediately preceded it in vs. 14? Waltke and O'Connor do not explain this interpretive decision.

[72] Samuel E. Balentine, "Isaiah 45: God's "I am," Israel's "You are"". *Horizons in Biblical Theology*. 16:1: 1994, 109.

2. Image-ing a World Behind the Text: *mīs pî/pīt pî* and Isaiah 40–48

2.1 A Search for Coherence

The search for coherence in Isa 40–48, for what Katie Heffelfinger refers to as the poetry's "own mode of cohesion,"[1] is related to a great many factors, such as one's understanding of DI's genre, context of origin, as well as a reader's context and hermeneutical proclivities. Both Roy Melugin and Heffelfinger have greatly contributed to our understanding of DI as a sui-generis and intricate collage of shorter poems (especially salvation oracles and disputation speeches) purposefully arranged as something akin to a mosaic or stained-glass window.[2] Heffelfinger has reflected on the tendency in DI interpretation to narrativize, construct a plot or argument, and thus categorically misread the genre (ironically "losing the plot").[3] Contra Richard Clifford, she argues that DI "lacks both a coherent overarching argument and dominant calls for action."[4] Thus, argues Heffelfinger, readings such as Clifford's, even that of Muilenberg, demonstrate a misunderstanding of the generic and rhetorical features organic to

[1] Heffelfinger, *I am Large*, 6.

[2] Melugin refers to DI creating, "a structure which looks very much like a new genre, a genre composed of disputation and hymn elements." Roy F. Melugin, *The Formation of Isaiah*, 35. Heffelfinger's thesis builds on this observation, arguing that the purpose of the poetry-as-event is through the implied audience's experience of vacillation between judgment and salvation within the divine speaking voice. Heffelfinger's thesis depends greatly on the argument that DI's genre can be classified as "lyric poetry", even if only for heuristic purposes. The reading of DI as lyric poetry is incredibly fruitful and, to my mind, appears the best genre classification in terms of the application of modern literary theory. Still, the mere fact that myriad scholars have considered this poetry best read as something closer to epic poetry, oratory, or even drama is suggestive of its genre-bending nature as well as the unavoidability of readerly-constructions. If one were to doggedly adhere to genre classifications from within the originating context then we might have to agree with Hindy Najman's argument (albeit from silence) that there was simply "no systematic reflection on literary genre [comparable to ancient Greek sources] in ancient Judaism." (Najman, 311) This is related, Najman argues, to the reality of texts in ancient Judaism being produced "by rewriting, recasting, and expanding pre-existing and already authoritative texts." (Najman, 313) Thus, a single text might fall into the midst of something like a genre venn-diagram, wear multiple hats, bend or blend genres. Hindy Najman, "The Idea of Biblical Genre: From Discourse to Constellation" in *Prayer and Poetry in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 311–13. For a rich analysis of biblical poetry as lyric, see the crucial work of F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), 178–226; Heffelfinger, *I am Large*, 22–81.

[3] Heffelfinger, for instance, argues that Clifford, Gitay, Abma, and others who understand DI as either oratory or drama have misconstrued the genre and, thus, foist a plot or argument onto DI's meaningful arrangement. This arrangement, for Heffelfinger, is best understood as a meta-sequencing of some thirty or so lyric poems. Heffelfinger, *I am Large,* 40.

[4] Heffelfinger, *I am Large*, 18.

DI. I agree with Heffelfinger that DI's mode of cohesion is poetic, imagistic, and ultimately related to a "series of encounters with speaking voices."[5] However, I do not share her certainty that readerly attempts to find coherence or an overarching organization, especially as they are teased by DI's thematic recurrences and refrain-like repetitions, will be left frustrated because "in the end there is none."[6]

In this chapter I argue that DI's repetitive and subtle juxtaposition of the fashioners of images with Yahweh – Israel's fashioner – is an overarching theme that provides a means to "find coherence".[7] This juxtaposition is not only native to this discourse but participates in a much wider pan-ancient Near Eastern symbolic discourse. For this reason I will examine the passages often referred to as aniconic or idol-polemic (often bracketed out in ways similar to the "servant songs") against the Mesopotamian cultic ritual for the renovation of a divine statue, in the *mīs-pî* / *pīt-pî* texts.

This chapter is, thus, a reflection on ancient Mesopotamian conceptualities of divine hiddenness and divine presence as compared with Isa 40–48.[8] To confess or lament a deity's hiding implies the inverse: the possibility or expectation that the deity manifests or presents/presences itself. The relationship, then, between divine hiddenness and divine disclosure/manifestation (i.e., theophany) is central to this thesis. This is the logical connection between Israel's charge, "my way is hidden from Yahweh" (Isa 40:27), and prepare the "way of Yahweh" so that "the glory of Yahweh shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together."[9] The declaration of Yahweh's presence in the prophetic discourse, beginning in the heavenly

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[5] Heffelfinger, *I am Large*, 62.

[6] Heffelfinger, *I am Large*, 64. Heffelfinger does nod in the direction of the idol parodies and related arboreal imagery as ostensibly coherence-making, but ultimately finds them to be only a vaguely sketched 'story' if one at all. Similarly she refers to the idol-maker passages collectively as a "centripetal force" alongside the most cohesive force in DI, the overwhelming presence of the divine speaking voice. Heffelfinger, 166. I agree with her analysis, finding it wanting only in that it does not press into further juxtaposition between these two centripetal forces, the lesser (idols) and the greater (Yahweh's voice) in the poetry of Isa 40–48.

[7] My argument pertains more to Isa 40–49 than it does 49–55.

[8] I appreciate Kutsko's distinction between the paradox of divine presence / absence in Ezekiel and "the classical question of *deus absconditus* and *deus revelatus,"* John F. Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth: Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel*. Biblical and Judaic Studies Volume 7. (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 150. Similar to Kutsko, in this section I focus on materials likely relevant to the originating context of DI's *deus absconditus*. It is, of course, another matter to what degree an interpreter decides this background should be determinative for the meaning of divine hiddenness (either within its originating literary context or in conversation with later theological reflections). In any event, hiddenness language in Isa 40–48 *is* related to both theodicy and theophany, and thereby I do not avoid language of "presence". On the other hand, care should be taken not to conflate "hiddenness" and "absence".

[9] Though the sentry heralding of the theophanic vision, "Here is your God!" in Isa 40:9–11 is not directly returned to until Isa 52:7ff.

court or divine council (Isa 40:1ff; or however one conceptualizes it),[10] leads directly into confrontation with the issue of divine representation and likeness in the form(ation) of an idol (Isa 40:18–20). This may seem strange. However, as this investigation will illuminate, Isa 40–48 participates in a wider symbolic discourse which serves to inform the poetic plaiting together of themes: divine presence (theophany), divine image formation, creation, and restoration from exile (to name only several salient themes). Theophany in the ANE was not envisioned abstractly, but related directly to the divine image.

This review of relevant background, however, does not seek to claim literary dependence of Isa 40–48 on the *mīs-pî* / *pīt-pî* texts.[11] However, the similarity of content between these texts, and their text-worlds, makes comparison fruitful for parties interested in the subject matter in relation to its ancient context of origin. Such comparative work is no less imaginative than what is often understood by intertextual readings of an inner-biblical or canonical variety.[12] For this reason, and recognizing that correspondences *could* be owing to direct knowledge (whether distant or intimate) I do imaginatively refer to parallels using language reminiscent of an author-hermeneutic. This inquiry into the *possible* world behind the text is inevitably influenced by the texts of Isaiah 40–48, as this is the focus of the present project. The following texts are most immediately important, given their relationship to divine hiddenness:

> Isa 40:27: Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is *hidden* from Yahweh and my right (or, justice) is disregarded by my God"?

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[10] For one of the earliest proposals of the word going forth from the divine council see F.M. Cross, "The Council of Yahweh in Second Isaiah," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 12 (1953): 274–8.

[11] My approach is not genealogical, claiming literary dependence. Since the chastening of Samuel Sandmel scholars have been more circumspect in avoiding the temptation to "parallelomania." Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962): 1-13. That said, even the selection of texts for comparison, Isaianic and Mesopotamian, is informed by a privileging of comparative study which assumes relationship of some kind between the two. There is a long and illustrious list of scholars, some of who appear in the footnotes which follow, who have analyzed DI against a broader Babylonian background. As a good representative example see Blenkinsopp's discussion of Isa 46:1-2 in light of the *Akitu* festival. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 105–110.

[12] See de Hulster's reflections on the importance of imagination for the work of historical reconstructions, particularly how imagination is used to construct/reconstruct past, present, and future. Izaak De Hulster, "Imagination: A Hermeneutical Tool for the Study of the Hebrew Bible." *Biblical Interpretation* 18/2 (2010): 119; 135–36. In broader brush we can be helped here by employing "Full imaginative seriousness," a phrase used by Walter Moberly to describe the interpreter's need to work diligently in order to imaginatively enter into the world of the text. Moberly gives an account of this concept in relation to second naiveté and the possibility of transformative encounter by means of immersion in the textual world in R.W.L. Moberly, *The God of the Old Testament,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 6–7. See also R.W.L. Moberly, *Old Testament Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 285. It seems to me that what Moberly proposes regarding constructive imaginative use of intertextual resonances within the biblical canon (whether or not the authors of the texts in question were aware of such resonances) can be profitably extended to the canons of Babylon.

Isa 45:15: But surely you are a God who *hides* himself, O God of Israel, Savior.

Isa 45:19: I did not *in secret* speak … I have not said to Jacob's seed "*tohu* seek me"

The rationale for this background is to reach a better appreciation of DI's symbolic discourse. In what follows, I will therefore outline scholarly proposals for an understanding of ancient Mesopotamian rituals involving the creation, ontology, and function of the cult statue/icon (this will include the role of divine and human craftsmen), focusing on the deity's presence by means of the divine image (or cult icon). This will, in turn, lead to an overview of Isa 40–48's employment or engagement with these topoi.

This chapter argues for DI's participation in the Mesopotamian symbolic discourse with a view to radically reconfigure the meaning of the divine image in Israel's imaginative landscape and, by so doing, to reawaken the exilic Israelite audience to its identity, and hence, its destiny. My purpose in outlining the connections between a certain Babylonian theo-ontology and the theological vision of Isa 40–48 is to argue for the importance of this background to the rhetorical purposes this poetry seeks to make possible.[13] Israel is being beckoned in this poetry not only to see Yahweh afresh, but to see itself, perhaps for the first time, likened unto the very divine images of their captors (abducted, despoiled, and disfigured) and, like those images, in urgent need of renovation and repatriation.[14] Israel is called to see itself as divine image and, yet, even as such, as ironically blind. As Isa 42–44 makes clear, blindness is intimately linked to the fabrication and worship of the idol. In this understanding, the "idol polemics" (despite what we may think of their provenance) are of one piece with the whole of Isa 40–48, funding the rhetorical re-figuration of the audience and aiding in the invitation (or imperative) to an Israel re-imagined. In what follows, I will supply the finer grain to argue the following: Isa 40–48's "prophetic aniconism" may be more aptly understood as a particular "anthro-iconism" in which the covenant community is deftly juxtaposed with the divine images of Babylon.[15] The rationale

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[13] Again, though I suspect the connection between the divine image and exilic Israel was part of the matrix of authorial, or at least redactional, intention I don't think it makes much difference to my argument. The fullness of the poetry's meaning lies well beyond these originating intentions. When I speak of the rhetorical purposes of the poetry I mean that the God of Israel could well have purposes that the author or redactors may not have fully comprehended - both for the original audience as well as later hearers and readers. That includes, of course, a 21st century re-investigation into Isa 40–48 such as this one. See Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hermeneutics* (Sheffield: Sheffield Acad. Press, 2009), 28–39 for his discussion of the limitations of author-hermeneutics and his complexifying the picture of a literary creator.

[14] Like Kutsko's work on Ezekiel I argue that the "image of God" is implied in Isa 40–48. I want to suggest the possibility however that the imagery employed with strategic subtlety, the "machinations of ambiguity" being fundamental to the rhetorical aim of "opening the eye" of Israel. Cf. Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 53–69.

[15] Kutsko's notes the "subtlety of the aniconic tradition," in speaking of Ezekiel's theology. Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth,* 155. Middlemas similarly underscores subtlety in prophetic aniconism. She reconsiders the textual evidence before adjudicating scholarly proposals on the relationship of DI to the Priestly creation account (e.g.,

is radical: Israel's participation in worshiping an image blinds itself to its own nature and ontology, for Yahweh images or presences Himself through the covenant community. Israel is Yahweh's image; but Israel must be renovated or renewed.[16] Fundamental to the reconciliatory purpose of the poetry is a call for Israel to come to its senses.

2.2 The mīs pî/pīt pî Ritual as Intertext to Isa 40–48

In this section I interact with the divine image (the cult icon) and divine representation and the related issue of theophany. The work of Christopher Walker and Michael B. Dick on the *mīs pî/pīt pî* ritual texts is central to this section. In short, this ritual leads to the actualizing of the presence of a deity within its temple cella. This helps establish the logic of Israel as Yahweh's "divine image," which must undergo a process of renovation or revivification.

The following presentation will be discussed in terms of actors, setting, actions (performed or promised), fundamental imagery/metaphors, and outcomes (understood or hoped for). For heuristic purposes we can think of the text performatively and this discussion as a lens upon that performance: moving from a wide-angle aerial view (setting and actors), to a side or field view (imagery, action, and outcomes).[17] For each I will first discuss the *mīs pî/pīt pî* ritual

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Moshe Weinfeld and James Barr followed by newer proposals put forth by Andreas Schüle and Joachim Schaper). She concludes that "Second Isaiah implicitly equates Yahwistic and human forms," even though avoiding the use of *ṣelem*. Middlemas in "agreeing and disagreeing" with Barr states, "Second Isaiah left open whether there might be something comparable to the deity's likeness, but rejected the formation of it, while at the same time confirming the special relationship between Yahweh and humanity." Jill Middlemas, *The Divine Image: Prophetic Aniconic Rhetoric and Its Contribution to the Aniconism Debate* (Mohr Siebeck; Tübingen, Germany: 2014), 139; cf. 147. This is mostly correct, though misses the wider rhetorical function of the questions of Isa 40:18, 25 and important development at 46:5. These questions, and the whole of the poetic address, are meant to goad Jacob–Israel to accept that though human agency is unable to form or fashion any likeness to Yahweh, the deity himself fashions all things: creation, the rise and fall of nations, and most importantly, the nation of Israel and its destiny. The relationship of the deity to Jacob-Israel in DI is not conflated with "all humanity"(here Middlemas conflates the focus of DI and P's accounts). By Isa 46:5 the rhetorical question follows a juxtaposition of Jacob-Israel with Babylon's deities. The argue that the subtlety in DI's theological vision and prophetic rhetoric is intended to goad Jacob–Israel to an understanding of itself as divinely (re)fashioned, akin to Yahweh's image.

[16] See on this point: Manjoja Kumar Korada, *The Rationale for Aniconism in the Old Testament: A Study of Select Texts* (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 320–346. Though he analyzes the texts of Ezekiel 16 and Deuteronomy 32 he comes to similar conclusions as I do from Isa 40–48. From juxtaposing the *mīs pî* and Isa 40–46 Antony Tharekadavil has come to the conclusion that in the theology of Second Isaiah Israel is fashioned and being revived by Yahweh as a living image in contradistinction to the divine images of Babylon. I was not able to access this article: Antony Tharekadavil, "The Babylonian mīs pî and Second Isaiah's Idol-Passages (Is 40-46)," *Malabar Theological Review* 3 (2008), 131–166.

[17] I take seriously Berlejung's caution against the attempt of interpreters to press the whole of the ritual into too linear a sequence. Angelika Berlejung, "Washing the Mouth: The Consecration of Divine Images in Mesopotamia," in Karel van der Toorn *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. K. van der Toorn (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 71.

before turning to Isa 40–48. To better correlate all of this with divine hiddenness in Isa 45, I conclude with a close-up view, zooming in to a higher level of detail for the way Isaiah 44–45 relates to the *mīs pî/pīt pî* ritual.

2.2.1 Actors

The *mīs pî/pīt pî* ritual for the creation or renovation of the divine image included a dizzying number of deities from the Assyro-Babylonian pantheon: the triumvirate of Ea/Enki, Asalluhi, and Šamaš, with a particular focus on Ea/Enki as craftsman deity *d*N*u-dím-mud*, "Image Fashioner," or father of the image.[18] It is stated of Ea in one incantation of the *mīs pî* that he makes the root of the sacred wood from which the core of the divine statue was made to "drink up pure water from the Underworld."[19] A litany of craftsmen gods and goddesses are also referred to and called upon to be present and active.[20] Though the earthly actions and actors are

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[18] It appears that the first day's liturgy centered around the craftsman god Ea and the second day may have focused more on Šamaš. Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 29. Christopher Walker and Michael Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia: The Mesopotamian Mīs Pî Ritual. Transliteration, Translation, and Commentary*. SAALT. (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001). Unless otherwise noted I have used the more accessible Revised and Updated Critical Edition of Walker and Dick which is temporarily hosted by siena.edu (though planned to be incorporated into UPenn's ORACC collection): https://sites.google.com/a/siena.edu/mis-pi/ Page numbers refer this digital edition and do not correspond to the printed version. Henceforth, referencing appears as above: Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition). Walker and Dick, *Induction*, 29. For this "triad of white magic" and Ea as deity of holy water, god of the Apsû, and "Image fashioner" see Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition) 58 n. 44. R.N. Whybray suggested that Ea's function in the *Enuma Eliš* may point to him as the deity that stands behind the argument in Isa 40:13-14. On Whybray's cheeky title, *The Heavenly Counsellor in Isaiah xl 13-14: A Study of the Sources of the Theology of Deutero-Isaiah*, David Clines remarks, "In contradistinction to Babylonian mythology, for example, where the creator god Marduk benefited from the advice of the god of wisdom, Ea, in Second Isaiah there is no advisor to Yahweh as creator. But Second Isaiah could not have denied there was had he not been familiar with the Babylonian myth, which thereupon is constituted as a source of the prophet's theology, though in inverse mode." Clines speaks of the "austere prophet of the exile" footnoting the Enuma Elish in his brilliant statement on monotheism. Though less concerned with strict literary-genealogical relationships the thrust of my argument underscores the importance of Ea not only as "counselor god" but as the craftsmen deity, as well as the "teamwork" (advising) between the host of deities in the Mesopotamian pantheon which took place in the creation and renovation of the divine image, as relevant background to Isa 40–48. Austerity may be the scholarly conception of DI, but his humor and parody mitigates against this; further, monotheism does not make best sense of the brilliance of the prophet's purpose and poetry. For Clines' touching tribute to Whybray and his work: "Making Waves Gently," in Katharine Dell and Margaret Barker, ed. *Wisdom: The Collected Articles of Norman Whybray* (Society for Old Testament Study Monograph Series; Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), ix-xxvi.
Though references to Asalluhi are more frequent than to Marduk in Akkadian incantations it is regularly recognized that Asalluhi and Marduk were syncretized already in the Old Babylonian period. For further see, Walker and Dick, *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth*, 74 n. 56. Also: Walker and Dick, Incantation Tablet 1-2, 91 n. 50; Nicole Brisch, "Marduk (god)", *Ancient Mesopotamian Gods and Goddesses*, ORACC and the UK Higher Education Academy, 2016. http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/amgg/listofdeities/marduk/

[19] Walker and Dick (Updated Critical Edition) 134, line 31(Incantation Tablet 4).

[20] Examples abound: "Ninildu, he touches your limbs;" "Ninkurra, he colors your eyes;" "…Kusibanda, he works the statue." In Walker and Dick, Incantation Tablet 1-2, lines 31–39, 134. A battery of mouth washings in the

extremely varied, at the center stands the *āšipu* (or *mašmaššu* priest) and with him "all of the craftsmen who approached that god."[21] These divine-image craftsmen and priests interact with the image/deity in a variety of ways: selecting the wood, shaping and adorning it, setting it up, washing its mouth, opening its eye, whispering into its ear, taking its hand and leading it in public procession unto the consummation of this most sacred liminal ritual, back into concealment within the deity's cella. The most important "actor" is the divine image/deity, even if admittedly passive from the textual descriptions.[22]

2.2.2 Setting and Summary of Action

The *mīs pî/pīt pî* was a two-day ceremony involving processions between the city (specifically the bīt mummi), "countryside" (wilderness), and temple of Ea (on the river bank).[23] Though Walker and Dick gloss the word *seru* with "countryside," they comment that the term is better "wilderness," representing chaos and the uncreated outside the realm of the city, and that this is a theological (even more than geological) observation, representing the liminality of the

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Babylonian ritual are interwoven with offerings to 9 deities (including Ea, Marduk, Sin, Ishtar of the Stars, followed by another 9 (for what appears to be mostly craftsmen deities), and then five series to the host of heavens (24 total including, among others: Jupiter, Venus, Moon, Saturn, Pegasus, Pisces, Eridu, Scorpion, and lastly the stars of Anu, Enlin, and Ea). The sum of these offerings is 42, of course, the answer to the ultimate question. BR, lines 25–36, in Walker and Dick, *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth,* 77–79. See also Walker and Dick, Incantation Tablet 3, 59ab-69ab. Walker and Dick refer to the agency of Kusu, chief exorcist of Enlin, whose purification of the divine image likely corresponds to the ritual's actual mouth washing. Walker and Dick, *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth, 98*.

[21] Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001), 15–16. Related incantation tablets seem to refer to the wise man (apkallu) and the abriqqu-priest. E.g., Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 194 14ab; 200, line 15ab (Incantation Tablet 4). See also, Walker and Dick, *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth, 98*. The Akkadian *āšipu* is conventionally translated "exorcist," though it is more helpful to review their various roles and the rituals they were involved in. For that see Daniel Schwemer, "Magic Rituals: Conceptualizations and Performance" in Karen Radner and Eleanor Robson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[22] Though in the texts *ilu šuati* is used, Walker and Dick argue that, "in the actual performance of the ritual, the name of the deity whose statue was being consecrated would have been invoked." Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 59 n. 48.

[23] There are some differences between settings in the **Babylonian Ritual** text (hereafter, BR), which begins in the "house of the craftsmen," and the **Nineveh Ritual** text (hereafter, NR), where the house of craftsmen is not stated explicitly. Walker and Dick suggest in their notes that it is implied in the NR, however. The bīt mummi (temple workshop) is synonymous with bīt mārē ummâni (house of the craftsmen) and, according to Walker and Dick, was probably "identified with the Apsû," that large body of water in Mesopotamian cosmic geography, upon which Babylon was believed to be built, the clay material to create the first humans taken, and over which Ea/Enki presided. For a summary reconstruction of the ritual using both BR and NR, which includes a very helpful table of comparisons, see Catherine L. McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden: The Creation of Humankind in Genesis 2:5-3:24 in Light of the mīs pî pīt pî and wpt-r Rituals of Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt.* Siphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures 15. (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 53–68. McDowell has also observed that the three primary locations (workshop, riverbank, and attached garden) bridge geo-physical and mytho-divine spatial spheres. McDowell, *Image of God*, 84.

ritual.[24] The first day begins with preparation of the holy water, followed by a procession from the workshop to the river where the ritual continues into the temple gardens, to the orchard within a circle of reed huts/tents (in Babylonian Ritual text: the Garden of Apsu). There, seven holy water basins are poured into a Tamarisk trough (*buginnu*). This garden/orchard "was a ritually significant site where most of the animating rites were enacted."[25] In the first day of the Babylonian version (**BR**), nine mouth washings are recorded, over against three in the Ninivite version (**NR**).[26] After these repeated mouth washings, the divine image was set up in a reed hut overnight with its eyes positioned towards immanent dawn.[27]

The second day of the *mīs pî*/*pīt pî* begins in the garden where thrones are constructed for Ea, Šamaš, and Asalluhi and offerings presented to them. They are then beseeched: "On this day be present: for this statue which stands before you ceremoniously grant him the destiny that his mouth may eat, that his ears might hear…"[28] Something on the order of ten incantations follow, accompanying the opening of the mouth, climaxing with "On the day when the god was fashioned/created (dím)."[29] This is the theophanic moment, in which we find a litany of descriptions of the deity's glorious appearance and splendor:

50ab (and) the god appeared in all the lands,

51ab then bearing an awe-inspiring radiance totally suited to rule with perfect strength;

52ab surrounded on all sides with splendor, endowed with a sparkling-pure appearance,

53ab he/it appears magnificently, the statue shines brilliantly [Sumerian: Splendidly flashing so that the statue emerges sparkling-pure!];[30]

54ab in the heavens he/it was crafted (or created: dím/*banû*); on earth, it was crafted (dím/*banû*).

55ab this statue was crafted (dím/*banû*) in the entire heavens and earth;

58ab this statue is the product of gods and humans;[31]

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[24] Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 57, n. 37. See McDowell's discussion on the threat posed by the sēru: McDowell, *The Image of God*, 54 n. 67.

[25] McDowell, *Image of God,* 62. McDowell notes that by the end of day one, the statue is already referred to as an *ilu*, or god, and its sensory organs are operative, though it cannot properly be considered fully animate.

[26] McDowell, *Image of God,* 61.

[27] In the first day of the BR nine mouth washings are recorded (total of fourteen), over against three in the NR.

[28] Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 159 (Incantation Tablet 3, lines 35–37).

[29] Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), NR, 73 n. 113.

[30] McDowell argues that the form of *nabātu* here captures the iterative nature of the image's magnificent appearance. McDowell, *The Image of God*, 63 n120. Regarding the subject Walker and Dick note that the *ṣalmu* and deity are one and the same, if not before, certainly now.

[31] Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 160 (Incantation Tablet 3). Though the relationship between the two recensions of the ritual text (BR and NR) and the incantations is complicated as Hurowitz states,

This is followed by a ritual in which the hands of the human craftsmen were ceremonially (symbolically) severed with a tamarisk dagger to emphasize the divine parentage of the image by the craftsmen deities, and not "the work of human hands."

49. you recite a Whisper Prayer. You retire; and [you position] all of the craftsmen who approached that god
50. and their equipment […… before(?)] Ninkurra, Ninagal, Kusigbanda,
51. Ninildu (and) [Ninzadim], and you bind their hands with a scarf;
52 . and cut (them off) with a knife of tamarisk wood.... You make (them) say: "I did not make him (the statue), Ninagal (who is) Ea (god) of the smith made him".
53. You open the eye of that god. The āšipu-priest recites before that god … the incantation, "As you grew up, as you grew up".[32]

The āšipu-priest is then called to whisper into the ears of the deity, "From today may your destiny be counted as divinity."[33] At this crucial stage of the ceremony, following the solemn oaths of the craftsmen, we find a unique instruction to open the image's eye (*in ili suati tepette*). Though the text is laconic, we can deduce that the eye is the last sensory organ to be activated.[34] Another battery of ten incantations ensues.[35] Though incantations are recited through the whole of the ritual, the theophany (deity's birth/creation come to completion) is here signaled by the concatenation of incantations. The deity is ready for its journey home. From this point in the BR text, the deity proceeds in several stages: a) from the orchard in the garden to the temple gate and b) from the temple gate to the enthronement of the deity in his cella. The ritual text concludes with instruction to the priest with a standard *Geheimwissen* colophon, "The uninitiated may not see it: Taboo of the great Enlil, Marduk."

2.2.3 Fundamental Imagery and Metaphors

It may be something of a titular misnomer to refer to the following as "imagery" or "metaphors," as the actual cult practices were graphic and steeped in materiality. In this section I will discuss birth and crafting imagery alongside wood and water imagery.

"[T]here are clear parallels between the ritual actions and the content of the incantations. The incantation tablets are crucial for understanding the ritual, and when put in proper sequence and coordinated as far as possible with the instructions, they serve as a sort of running commentary, revealing to a great extent the purpose of the prescribed actions that they accompany." Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "The Mesopotamian God Image, from Womb to Tomb." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. 123: 1 (2003): 149.

[32] Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 82 (BR, lines 49–53).

[33] Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 73 (NR, line 167).

[34] McDowell, *The Image of God*, 65.

[35] My counting is taken from the BR (BM 45749) here.

Confluence of manufacturing / birthing imagery

McDowell has helpfully reevaluated two important aspects of the *mīs pî* ritual to suggest that the rite was "based on two complementary analogies: human procreation and birth, *and* material manufacture."[36] Sommer has noted the revealing nature of the Akkadian and Sumerian verbs used in the ritual texts: "create, build, fashion" when discussing the earthly origin of the statue, whereas forms of the Sumerian verb "to give birth" (Ù-TU-UD-DA) are employed when referring to the divine or heavenly origin of the *ṣalmu*.[37] Both ritual and incantation texts establish a clear father-child relationship between the image and Ea/Enki.[38] Lastly, Hurowitz has presented the use of the Akkadian *walādu* in a broader set of Mesopotamian texts which speak of the creation of a divine image as a birthing process.[39]

As seen in the above section on the resplendent manifestation of the deity in the image, alongside the birthing imagery there is a concomitant stress on the crafting, making, or creation of the image/deity.[40] In one of the incantation texts, recited as the statue processed from the temple workshop to the river, various gods are described as working the statue: "…eyes which Ninkurra has made; the statue is of gold and silver which Kusibanda has made…which Ninildu has made…which Ninzadim has made…"[41] In the *mīs pî* the *ilu*, or god, "was made, created, or

[36] Namely, she reevaluates the *buginnu* trough (tamarisk trough, understood as a womb structure) and the birthing brick (of *Dingir-mah)*. McDowell, *The Image of God*, 53. Italics in original. McDowell's explanation is offered as part of a longer summary and evaluation of the positions of Boden (*mīs pî* is to be understood as a ritual of transition on analogy with human gestation and birthing) and that of Berlejung (simply a purification rite). These positions are regularly presented as contradictory or mutually exclusive. I find McDowell's "both/and" conclusion best suited to the available evidence: "Manufacture did not preclude birth, nor did birth preclude manufacture." McDowell, *The Image of God*, 85.

[37] Benjamin Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel. (*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 20. The titles in Incantations or first lines use the phrase "Born (TUD) in heaven by your own power," and "Statue born (TUD) in a pure place." Lines 189-90 (NR), line 54 (BR); See also McDowell, *The Image of God*, 77.

[38] E.g., "From today you go before your father Ea," in Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 63, line 61 (NR). McDowell notes that the image is referred to in Incantation Tablet 1/2 as "child (*dumu*) of heaven, child (*dumu*) of Enki." *The Image of God*, 78. The important connection between the waters for purifying and perhaps even more the metaphorical association between the animating power of the fresh water of the *apsu* (i.e., for growing the sacred woods used in the construction of the gods) and Ea's fructifying power of Ea's would have influenced Ea's role as "father of the image" in the ritual. Keith Dickson sees a direct connection between Enki (Ea) as Lord of Waters (abzu) and as "Primal Parent"noting that "cosmogony and agricultural fertility are generally understood by analogy to human reproductive acts, thereby making irrigation and intercourse virtually interchangeable tropes." Keith Dickson, "*Enki* and *Ninhursag*: The Trickster in Paradise." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 66:1 (2007): 7-8.

[39] Once again a parental relationship of Ea to images is seen in other inscriptions, where under the epithet *Nišši̇ku*, Ea, "creator of everything," is said to give birth (*ulid*) to images of the great divinities who then take to their cella thrones. See Hurowitz, "The Mesopotamian God Image," 151–152.

[40] E.g., Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 122, lines 68-80, Incantation Tablet 1/2.

[41] Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 160–161 lines 59ab-64ab (Incantation Tablet 3).

engendered (*banû*) in the bīt mārē ummâni or bīt mummi, the temple workshop where divine statues…were skillfully wrought and repaired."[42]

Wood and water (arboreal and hydro- imagery)

The *mīs pî* texts are dense with ritual action involving an array of trees and plant life as well as arboreal incantations.[43] These regularly describe the purity, purifying power, heavenly origin, and relation to divine water/Ea/the Apsû. Myriad trees are mentioned specifically in connection with the actual washing of the mouth of the divine statue (e.g., tamarisk, date palm, seven palm shoots, various reeds, cedar, cypress, juniper, etc.).[44] Primary among the trees in both ritual and incantation texts is the tamarisk, which is mentioned both as raw material for the fabrication of the deity, as well as that which purifies the divine statue:

1 Incantation: tamarisk, pure tree, growing up from a clean place,
2 coming from a pure place,
3 drinking water in abundance from the irrigation-channel;
4 from its trunk gods are made,
5 with its branches gods are cleansed.[45]

As in this case, so most other incantatory encomia and ritual action bring together the sacred or divine water and wood. Various deities (especially Ea and the goddesses associated with birth) are described as pouring over the divine image the water of incantation.[46] I will discuss these features alongside one further incantation text as we approach the relevant texts in Isa 40–48. However, before turning to the Isaianic texts let us view several attending difficulties facing contemporary understandings of the Mesopotamian conceptualities of the divine image.

[42] McDowell, *Image of God*, 80.

[43] Kirsten Nielsen's analysis does not extend beyond Isa 1–39. Though she discusses some ANE background, her focus on the tree as a building material or as "fruit bearer" does not extend to the construction of the cult statue. Her primary texts are almost exclusively biblical, even when discussing the "tree as holy" in "primitive religions." Kirsten Nielsen, *There is Hope for a Tree: The Tree as Metaphor in Isaiah*, JSOTS 65 (Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 73.

[44] Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 79, BR, lines 16–20 (cf., NR, lines 24–27).

[45] Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 105, lines 1-5; Incantation Tablet 1/2. See similarly important place and description of reeds, referred to as "reed of the gods." Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 97, lines 9–29, Incantation Tablet 1/2

[46] Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 16ab-17ab; 31ab-33ab, Incantation Tablet 4; 122, lines 65–67, Incantation Tablet 1/2.

2.3 Representing the Deity: The Divine Image in Babylon

2.3.1 Image-ing the Deity: Conceptual Difficulties

Though on the one hand the above descriptive account of the *mīs pî* may seem to relay a straightforward relationship between deity and the divine image (or cult icon) in Babylon, in fact, contemporary conceptualization of such is immensely difficult. To underscore the difficulty in our conceptualization, let us turn to a brief semantic discussion focusing on the divine image. The reader will note that, in the context of discussing Isaiah in its ancient Near Eastern context, I prefer the term "divine image" (or *ṣalmu*). Still, I have no problem with using the terms "cult icon" or "cult statue," especially when the materiality or fabrication of the image is in view. I avoid "idol" or "graven image" (פסל) in this section because the use of such terms fosters a kind of ontological distanciation which is foreign to Assyro-Babylonian theogony. In order to see the message of Isa 40–48 in sharp relief, and the theology of "graven image" therein with gravity, I temporarily avoid the unfashionable semantics of the prophetic imagination.

We need to better understand our own proclivity for this bifurcating of "real" and "represented." Zainab Bahrani argues that the metaphysical divide between the represented and the real simply does not do justice to an Assyro-Babylonian ontology of representation, namely the centrality of "what might be described as conjuring presence in an image."[47] Bahrani's approach throws into sharp relief the conflict between our mimetic conceptions of the real and the represented, whether inherited from post-Platonic metaphysics or modern scientific-industrial thinking of reproduction, which differentiate material reality and semiosis from the ontology of Assyro-Babylonians, in which "the world of appearance and the world of essence are the same."[48] Our conceptual apparatuses are, Bahrani argues, alien to Assyro-Babylonian ontotheology. Her argument centers on a reexamination of the Akkadian word *ṣalmu*. She first problematizes translations of this word such as "statue" or "image," seeking rather to define the ***ṣalmu*** in more functional terms as "part of a pluridimensional system of representation."[49] This system of representation is best conceived as a multidimensional "chain of possible appearances," one in which an entity could be encountered through "different signifiers or substances."[50] Thus in retranslating texts that describe the king placing his ***ṣalmu*** before various

[47] Zainab Bahrani, *The Graven Image: Representation in Babylonia and Assyria.* (Philadelphia, PA: UPenn Press, 2003), 1.

[48] Bahrani, *The Graven Image*, 134.

[49] Bahrani, *The Graven Image*, 123.

[50] Bahrani, *Graven Image*, 128. Part of her argument involves a reexamination of a ritual practice in which a human substitute for the king undergoes an incantational transformation: "The organic body double is referred to as *salmu*, but only until the transformation is completed. After the ritual process of substitution, the double is referred to simply as the king." Bahrani, 130.

deities, Bahrani argues that this is a "natural and organic" extension of the person of the king and his kingship, a "mode of presencing" by which he could be encountered.[51]

This reappraisal of Assyro-Babylonian ontology helps us take better stock of the potent Mesopotamian rituals that we have laid out in detail, the *mīs pî* (washing of the mouth) / *pīt pî* (opening of the mouth) ceremony.[52] As we have seen, this sacred and secretive multi-day ceremony called upon the full gamut of cultic knowledge through a litany of ritual specialists, namely priests and craftsmen. The telos of the *mīs pî*/*pīt pî* was the actualizing of a deity's presence, residing within its temple.[53] J. Richard Middleton summarizes:

> The result of the mīs pî is that the carefully carved and decorated statue is said to be born of the gods and becomes the living presence of deity on earth. The mode of this presence, as both Jacobsen and Dick indicate, was distinct from

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[51] Bahrani, *Graven Image*, 137.

[52] Whereas the *mīs pî* (washing of the mouth) purification rite was performed on both divine *ṣalmu*, or images, and also on the king, his royal insignia, royal statues, priests, individual humans or animals, and sacred objects in preparation for contact with the divine, the *pīt pî* (opening of the mouth) seems to have been reserved for what we might class as inanimate objects: to consecrate, activate, or enliven the object for cultic use. In the case of the divine image the *pīt pî (*opening of the mouth) vivified the statue and activated its sensory organs, allowing it to speak and move freely. See, I. Winter, "Idols of the King: Royal Images as Recipients of Ritual Action in Ancient Mesopotamia," JRS 6 (1992), 13; Also, Stephen L. Herring, *Divine Substitution: Humanity as the Manifestation of Deity in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East.* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 28-29; Catherine L. McDowell, *The Image of God*, 43-45. Parsing the precise relationship between the *mīs pî* and *pīt pî* isn't entirely germane (and, seeing that I am neither an ancient āšipu priest, to whom these texts were addressed in the second person masculine singular nor even an Assyriologist, I am sadly unqualified to do so). It suffices to say that an amalgamation of these rituals was necessary in order to move the divine image from a more liminal ontology to full-blown theophany, after which it is referred to explicitly by divine titles and epithets. Again, though, McDowell argues from the parallel use of *ilu* with *ṣalmu* that such a clear and distinct boundary between the two may be a distinction more of our own making and that the process of transformation may have been more gradual. See further, McDowell, *The Image of God*, 56; Stephen Herring, *Divine Substitution*, 27; Bahrani, *The Graven Image*, 171.

[53] Historical references to the ceremony in texts as far back as the Ur III period demonstrate the antiquity of the tradition. The ceremony is referenced between the 14-13th centuries B.C.E., in a 9th century B.C.E. text commissioning a divine statue of the Sun-God *Samas*, and in an oft-cited Neo-Assyrian piece of correspondence reporting the renewal and consecration of statues, usually linked to Esarhaddon's restoration of the cult images that Babylon lost to Sennacherib in 689 BCE. See Catherine McDowell, *The Image of God*, 46–48. A number of *mīs pî*/*pit pî* tablets and accompanying incantations have been discovered at various sites across the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian empires ranging in date from the mid-9th to 5th centuries B.C.E, leading to various reconstructions of the ceremonies. Though the *mīs pî* ritual texts have themselves been known since the beginning of the twentieth century, in depth explanatory work wasn't published until the work of T. Jacobsen in 1987, who interpreted the ceremony as a "ritual-birthing procedure." This interpretation has been fruitfully extended by Peg Boden and subsequently argued against in A. Berlejung's volume on the theology of the cult statue, who sees this as a rite of passage, primarily of purification. For a thorough review of these views see Hurowitz, "The Mesopotamian God Image," 148–51. See also, Nathaniel B. Levtow, *Images of Others: Iconic Politics in Ancient Israel, (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014),* 91–100. Peggy Jean Boden, "The Mesopotamian Washing of the Mouth (*Mis Pî*) Ritual: An Examination of Some of the Social and Communication Strategies Which Guided the Development and Performance of the Ritual Which Transferred the Essence of the Deity Into Its Temple Statue" (Ph.D diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1998) and A. Berlejung, *Die Theologie der Bilder: Herstellung und Einweihung von Kultbildern in Mesopotamien und die alttestamentliche Bilderpolemik* (Fribourg: Universititsverlag, 1998) and her "Washing the Mouth: The Consecration of Divine Images in Mesopotamia," in Karel van der Toorn, ed., *The Image and the Book*, 45-72.

> either a merely symbolic reminder of deity or the actual, literal god. The name of the ritual is itself significant. As a line in one of the incantations explicitly proclaims: "This statue cannot smell incense, drink water, or eat food without the Opening of the Mouth!" The ritual, in other words, is understood as efficaciously vivifying the image, so that its various orifices are opened and it may speak, hear, see, and even (in a certain sense) walk.[54]

Bahrani's problematizing approach is a foray into the difficulty scholars face in adequately describing this event. To begin with, these consecration rites were a secretive and well-protected ceremony, harnessing the entirety of the Assyro-Babylonian cult apparatus.[55] It seems wise to approach the religio-historical divide with humility. It is likely that this divide, and our own divided ontology, accounts for some of the divergence of opinion among scholars regarding how to understand the transformation of the image into the living embodiment of the deity.[56] Arguments abound as to how or when Mesopotamians understood the deity to inhabit the divine image.[57] Benjamin Sommer's discussion of the *mīs pî/pūt pî* rituals presents the following tentative conclusions:

1) The divine image was birthed by deities. Though human participation in the formation of the cult statue is acknowledged in these texts, this is only to introduce the stringent denial by the artisans that they fashioned the deity.[58] The dual nature of the statue as both earthly and heavenly seems to be the ontological sticking point in both antiquity and contemporary scholarship. Are we talking about a full-blown ontological shift? Ryan Bonfiglio suggests we

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[54] J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), 128.

[55] A fact reflected in Catherine L. McDowell's refreshing candor: "even summarizing the *mīs pî/pūt pî* is difficult." McDowell, *The Image of God*, 53.

[56] On the problematic nature between ourselves and the object of study exacerbated by the object's foreignness and temporal distance see Bahrani, *The Graven Image*, 7 where she includes a snappy quote from Michael Ann Holly: "We may be talking about an artifact, but we are also talking about ourselves."

[57] Ryan Bonfiglio discusses a spectrum for scholarly (mis?)understanding of the relationship of signifier (*ṣalmu*) and signified (deity), from "reminder" to "embodiment," Ryan P. Bonfiglio, *Reading Images, Seeing Texts: Towards a Visual Hermeneutics for Biblical Studies.* 280. (Academic Press, 2016), 276. Judge and Puthoff, for instance, both note a general ambiguity and a lack of clarity in Assyro-Babylonian sources on this point. Puthoff describes the ancients as 'not always knowing which images were "representational copies" of a god who was absent and which were truly "embodied doubles" of a god who was very much present.' Tyson L. Puthoff, *Gods and Humans in the Ancient Near East,*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 213. Judge, whose interest has to do with the biblical polemic, considers Jacobsen's claim that the Mesopotamian evidence is contradictory before concluding with Moshe Weinfeld that ancient Israel, in any event, saw no distinction between other deities and their idols. Thomas Judge, *Other Gods and Idols: The Relationship Between the Worship of Other Gods and the Worship of Idols within the Old Testament,* 146.

[58] The text calls for all of the craftsmen 'who approached that god' along with all their equipment to be brought before the craftsmen deities. They are made to say: "I did not make him [the statue]; Ninagal [who is] Ea [god] of the smith made him." See Benjamin Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*, 19 n. 40. For the actual ritual texts see Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 80 (transliteration).

understand the consecration rite as actualizing the image's ontological *potential* to "function as the real presence" of the deity.[59] This is a metamorphosis, surely; but the transformation is not a total alteration of essence as it is dependent upon the cosmic nature of the materials from which it is fashioned.[60]

2) Assyro-Babylonian identification between divine image and deity was not total. Indeed, this is crucial for Sommer's thesis: there was a "fluidity" to the divine body; it was not confined or confinable. Nor was the image the *only* body of a god. It is not, Sommer argues, as if the heavenly body of a respective deity ceased to be once the *mīs pî/pīt pî* ceremony was complete. Deities manifested themselves in multiple places, even simultaneously. Further, deities could and did leave divine images (i.e., their abandoning a city and people). The relationship between the signifier (*ṣalmu*) and signified (deity) was not stable.[61] The important point, however, is that once the divine image passed through the *mīs pî/pīt pî* rituals, it did not merely depict the deity, it *was* the deity. The relationship between the cult statue and deity is put starkly by Dick and Walker in terms similar to that of the process of transubstantiation in the Eucharistic presence:

> By a cultic ritual (mīs pî) the "work of human hands" became for the iconodule the real presence of the deity! Offerings are brought before Marduk himself in the Esagila not before the statue of Marduk![62] This "work of

[59] Bonfiglio, *Reading Images, Seeing Texts*, 183; 212.

[60] Victor Hurowitz argues that the materials used in the construction of the *salmu* / *ilu*, especially the wood, were considered to be divine in origin, harvested from cosmic trees. For instance, the mēsu tree from which Marduk was manufactured in the Erra myth could be referred to as "the flesh of the gods" (šīr ilī). V.A. Hurowitz, "What Goes In Is What Comes Out–Materials for Creating Cult Statues," in Gary M. Beckman and Theodore J. Lewis, eds., *Text, Artifact and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion* (Providence: Brown University Press, 2006), 13. See also Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "The Mesopotamian God Image, from Womb to Tomb," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 123:1, 2003, 147–57. In the latter he cites the origin of the wood in the celestial forest, p. 150. See also Benjamin Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 183 n. 40 where he entertains Barlejung's argument that the mouth-washing ritual "consolidated (but did not constitute) the connection between god and image," and brief counter-argument. Yet, see Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), Translation 100 "tamarisk…from its trunk gods are made" and n. 70, "the tamarisk wood was used for making divine statues; Šep lemutti 81-82: "Bones of divinity, holy tamarisk, pure wood."

[61] Bahrani argues that this is so because "in the Assyro-Babylonian view the world is not stable and actual…because it is always in the process of becoming." Bahrani, *Graven Image*, 132.

[62] Though Thorkild Jacobsen uses the language of "transubstantiation," the comparison of the divine image to Eucharistic "real presence" is first used by Michael B. Dick. It has been hugely influential. Walker and Dick, "Induction of the Cult Image," 57 n. 2. See also Michael B. Dick, "The Mesopotamian Cult Statue: A Sacramental Encounter with Divinity" in *Cult Image and Divine Representation in the Ancient Near East*. For some fine-tuning of the theological provenance of "real presence" language see J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 128 n. 131. Judge and Puthoff, for instance, employ the language of the deities' "real presence" in the divine image once the vivification ceremonies have been complete. See Puthoff, *Gods and Humans,* 212 and Judge, *Other Gods and Idols: The Relationship Between the Worship of Other Gods and the Worship of Idols within the Old Testament,* 146. Benjamin Sommer also

> human hands," the פסל of Isa 40–48, then, is for the iconodule the encounterable deity: "localized, visible, corporeal."[63]

2.3.2 The *Mīs pî* and the renovation of divine image in times of war

Thorkild Jacobsen, Christopher Walker and Michael Dick, and many others after them have underscored the link between the loss or damage of the divine image, often in war, and the need for the creation of a new one or refurbishment of an old one.[64] *Mīs pî* rituals were, thus, not only conducted on newly fashioned divine images, but also on those which had been abducted and defaced, often during warfare. Conquering armies regularly abducted and damaged the divine images, depositing them in their own sanctuaries or treasuries.[65] The *mīs pî*/*pīt pî* ritual provides access to the Mesopotamian "answer" to this dire threat, which was able to destabilize cosmic order.[66]

The conquering of a city was explained, often by both victor and vanquished, as the final outcome of a deity's anger, regularly expressed in terms of divine abandonment. This was a widespread theological interpretation of disaster and defeat and was expressed as a literary motif in both Mesopotamian and Israelite literature.[67] Divine abandonment was *seen* graphically in the

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employs "real presence" language, even describing the *ṣalmu* as "an incarnation, whose substance was identical with that of the god." Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 22.

[63] J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 25.

[64] Jacobsen's provides three examples of divine images being returned and refurbished. Jacobsen, "The Graven Image," 16–17; See also in depth discussion of the need and practice of refurbishing images in Christopher Walker and Michael Dick, "The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia: The Mesopotamian mīs pî Ritual," in Michael B. Dick (ed.), *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 58ff. Levtow organizes his discussion of the abduction/deportation, mutilation or destruction, and the repair and return from the perspectives of "Victor" and "Vanquished". He concludes that what Cyrus achieved "through both force and discourse," is that which "the authors of the icon parodies pursued for Israel through *discourse alone*: power over ritual modes of social formation…" Levtow, 125. Though I would not dispute the connection between "political power and its iconic manifestations and reifications," I do not think that "Israel's foray into the iconic politics of ancient West Asia" was meant only to "dethrone the gods of Babylon, enthrone Yahweh, and turn defeat into victory through the manipulation of iconic modes of social formation." Levtow, *Images of Others*, 100–125. For a detailed chronological table (ca. 1590–530 BCE) listing evidence for one or more of the often related actions of removing, repairing, and returning the divine image, see the appendix in John F. Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth,* 157–69.

[65] Mordechai Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah, and Israel in the eighth and seventh centuries BCE.* (Missoula, Montana: Society of Biblical Literature and Scholars Press, 1974), 22; Bonfiglio, *Reading Images, Seeing Texts*, 289.

[66] See "Epic of Erra." Samuel Balentine discusses general pan-ANE historical background for the motif of divine hiddenness. He presents several examples from Mesopotamia in which national or corporate calamity is understood in terms of a deity abandoning a city or people. Samuel Balentine, *The Hidden God: The Hidden Face of God in the Old Testament*, 41–45.

[67] John Kutsko provides a helpful review of the evidence linking divine displeasure and the status of divine images in the Assyro-Babylonian sources to introduce the precedent for a deity's self-exile. This includes discussion of the abduction, repair, and return of divine images before he turns his attention to Ezekiel's adaptation of this motif. Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 103–123. For the connection between outcomes at war and more specifically on

abduction of divine statuary by the vanquishing army.[68] Iconographic witness to this practice is evidenced in the gypsum wall reliefs of Tiglath-Pileser III's South-West Palace, which depict the deportation of divine images, carried off by Assyrian soldiers (fig. 1).

Figure 1 (BM 118931; Relief 35 - Slab 3; photo: author's)

There is a plausible connection between this procession of divine images taken into captivity and the wall relief situated immediately to its right in the British Museum, which depicts Tiglath-pileser III with his foot on the neck of a genuflecting enemy (fig. 2).

military defeat as a manifestation of divine abandonment see Anne Löhnert, "Manipulating the Gods: Lamenting in Context," in Radner and Eleanor Robson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 409–11.

[68] Cogan concludes thus: "In practical terms, the motif of divine abandonment resulted in the deportation of divine images…" Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 21. Cogan also relates how Nabonidus gathered the gods from various districts into the capital and how the Cyrus cylinder interprets Nabonidus' ingathering of the gods: "The gods, who lived among them, left their abode, angry that he had brought them into Babylon." Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 32–33. See also Paul-Alain Beaulieu, "An Episode in the Fall of Babylon to the Persians," JNES 52, no. 4 (1993): 242.

Figure 2 (BM 118933; Relief 34 - Slab 2; photo: author's)

Though the original location of these two slabs appears to have been in the NW palace at Nimrud, they belong to slabs referred to as "Wall r" and were found in close proximity to one another. Barnett and Falkner posit that slab 2 (fig. 2) would have originally stood to the right of slab 3 (fig. 1) after an intermediate slab. Indeed, this is how the slabs are displayed at the British Museum (fig. 3).

Figure 3 (BM 118933; Relief 34 - Slab 2; photo: author's)

These plausible iconographic connections serve as an ingress to deeper thinking about the constellation of ideas in Isa 45:14–17. In Isa 45:14, we find an example of what Michael J. Chan refers to as the Wealth of Nations tradition. He defines this tradition as "a trinodal constellation, in which (1) foreign nations bring their (2) wealth to a (3) royal figure as an act of homage, honor, and submission." He surveys this tradition not only throughout the Hebrew Bible, but also throughout the ancient Near East, both in visual and textual sources.[69] Chan has

[69] Michael J. Chan, *The Wealth of Nations: A Tradition-Historical Study* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 21. According to Chan the Wealth of Nations tradition is hard to date, was "in the air" and part of the 'canon' of ANE imperial symbolism. Chan, 196. He observes the tradition in the following biblical texts: 1 Kgs 10:1-10, 13, 15//2 Chr 9:1-9, 12, 14; 1 Kgs 10:23- 25//2 Chr 9:22-24; Pss 68:19, 30-32; 72:10-11; 76:12; 96:7-8//1 Chr 16:28-29; Isa 18:7; 45:14; 60:4-17; 61:5-6; 66:12; Zeph 3:10; and 2 Chr 32:23. Chan, *The Wealth of Nations*, 198. In his analysis of Mesopotamian iconographic evidence Chan finds no extant Babylonian artifacts depicting foreigners bearing wealth to the king (though many from the Neo-Assyrian period). Chan, The *Wealth of Nations*, 152. Similarly, the literary/inscriptional evidence for the Wealth of Nations tradition is most abundant in the Neo-Assyrian period. There is, however, such evidence in Babylonia and Persia. In his analysis of the Cyrus Cylinder Chan notes that its formulation was meant "to appeal to the traditional sense of its Mesopotamian audience" and was particularly modelled on the building inscriptions of Ashurbanipal. Chan, *The Wealth of Nations*, 191.

also shown some broader links in the ANE between the themes of temple renovation and the receiving of tribute.[70]

Immediately following in Isa 45:15, we find the confession to Israel's deity: "Surely, you are a God who hides himself." Jean-Georges Heintz has posited that this confession of God's hiding should be understood as a satirical allusion to the theme of the absent deity, which was well-established in the Mesopotamian record. Among other sources in his discussion of the Mesopotamian evidence, Heintz includes a reconstructed sketch of the above relief (fig. 1).[71] Heintz's article is partially motivated by a desire to demonstrate the coherence of the final form of the MT over against what he sees as ill-informed emendations of earlier scholars and the reading of his contemporary, M. Dijkstra, who posits a theory of textual displacement in need of correction.[72] Central to Dijkstra's proposal is the seeming disjunction between Isa 45:14, 16 (salvation for Zion) and Isa 45:15; 17–19 (v. 15 as the prophet quoting a lament of the exiles and vv. 17–19 as the prophetic response contesting v. 15). Heintz's argument would benefit from an explanation that provides coherence between v. 14 and v. 15. Despite his argument for the coherence of the whole unit, however, Heintz leaves out detailed discussion of how v. 14 contributes to an understanding of divine hiddenness within his proffered reading. This makes his case against scholarly positions, such as that of Westermann, who holds that Isa 45:14 was a fragment more connected to Isaiah 60–62 which was secondarily added to this section, somewhat less convincing.[73]

If we return to the above discussion of the bas reliefs of Tiglath-pileser III, however, we find the possible association of foreigners bowing down, a procession of exiled divine images, and the paying of tribute being explicitly mentioned in the inscriptions associated with both reliefs. This is the very constellation of themes found in our pericope. The inscription associated with Figure 1 above mentions tribute (*ma-da-at-ta-su*) as well as the phrase, "they came and kissed my feet;" while the inscription associated with Figure 2 refers to tribute (*ma-da-at-tu*) Tiglath-

[70] Chan, *The Wealth of Nations*, 189.

[71] Jean-Georges Heintz, "De l'absence de la statue divine au 'Dieu qui se cache' (Esaïe 45,15)." *Revue d'histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 59 (1979): 435.

[72] Dijkstra sees as a significant contribution of his analysis the conclusion: "…for a reason difficult to grasp, verses 15 and 16 were reversed in an early stage of the textual transmission. Formally, v. 16 belongs more to v. 14 than to any other verse in this context." Meindert Dijkstra, „Zur Deutung von Jesaja 45:15ff" *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft.* 89:2 (1977): 222.

[73] Westermann, it should be noted, is at a loss to explain how this verse, "which, as we have seen, properly belongs to the description given in Isa. 60, came to be placed here." Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 170. See also the detailed description of the links between Isa 45:14 and Isaiah 60–61 in Reinhard G. Kratz, *Kyros im Deuterojesaja-Buch Redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Entstehung und Theologie von Jesaja 40-55.* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 94 n349.

pileser III received from the kings of the West.[74] In an article that furnishes supporting data for Shalom Paul's emendation from אנשׁי מדה (men of stature) to נשׂאי מדה (bearers of tribute) in v. 14, Samuel Boyd argues as follows: "If one replaces the semantics of Hebrew מדה with the Akkadian *maddattu* and rearranges the previous word along the lines examined above, then the phrase reads נשׂאי מדה meaning 'those bearing tribute'"[75] After arguing for how this scribal change came about, Boyd continues:

> Regarding the literary context of Isa. 45:14 specifically, these nations would be bringing their wares as tribute to Israel in similar fashion to reliefs from the Neo-Assyrian to the Persian periods. It should be noted that the victory stele of Esarhaddon includes not only these African nations in its reliefs, but also the phrase 'king of the kings of Egypt, Paturisu and Kush' which became part of his 'standard titulary' according to John Malcolm Russell. The phrase מדה נשׂאי maps perfectly to the Akkadian phrase *nās maddatte*.[76]

Related to this constellation of themes (exile of divine images, taking plunder, and receiving of tribute), Ryan Bonfiglio argues that the abduction of images should be understood as far more meaningful an act than mere "barbaric looting," or "propaganda."[77] The acts of deportation and defacement were predicated on the ontological foundation already discussed, in which the image was believed to "embody the real presence" of king or deity. Damage to these images, especially those of foreign kings, targeted the sensory organs, "such as the eyes, ears, nose, and mouth."[78] Bonfiglio suggests that,

> …scratching out the eyes and mouth of an image might have been the logical converse of the consecration ceremonies in which an image obtains its life and agency through the ritual washing or opening of these same features. If this is the case, invading soldiers might be understood as attempting to reverse the very mechanism by which the image became animated in the first place. Thus, rather than being an expression of political vandalism, the

[74] Paul Rost, *Die Keilschrifttexte Tiglat-Pilesers III* (Leipzig: E. Pfeiffer, 1893), 12. See especially ln. 54. Neo-Bayblonian and Persian sources also appear to have associated the return of divine images with tribute.

[75] Samuel Boyd, "Two Instances of Language Contact in Isaiah 45: 14." *Journal of Semitic Studies* 64/2 (2019), 405.

[76] Samuel Boyd, "Two Instances of Language Contact in Isaiah 45: 14," 407–408. Though I find Boyd's presentation engaging and persuasive, I still see no problem with accepting Akkadian as "the medium through which this expression could appear in Isa. 45:14" (Boyd, 410), and not Aramaic as Boyd and Paul argue.

[77] Bonfiglio here follows the work of Morton Cogan and Z. Bahrani. Bonfiglio, *Reading Images, Seeing Texts*, 212.

[78] Byzantine emperors are known to have comparably mutilated potential rivals making them ineligible for the throne. This appears to be a shared sense of symbolic meaning in the history of ideas.

> destruction of images in the context of war was a deliberate attempt to extract from an image its internal agency and lifelike status.[79]

I suggest that Isa 40–48 participates in, perhaps parodying, the above motif. We find, for instance, in Isa 42:17-20 the people described in biting irony as deaf and blind[80] before the statement that Yahweh gave up Jacob and Israel (describing them as trapped in pits and hidden in prisons), language which might even suggest the comparison to plunder itself. For instance, Cogan has discussed the practice of spoliation or exile of divine images as booty and their being deposited in temples or "packed away until further disposition."[81] In vs. 25, we read that Yahweh "set him on fire all around, but he did not understand."[82] We find similar descriptions at Isa 43:28 and 47:6 of Yahweh being responsible for the community's profanation (a claim connected to Yahweh as sole proprietor of Jacob-Israel).

2.4 Israel as Divine Image: Evidence Internal to Isaiah 40-48

So what does all of this have to do with Isa 40–48, and divine hiddenness more specifically therein? Much, in every way. Several sections of Isa 40–48, especially those often referred to as the idol-parodies and chiefly Isa 44:9-20, have received comparative analysis alongside the *mīs pî/pīt pî* ritual.[83] Based on the display of intimate knowledge of these rituals in the so-called idol-parodies, Bonfiglio has argued, contra Robert Carroll, that DI did not misunderstand the Babylonian conceptual world. Rather, what we find is deliberate distortion based on the seriousness of the belief that these images *had lives of their own*.[84] Rather, DI

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[79] Bonfiglio, *Reading Images, Seeing Texts*, 213.

[80] The poetic progression of Isa 42:17–18 deftly ties together the great shame of those who worship a "molten image" [מַסֵּכָה] with ensuing blindness and deafness.

[81] Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 22–30.

[82] This being burned may have an interesting parallel to the wood of the idol burned in Isa 44:16.

[83] M. Dick, "Worshipping Idols: What Isaiah Didn't Know," BR 18 (2002) 36; G. L. Glover, "Getting a Word in Edgewise: A New Historicist Interpretation of Deutero-Isaiah's Idol Rhetoric." Doctor of Philosophy, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey 1999; Levtow, *Images of Others* (2014); J. S. Morrison, "Renovating a Deity: The Formation of Biblical Craftsmanship Metaphors and the Artisanal God-Talk of Deutero-Isaiah." Diss, Brandeis University, 2017; Catherine L. McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden*; Joachim Schaper, "Divine Images, Iconophobia and Monotheism in Isaiah 40–66", in L.S. Tiemeyer and H. Barstad (eds.), *Continuity and Discontinuity: Chronological and Thematic Development in Isaiah 40–66* (FRLANT), (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 145–158. Shaper argues contra Knut Holter for a genealogical connection, specifically that Second Isaiah is writing in response to the *mis pî/pit pî*, 152–53.

[84] Bonfiglio, *Reading Images, Seeing Texts*, 224. DI crafts the ironic image in which craftsmanship is itself an ontological undoing: the craftsman blinds his own eyes in the opening of the image's. It is true that the biblical author deliberately distorts. Yet, that is a very different thing than misunderstanding. Brevard Childs goes so far as to conclude that the details in Isa 44 "reveal careful firsthand observations." Childs, *Isaiah*, 343. See also Levtow, *Images of Others*, 4.

participates in the symbols and imagery of these conceptualities. The disagreement surrounds the fundamental question of "who fabricates whom?" and in what way. The very root of this discourse involves a several-pronged prophetic rejoinder regarding the deities' "mode of presencing." In this section, I argue that Isa 40–48 not only attacks but participates in these iconic and ritual conceptualities in order to radically reconfigure them for the sake of his audience.[85] Only by understanding what Clifford Geerts refers to as the "webs of significance" from which the symbolic and theological universe of Isa 40–48 is spun can we come to better discern and appreciate the theological program of this unit, especially as it relates to the meaning of God's hiddenness.[86] In order to do this, we will now look at evidence internal to Isa 40–48.

There is much inherent to the structure and imagery of Isa 40–48 to invite a reading of this section alongside the *mīs pî/pīt pî* ritual. To begin with, there is a pervasive juxtaposition of Yahweh not only or even principally with other deities, but with the craftsmen of idols. A related implication of this juxtaposition is that Israel is posited in some comparative relationship to the images of the nations – to use Isaiah's terminology the פסל (graven image). Though the juxtaposition of Yahweh with idol fabricators has received detailed investigation by Knut Holter and to a lesser extent by Richard Clifford and Nathan MacDonald, there has been considerably less attention given to the relationship between Israel-Jacob and the idols in Isa 40–48.[87] For this reason, I first present an overview of parallels of humanly-fabricated deities with the deity-fabricated Israel internal to Isa 40–48. By comparing the general concerns and purpose of this

[85] Both the original audience and, with Ricoeur, those like ourselves who come later to wrestle with these conceptualities' "implicit wealth of meaning"; or perhaps wrestle ourselves *into* that "indestructible symbol which henceforth belongs to the unchanging treasury of the Biblical canon." Paul Ricoeur, "The Image of God and the Epic of Man," in *History and Truth* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1965), 110.

[86] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures, Selected Essays.* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1973), 5. Geertz riffs here on Max Weber's observation that humanity is "an animal suspended in webs of significance," which are self-spun. Geertz proceeds to call these webs "culture," the analysis of which is interpretive, a search for meaning. Gregory Glover employs Geertz's ethnographic differentiation between "thin" and "thick description" to reappraise Isa 40–48's "so-called idol passages." The texts and constructive insights Glover amasses to arrive at a "thick description" aide his critique of historical criticism's "'thin description' (Deutero-Isaiah holds a negative view of idol production)." The thickly described historical reconstruction he arrives at, however, seems unnecessarily specific given the poetic features of DI. Gregory Glover, "Getting a Word in Edgwise," 46. For his concept of "web of imaginative construction," see R.G. Collingwood, "The Historical Imagination," in *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 231–49.

[87] For the former juxtaposition (Yahweh with idol fabricators): Knut Holter, *Second Isaiah's Idol-Fabrication Passages Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie* 28. (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH, 1995); Richard J. Clifford, "The Function of Idol Passages in Second Isaiah." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 42/4 (1980): 450–64; Nathan MacDonald, "Aniconism in the Old Testament," in Robert P. Gordon (ed.), *The God of Israel.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 20–34. However, see in discussion to follow: G. L. Glover, "Getting a Word in Edgewise" and J. S. Morrison, "Renovating a Deity: The Formation of Biblical Craftsmanship Metaphors and the Artisanal God-Talk of Deutero-Isaiah" (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 2017).

discourse with those of the *mīs pî/pīt pî* ritual via specific imagery and themes, we can better discern the theological distinctives of the Isaianic material, especially concerning divine presence and hiddenness. I hope to highlight how the poetic positing of Jacob-Israel as a locus of theophany in Isaiah 40-48 (part of a radical re-configuration of the *mīs pî/pīt pî*) can be appreciated as a constructive theological statement. I will then later coordinate the implications of this analysis with the meaning(s) of hiddenness in Isaiah 45:15.

Though a growing number of biblical scholars have noted the centrality and rhetorical function of the comparison between Yahweh and the idol craftsmen in Isa 40–48, there has been far less interaction with a central implication of that comparison, namely that Israel, as that which Yahweh forms and makes, stands over against the divine statues. In a chapter entitled "Aniconism in the Old Testament," Nathan MacDonald organizes approaches which attempt to explain the "underlying rationale and purpose of the aniconic tradition," and after finding each wanting in some respect, turns his attention to Isaiah 40-48, among others. MacDonald helpfully distinguishes a division of labor (and possible difference of priorities) between the historian of Israelite religion, whose interests lie more closely to origin and rationale, and that of the biblical exegete, whose work will likely touch on the meaning of aniconism(s) within Israel, "and for the biblical theological task."[88] MacDonald classes his work among the latter. In this work he first revisits John Kutsko's work on divine presence and absence in Ezekiel, summarizing that Kutsko demonstrated that "Ezekiel's concern (was) to relate the divine presence to the people rather than a place or object."[89] In his section on Isaiah 40-48 MacDonald fruitfully extends Knut Holter's observation that the prophet juxtaposed Yahweh and the idol-fabricators to its implied corollary: Israel as contrasted to the idols. Though his treatment is very brief, limited only to sections of "idol polemic," the main lines of the argument I wish to pursue are cogently set down there. He observes that "it is common to regard these passages as little more than parodies that misrepresent Mesopotamian worship of images," which have regularly been "treated as distinct from the more exalted prose that constitutes the rest of Second Isaiah."[90] MacDonald suggests that where the theology or detail of Mesopotamian worship is muddled, this is purposeful.[91] MacDonald pushes beyond Holter's main thesis to briefly explore the important implication regarding the contrast between Israel and the idols.

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[88] Nathan MacDonald, "Aniconism in the Old Testament." in Robert P. Gordon (ed.), *The God of Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 27.

[89] MacDonald, "Aniconism," 29.

[90] MacDonald, "Aniconism," 29.

[91] See Knut Holter, *Second Isaiah's Idol-Fabrication Passages*, 208–9 on the purposeful chronological disordering or scattering of well-known scenes from the world of idol-fabrication.

MacDonald notes the explicit links between the words and actions of idol-fabricators and the words and actions spoken by Yahweh to Jacob-Israel in Isa 41:6–7: "YHWH effects for Israel what the idol-fabricators cannot for their creations."[92] Isaiah 41:6–7 describes the frantic activity of the craftsman calling out to the smelter. Though the activity clearly connotes the idol (hammering, speaking to the soldering, stabilizing with nails to prevent toppling), it ironically refuses to signify it directly. The implication is that after all that hard work, nothing is really there at all. Isaiah 41:8 then addresses Jacob-Israel in direct contrast to this storm of activity with vacuity at its center: "But you Israel my servant, Jacob which I have chosen!" While precious wood is chosen for the fabrication of an idol (Isa 40:20, עֵץ לֹא־יִרְקַב יִבְחָר) Yahweh chooses Israel (Isa 41:8, יַעֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר בְּחַרְתִּיךָ cf. Isa 44:1).[93] A similar juxtaposition is often overlooked in the movement from Isa 41:29 to Isa 42:1.[94]

Isaiah 41:29	Isaiah 42:1
הֵן כֻּלָּם אָוֶן אֶפֶס מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם	הֵן עַבְדִּי אֶתְמָךְ־בּוֹ בְּחִירִי רָצְתָה נַפְשִׁי
רוּחַ וָתֹהוּ נְסִכֵּיהֶם:	נָתַתִּי רוּחִי עָלָיו מִשְׁפָּט לַגּוֹיִם יוֹצִיא:

From a straightforward sequential reading of the text, leaving aside for a moment the poetic ambiguity and the 'identity crisis' of the servant in Isaiah scholarship and sticking with Israel-Jacob having been established quite emphatically as "my servant" in Isa 41:8ff, a contrast is created with the sequencing of the two occurrences of הֵן.[95] First, "all of them" are contrasted to

[92] MacDonald, "Aniconism," 30.

[93] See Hugh GM Williamson, "Isaiah 40, 20-A Case of Not Seeing the Wood for the Trees." *Biblica* (1986): 1–20. Here Williamson argues contra Driver that עֵץ לֹא־יִרְקַב יִבְחָר is a gloss on the more difficult הַמְסָכָּן . He rightly concludes that this is a reference to the Akkadian *musukkannu* or *me-suk-kan-nu*. However, referring to the relationship between Isa 40:19–20 Williamson states, "Those who think of only one idol … imply that the work of overlaying was done before the choice of wooden core, which is absurd…" Yes, precisely. It *is* absurd. That is the point. P. 14 In fact, Williamson goes on to affirm that much of DI's relating to idols is "conducted precisely in terms of the absurdity of the enterprise…" Williamson, 16.

[94] Lexical similarities are masked in many translations (e.g., the NRSV). Add to this the unhelpful chapter break and the near-insurmountability of readerly expectation once the Duhmian "servant song" is encountered. Goldingay identifies Isa 41:1–20 and 41:21–17 as parallel or spiral sequences. See Jim W. Adams, *The Performative Nature and Function*, 107 and Goldingay, "Arrangement of Isaiah," 289–99.

[95] Adams argues convincingly that here, as elsewhere in Isa 40–48, the referent is Jacob-Israel. He categorizes the thirteen uses of עבד (always singular) in Isa 40–48 as follows: seven passages where Jacob–Israel is identified (41:8; 44:1, 2, 21 [2x]; 45:4; 48:20); four passages in which עבד seems to refer to the nation with little ambiguity (41:9; 42:19 [2x]; 43:10); two more ambiguous uses, one of which is Isa 42:1. However, the use of תמך and בחר both in Isa 42:1 build on previous use of the same roots in clear address to Jacob-Israel as servant in 41:8–10. Jim W. Adams, *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40–55*, 106–7.

"my servant" and "their works" to "my chosen one." The nothingness of "their works" (אֶפֶס מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם)[96] is contrasted with Yahweh's upholding and being pleased with his servant (תמך; c.f. 41:10, אַף־תְּמַכְתִּיךְ בִּימִין צִדְקִי). The relationship between "actors" and "the ontology of the acted upon" (images / chosen one) is front and center here. Lastly, the contrast is underscored by the ironic multiple use of רוּחַ for "their (molten) images" and the servant/chosen upon whom "I place my spirit."

The description of Jacob-Israel as fashioned by Yahweh continues to deepen in Isa 40–48. There is a broad deployment of verbs which describe fabrication or forging, such as יצר and עשה, particularly in the participial use. Isaiah 43:1 juxtaposes such participles (בֹּרַאֲךָ and וְיֹצֶרְךָ) in direct address to Yahweh's primary addressee: "your creator, Jacob / your fashioner, Israel" (cf. בּוֹרֵא יִשְׂרָאֵל in 43:15). Isa 42:8 states that Yahweh will hand over neither his glory nor his praise to graven images (לַפְּסִילִים וּתְהִלָּתִי וּכְבוֹדִי לְאַחֵר לֹא־אֶתֵּן). In contrast, we find the declaration in Isa 43:20–21 that Yahweh fashioned (יצר) his chosen people (עַמִּי בְחִירִי / עַם־זוּ) for himself "that they might declare [his] praise."[97]

Further, I want to argue that the placement of the polemical-satirical description of idol-fabrication in 44:9-20 follows the same general contrastive pattern and that this is of great rhetorical and theological importance.[98] To begin with, this scene is revealingly sandwiched between direct addresses to Israel/Jacob in Isa 44:1–8 and 44:21–23. In both addresses, "fabrication" participles are again used. In Isa 44:2 we find, "Thus says Yahweh, *your maker* (עֹשֶׂךָ) and *your fashioner* (יֹצֶרְךָ) from the womb…" Then, in Isa 44:8–9, the connection between the idol scene and its immediate context is revealed in a similar juxtaposition: "you are my witnesses" (Isa 44:8) is contrasted with "their witnesses" (i.e., of the idol-fabricators).[99] All of Yahweh's crafting, his work of creation, is to bring Israel literally back to its senses, to recognize itself as the servant, perhaps even the trademark, of Yahweh. As MacDonald concludes, "The idols of the nations are witnesses that cannot see or know (44:9), but Israel is to be a trustworthy

[96] It is tempting to read the ubiquity of אֶפֶס in Isa 40–48 as an echo or play on the *apsū*, the fresh-water sea central to the *mīs pî/pīt pî* ritual texts; or, even more conjectural, as a metathesis of the prevalent *āšipu* priests. See *HALOT* 771.

[97] This is also a rich allusion to Exodus 15, the song of the sea.

[98] On the relationship between humor/satire and parody see Will Kynes, "Beat Your Parodies into Swords, and Your Parodied Books into Spears: A New Paradigm for Parody in the Hebrew Bible," *Biblical Interpretation* 19 (2011): 276–310.

[99] The construct form יְצַרֵי־פֶסֶל is used in Isa 44:9 and is paralleled with וְעֵדֵיהֶם. That יצר is used by DI to refer specifically to the fabrication of "a deity" is seen in 44:10.

witness to Yahweh's acts (43:10, 12)."[100] The return to primary addressee in 44:21ff must also be stressed. On the heels of all the image-fashioning imagery in Isa 44:9–20, the prophetic summons is:

> Remember these things Jacob and Israel for my servant you are;
> I have *fashioned* you a servant to me you are…

Incredibly, not only *has* Yahweh redeemed Jacob, but he *will be* glorified in Israel (וּבְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִתְפָּאָר). This stands in contrast to the "human glory" of the divine image as described in Isa 44:13 (כִּתְפִּאֶרֶת אָדָם). Isaiah 44:24, which leads out into the "Cyrus reveal", again addresses Israel with "fashioning" appellations.

This contrast between idol and Israel comes to its most overt expression in Isa 46 where the Babylonians carrying their idols into captivity are vividly compared with Yahweh, who carries His people (out of exile). Though MacDonald alludes to the paralleling of the verbs נשא and עמס used to describe Bel and Nebo being born by beasts of burden (46:1-2) contrasted with Israel being born up by Yahweh (46:3) this comparison can also be seen in the verbs סבל and עשה being used of Yahweh's redemptive activity vis-à-vis Israel (46:4), with the idol craftsmen smelting an image (צרף and עשה), which they then lift upon their shoulders and carry (נשא and סבל; in 46:6-7). [101] Between this juxtaposition falls, once again, the crucial question of Isa 40-48: "To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, as though we were alike? (Isa 46:5)" Here, MacDonald is on a promising trajectory in answering the prophet's question, thus: "there can be no question of Israel being similar to Yahweh. It might be possible, however, to say that the prophet sees Israel as an appropriate representative of Yahweh, a functional equivalent of the idols of other nations."[102] This is further corroborated by Yahweh sharing or giving to Israel "my glory/beauty" in Isa 46:13 (נָתַתִּי לְיִשְׂרָאֵל תִּפְאַרְתִּי). Once again, the statement is striking as both a contrast to the glory/beauty forged by the idol-craftsman in 44:13

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[100] MacDonald, "Aniconism," 31. Though he does not extend his discussion to the texts which refer to Israel as witness in Isa 44, MacDonald does correctly identify Isa 44:9 as a reference to the idols of the nations as their witnesses in contrast to Israel as YHWH'S witness in 44:8.

[101] See the recent suggestion of Zachary J. Schoening that birth imagery is integral to the idol polemic of DI, especially in Isa 46:1 where Bel's convulsing and Nebo's travailing refer to crouching in labor. He relates this to the birth and nurturing imagery in Isa 46:3–4 as well. Zachary J. Schoening, "Bel Convulses, Nebo Travails: A New Reading of Isaiah 46:1–4" (Paper presented at the SBL PCR 2021 Regional Meeting; Program Unit: The Bible and the Ancient Near East, March 3, 2021). Accessed on Nov 29, 2021: sblpcr.wordpress.com/k10-bel-convulses-nebo-travails/

[102] MacDonald, "Aniconism," 31. Though similarity between Yahweh's strength and those who wait for him and his transformational activity on their behalf is implied in Isa 40:28-31. I am thankful to Professor Walter Moberly for underscoring this in personal conversation.

(כְּתַבְנִית אִישׁ כְּתִפְאֶרֶת אָדָם), but also because Yahweh explicitly states that he will not share his glory with another (cf. 42:8; 48:11). Isa 48:10-11 states, "See, I have refined you, but not like silver; I have tested you in the furnace of adversity." Yahweh's fabrication/purification work is here further contrasted with the work of craftsmen to create an idol (cf. Isa 40:19-20 where the same verbs צרף and בחר are used in construction of idol). The smelting verb צְרַפְתִּיךָ is here artfully collocated with a double entendre/ wordplay בְּחַרְתִּיךָ בְּכוּר עֹנִי which both plays on the theme of testing and choosing Israel (בחר), firstborn (wordplay w/בכור), alongside the imagery of testing as an iron smelter (prepositional phrase (עֹנִי בְּכוּר , cf. 1 Kings 8:51. The paralleling of 48:10-11 is further revealing:

> See, I have refined you, but not like silver; I have tested you in the furnace of adversity. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for why should my name be profaned? My glory (כבודי) I will not give to another.

Israel's glory is not like the costly elements of gold and silver which plate the wooden core of the image (all of which would be weighty, כבד).[103] There is a fundamental difference in how Yahweh manifests his glory (כבוד) in Israel. We can see, then, that Yahweh's glory is inextricably implicated in the fabrication and smelting/choosing of Israel (perhaps in the context of Isa 40-48 'refurbishing/revivifying' becomes an apt description of the deliverance work).[104] Light is further thrown on the nexus of these ideas with the activity and will of Yahweh to open Israel's blind eyes and unstop their deaf ears (cf. 42:7; 48:8), and the very real and present danger of Israel-Jacob misattributing Yahweh's redemptive activity to idols (48:5) when we turn to the Babylonian context. We shall see that it is by consistent theological design and not simply a throw away literary flourish that in Isa 44:23 Yahweh's *being glorified in Israel* through his redemptive activity is carefully juxtaposed with a call for not only the heavens and earth but the forest and *every tree therein* to erupt in celebration:

פִּצְחוּ הָרִים רִנָּה יַעַר וְכָל־עֵץ בּוֹ
כִּי־גָאַל יְהוָה יַעֲקֹב וּבְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִתְפָּאָר׃

As Katie Heffelfinger argues, "in response to concerns over divine absence and silence, *Second Isaiah's strongest cohesive device is not a thematic or discursive claim like homecoming or comfort but the*

[103] Here, though the word כבוד is not used it is tempting to think of an ironic intention as the wood of the idol would itself be heavy.

[104] The same implication is discernible in the movement in Isa 42:7–8 which first describes YHWH's redemptive activity in 42:7 (opening eyes of the blind, bringing out prisoners from dark dungeons/prison) before declaring that YHWH does not give His glory or renown to idols in 42:8.

overwhelming presence of the speaking deity."[105] However, as seen above we must take into consideration the nature and effect of Yahweh's presence on Israel, his own functional equivalent to the idols. Over against the well-guarded, secretive, ritual practices, incantations, and processes by which the presence and glory of the Babylonian deities was manifest in the *mīs pî/pīt pî*, Isa 40–48 claims that "the glory of Yahweh will be revealed and *all people will see it together*," and that Israel is the fulcrum for this theophany-based rebuttal *to Israel* (cf. Israel's complaint in Isa 40:27).[106] In what follows, then, I will relate aspects of the *mīs pî/pīt pî* ritual to this relationship of theophany/divine presence and the fabrication of the divine image, which we have seen is already internal to Isa 40–48.

2.5 Isa 40–48 in light of the *mīs pî pīt pî*

The following section works toward a reading that provides greater coherence to this section of Isaiah, which Katie Heffelfinger has argued, contra Richard Clifford, is lacking a coherent overarching argument.[107] Though it is admittedly conjectural the degree to which Isa 40–48 might find coherence upon some of the scaffolding of the historical background provided above, the following discussion does suggest broader correspondences between Isa 40–48 and the *mīs pî pīt pî* (e.g. imagery, themes, and specificity of disputation). The purpose of the polemic is a radical reclamation of Israel's identity, a prophetic refiguration via reconciliation, even in the midst of Babylon.

2.5.1 Setting

The oscillation of settings in Isa 40–44 is reminiscent of, though not necessarily dependent on, the oscillation in the "mouth washing" ritual. In the latter the renovation of the image begins by auspicious divine signs or decree (e.g., Esarhaddon's Renewal of the Gods), and is fulfilled via many processions, from wilderness to orchard/garden, by important watercourses, and the focus on liminal spaces, ending in the deity's temple. In Isa 40–44 we find a divine

[105] Heffelfinger, *I am Large*, 33 (italics in original). Heffelfinger's counters arguments such as Richard J. Clifford who argues that Deutero-Isaiah is best read as "rhetoric," more or less in classically conceived genre terms. Though I agree that "homecoming" and "comfort" have often been overemphasized by interpreters as cohesive devices, this does not negate their force as important motifs in the discourse.

[106] In the cogent summary of Shalom Paul, "God reveals His glory to the world through Israel, as opposed to the idol craftsmen who construct deaf-and-dumb idols…" Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, 245.

[107] Heffelfinger, *I am Large*, 16. My proposal for the world behind the text is reconstructive.

charge going out,[108] leading out to the wilderness/way imagery in Isa 40:3, to multiple "scenes" depicting a setting for the idol craftsmen, to further procession and wilderness / garden imagery, which then leads on to the re-establishment of the temple in Jerusalem). For just one instance, the pools mentioned in Isa 42:15 are reminiscent of the Akkadian *agammu* (itself from Sumeraian agam, A.BAD) "swamp, reed lagoon," and their association with the birth of the divine images may contribute to Yahweh's drying them up.[109] Importantly, we also find the imagery of "drying the rivers," and the deep just following a stacking of participles Yahweh's action in overturning all Babylon's complex cultic rites and rituals, with an emphasis on diviners and sages (Isa 44:25–28). This leads us to the next section.

2.5.2 Actors

We have already discussed the contrast of Yahweh with idol fabricators and calling deities to speak forth what is to come or give counsel (Isa 41:21–28) to justify their claim to divinity is well known. Additionally, we find that Yahweh is the "bringer forth" of the heavenly host (Isa 40:26; c.f. claim that Yahweh has commanded all the host of heaven at 45:12, contra the Assyro-Babylonian connection of deities with heavenly host, the names of which are on full display in the ritual texts described above).[110] As just mentioned, after the extended idol-parody in Isa 44:9-20, we find divine asseverations regarding Israel's God as sole-creator (in craftsmanship language) conjoined to participles used for his frustration of Babylonian diviners, making foolish the sorcerers, and nullifying their sages.

מֵפֵר אֹתוֹת בַּדִּים וְקֹסְמִים יְהוֹלֵל
מֵשִׁיב חֲכָמִים אָחוֹר וְדַעְתָּם יְשַׁכֵּל[111]

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[108] F.M. Cross, "The Council of Yahweh;" c.f. For a table illustrating the relationship and a juxtaposition of the Mesopotamian and Yahwistic conception of the imperial assembly see Alan Lenzi, *Secrecy and the Gods: Secret Knowledge in Ancient Mesopotamia and Biblical Israel.* (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2008), 271. In DI it is the prophet, not another of the pantheon, who is called to go forth to set things right.

[109] Paul V. Mankowski, S.J. *Akkadian Loanwords in Biblical Hebrew* (Harvard Semitic Museum Publications, Harvard Semitic Studies, no. 47; Winona Lake, Indiana, 2000), 20. Alongside these reed lagoons we find in this strange poetry that Yahweh will cause even mountains to dry up (אַחֲרִיב הָרִים)! Though conjectural, one possible explanation for this might be the background of the mythological mountain of the Apsû, which also features in the *mīs pî pīt pî* texts. Similarly, there might be something of this background in the enigmatic use of reed (קָנֶה): Isa 42:3, 43:24, and 46:6.

[110] The same verb is importantly used for "bringing forth" the blind/deaf nation of Israel in Isa 43:8.

[111] See Paul's helpful discussion on text, translation, comparative semitics and Babylonian practice. S. Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, 246. Compare this material at Isa 45:25–26 to references in Incantatory Tablet 3 to the deities "who direct the decisions of the heavens and earth," who "loosen the evil portents and signs." Along somewhat similar lines many have suggested Isa 45:7's thorny assertion that Yahweh alone is "shaper of light and creator of darkness, maker of peace and creator of evil" might be locking horns with a Zoroastrian background or best understood as an inner-Israelite polemic with Genesis 1. However, it is just as reasonable to understand such a statement against the

This divine showdown is here reaching a head at the unveiling of Cyrus as the means by which Yahweh's glory will be manifest (in the rebuilding of Jerusalem and repatriating of Israel). We then see the denouement of this trial at Isa 45:18ff, followed by the defeated deities of Babylon, Marduk and Nebo, parodied into exile (46:1-2). Closely related to this parody is another: Babylon's downfall (Isa 47), in which the impotence of lady Babylon's abundant sorcery and divination are further mocked.[112]

Walker/Dick and McDowell have focused on Isaiah 44:11's emphasis on the genesis of the graven image being of *human* craftsmen [וְחָרָשִׁים הֵמָּה מֵאָדָם].[113] The relevant section for comparison in Isaiah states:

> "All fashioners of idols are nothing (תֹּהוּ), and the things they delight in do not profit; their witnesses cannot see; they do not know. And so they will be put to shame. Who fashions a god or casts an image that cannot profit? Look, all its devotees (or spells, חֲבֵרָיו) shall be put to shame; the craftsmen (חָרָשִׁים), they are merely human. Let them all assemble, let them stand up; they shall be terrified, they shall all be put to shame."

In fact, the use of several terms here may be to effect a double entendre. First, the use of חֲבֵרָיו for "devotees" may be polysemous. Straightforwardly it means those who attach themselves to idols. However, "if one vocalizes the substantive חֲבָרָיו or חֹבְרָיו … it would refer to one who casts magical spells, as in Deut 18:10-11".[114] Secondly, the use of חָרָשִׁים for craftsmen can be connected to magical spells or enchanters in the cognate languages.[115] Shalom Paul recognizes this then as a possible barb against the "mouth washing" ritual – itself replete with incantations, specifically to the place in the ritual where all the craftsmen "who approached that god" are brought near and made to say, "I did not make him (the statue), Ninagal (who is) Ea (god) of the smith made him."[116] This suggestion becomes even more likely when considering that it is precisely the content of the witness of these craftsmen regarding divine agency over

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wider pan-Assyro-Babylonian background. For instance, see the same section of above incantation which claims the deities "dispel evil and establish the good"

[112] For the similarity of this prophetic anthropomorphization to ANE laments see S. Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, 288.

[113] Though this might also be translated as "craftsmen they are, from human (origin)"

[114] Paul, *Isaiah 40–66,* 234-235. Importantly, for the latter resonance the term appears twice a few chapters later in Isa 47:9, regarding the downfall of Babylon: "Despite your many enchantments and all your countless *spells* (בְּעָצְמַת חֲבָרַיִךְ מְאֹד)" and "Stand up, with your *spells* (עִמְדִי־נָא בַּחֲבָרַיִךְ) and your enchantments!"

[115] Paul, *Isaiah 40–66,* 235.

[116] BR 49-52.

against their own fabrication which is being countermanded in Isaiah. Furthermore, directly following this witness of the craftsmen in the Babylonian version of the *mīs pî*, we find the command to "open the eye of that god" and immediately thereafter a series of seven incantations to be recited by the *āšipu* priest (i.e., an exorcist).

In the Isaiah text, then, we find the double-entendres artfully collapsing the specialization of craftsmen and exorcist, and just as in the *mīs pî* these craftsmen are called together and positioned, so in Isaiah (יִתְקַבְּצוּ כֻלָּם יֵעָמְדוּ יִפְחֲדוּ יֵבֹשׁוּ יָחַד ; let them be gathered together and stand). In Isaiah, however, the intended result is that they would be fearful and ashamed. This itself centers around the disclosure that according to the prophet, there is no animated eye, that not only is the divine statue itself unable to see, but the craftsman himself is blinded by what Isaiah deems to be an act which rather than creating something – somehow reverses the order of creation, as he goes on to later depict these craftsmen in the following terms: "They know nothing, they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, so their hearts might become wise. (Isaiah 44:18)"[117] The implication of the prophetic satire is that by means of the very activity of opening the divine statues eye, the height of the Babylonian ritual, the craftsman's eyes are figuratively plastered over. As McDowell has observed, "*the prophet applies the activation of the sensory organs of the divine image to the craftsmen themselves, only in reverse*," and in aniconic rhetoric have "*become like their idols* – having eyes but unable to see."[118]

The fact that the craftsman is described immediately thereafter in Isaiah 44 as becoming weary, hungry, and thirsty whilst fashioning the image both points back to the immediate response to Israel's bitter complaint in Isa 40:28ff[119] and simultaneously and satirically controverts the "opening of the mouth" ritual in which the divine statue's sensory organs are vivified, the outcome of which is the ability to eat. Testimony to the link between the "opening of the mouth" and the statue becoming animate is evidenced in a line taken from the midst of descriptions about the activity of the gods in the creation of the image: "this statue that Ninkura, Ninagal, Kusibanda, Ninildu, Ninzadim have made / this statue cannot smell incense without the 'Opening of the Mouth' ceremony. / it cannot eat food nor drink water…"[120] For good reason does McDowell conclude thus, following Walker and Dick:

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[117] My own translation using NIV as base text. S. Paul translates that this verb, a hapax legomenon, as either "besmeared" or "plastered over". Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, 241.

[118] See above discussion on the captivity and mutilation of images.

[119] Where Yahweh is described as never becoming weary and those who wait for Him become like Him.

[120] Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 151 69ab-71ab. An interesting discussion between Ea and his son, Marduk, also stems from this statement leading to Ea dispatching Asalluhi (syncretized with Marduk in Enuma Elish) to make effective the incantations of the priests, as he is the supervisor of the purification priests and their incantations.

> The prophet was not simply familiar with the Washing of the Mouth and Opening of the Mouth on a superficial level. Rather, he seems to have been well acquainted with the ritual's claims…not only of the physical manufacture of divine images but of the …rituals themselves by which the physical images were consecrated and activated.[121]

2.5.3 Imagery/Metaphors:

Shalom Paul notes, "Deutero-Isaiah has more references to different types of trees than anywhere else in the Bible."[122] I would suggest that the Assyro-Babylonian theo-arboreality provides the backdrop to the long list of trees in Isa 41:19, and helps explain the connection between this passage and the disputation with the "no gods" that follows in 41:21ff.[123] The parodic possibilities of this listing are confirmed by the mention of various trees in Isa 40:20 and 44:14. M. Dick has argued that Akkadian loanwords are used specifically for trees used to create the divine statues: *ʾōren* (in Isa 44:14; Akkadian *erenu*) and *mesukkan* (in Isa 40:20, for Akkadian *musukkannu*).[124] I suggest that trees spring up in the first few chapters of DI due to the more overarching argument: Yahweh is renovating the exiles (his functional equivalent of Babylonian 'divine image') through prophetic mediation and repatriating them through the agency of Cyrus. Using the very imagery of the *mīs pî* texts, in which sacred/divine wood serves as bridge between heaven and earth, Isa 40–48 posits Israel as the elected locus of divine activity.[125] This will be shown more clearly in what follows.

As seen above it is in Isaiah 44 that we find an accumulation of parallels with many aspects of the *mīs pî pīt pî*. We have already noted the crafting/making language of Isa 44:1. In 44:1–5 we witness a description of Israel/Jacob's offspring "springing up like a green tamarisk," and as a "willow by watercourses" after Yahweh promises to pour his spirit upon them.[126] If we

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[121] McDowell, *The Image* of, 10.

[122] Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, 228.

[123] "I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive/oleaster; I will set in the desert the cypresses, the plane, and the pine together, so that all may see and know, all may consider and understand, that the hand of the LORD has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it."

[124] M. Dick, "Worshipping Idols: What Isaiah Didn't Know," *BR* 18, 2002. From this Dick reasons that DI had first-hand knowledge of the *mīs pî*. See also Williamson, "Isaiah 40, 20" *Biblica* (1986): 1–20.

[125] Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 134, lines 1-2, n. 186, Incantation Tablet 1/2 - citing Conti.

[126] Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, 227–28. Here I read כְּבֵין חָצִיר with 1QIsa^{a} , LXX, and Targum instead of the MT בְּבֵין. Recall the relentless cadence of the verb referring to the deity coming out or "sprouting" from the pure river bank and "pure *ḫašurru*-forest" in *mīs pî* incantations. Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 133–34, lines 13–32, Incantation Tablet 1/2 [ST 199]. The above phrase is also tantalizingly close to כְּבֶן חָצֵר (as a son of the courtyard), with rich allusion to princely and worship imagery.

recall the centrality of holy water/divine water being used in the *mīs pî pīt pî*, the activity of Yahweh's spirit causing the springing up of "your seed" compared to the tamarisk is likely spoken in contradistinction to the Assyro-Babylonian creation/renovation of the divine image. This likelihood, in fact, helps elucidate an often troubling aspect in Isaiah 44:7.

וּמִי־כָמוֹנִי יִקְרָא וְיַגִּידָהּ וְיַעְרְכָהּ לִי
מִשּׂוּמִי עַם־עוֹלָם וְאֹתִיּוֹת וַאֲשֶׁר תָּבֹאנָה יַגִּידוּ לָמוֹ׃

Though the MT of מִשּׂוּמִי עַם־עוֹלָם is regularly amended to read מי השמיע מעולם אותיות this is unnecessary. The text is comprehensible as "from my placing/setting an eternal people and things to come." The powerful imagery of Israel's traditions, including the Exodus, and that of the *mīs pî* are like two streams productively coursing together in this poetry. Just as in the *mīs pî* the divine image was seated in the orchard towards sunrise and water poured over him (mouth washing), so Israel is here described as being placed "an eternal people."[127] This then leads immediately into the contrast of witness and the parody on fabrication of the deity in Isa 44:8ff, already discussed. This climaxes in re-address to Jacob-Israel and the hymnic imperative to heaven, earth (or underworld),[128] mountains, forest and every tree therein to break forth in rejoicing *because Yahweh will be glorified in Israel*. We find similar calls in the *mīs pî*, regarding the manifestation of the deity:

> "Go, do not delay! Let the heavens rejoice over you; let the Earth rejoice over you! …when you enter into your land, (then) may the Heavens rejoice, may the Earth rejoice!"[129]

In contrast to the near-phantasmagoric descriptions of the deities' splendorous appearance and glory in the *mīs pî* incantations, Yahweh declares that he will be glorified in Israel (Isa 44:23).[130] We will return to this juxtaposition of the *mīs pî*'s superfluity of radiance in speaking about the theophany and the confession in Isaiah 45:15 that the God of Israel is a deity

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[127] Though S. Paul disagrees with the MT here, he notes the expression appearing in Ezekiel 26:20 where it denotes "the ancient dead." This may not be accidental and may be further ironic play on Israel's state as מתי עולם "long dead" and need of revitalization; S. Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, 231. Note also a collocation similar to what we find here in Isa 44:7 in Isa 45:11: אותיות with בני / פעל ידי.

[128] אֶרֶץ תַּחְתִּיּוֹת here might refer to the underworld. See note in Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 57, p. 158 Incantation Tablet 3, where Earth refers to the Underworld.

[129] Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 196, lines 66ab-68ab and 197, Lines 73ab-76ab, 82ab-83ab. This is followed in 77abff - the rejoicing of many of the deities in the Babylonian pantheon. Walker and Dick note the ambiguity in the semantic range for the verb "to go out, emerge" here which can "also include organic growth… *aṣû* (in sense of "to sprout"), or *rubbû* (of plants)." Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 133, line 13, Incantation Tablet 1/2; see n. 184

[130] Perhaps "among" or "by means of" Israel.

who conceals himself. However, at this point in our reading we turn to a "close up" of the texts leading up to Isa 45:15.

2.6 Isa 45:9–17 in light of the *mīs pî - pīt pî*

2.6.1 Isaiah 45:9–10

We saw the confluence of birthing and crafting imagery in Isaiah 44:2 with Yahweh as maker and fashioner *from the womb* (44:1-2).[131] Once again in Isa 45:9-10, just following the Cyrus oracle, we see an even more trenchant collocation of fabrication and birthing/creation imagery. The ancient versions attest to the likelihood of an early date for what Blenkinsopp refers to as "severe textual problems."[132] For the sake of the discussion on the plausibility of ongoing generative connections between this section of Isaiah and the *mīs pî* I limit my discussion only to the Hebrew text(s), including below the MT text of Isa 45:9–10 (both pointed and unpointed) and that of 1QIsa[a] (w/differences from MT highlighted).

Pointed MT	Unpointed MT	1QIsa[a]
9הוֹי רָב אֶת־יֹצְרוֹ חֶרֶשׂ אֶת־חַרְשֵׁי אֲדָמָה הֲיֹאמַר חֹמֶר לְיֹצְרוֹ מַה־תַּעֲשֶׂה וּפָעָלְךָ אֵין־יָדַיִם לוֹ׃ 10הוֹי אֹמֵר לְאָב מַה־תּוֹלִיד וְלִאִשָּׁה מַה־תְּחִילִין׃	9הוי רב את יצרו חרש את חרשי אדמה היאמר חמר ליצרו מה־תעשה ופעלך אין ידים לו 10הוי אמר לאב מה תוליד ולאשה מה־תחילין	9הוי רב את יצריו חרש את חורשי האדמה הוי האומר [חמר ל]יצרו מה תעשה ופעלכה אין אדם ידים לו 10הוי האמר לאב מה תוליד ולאשה מה־תחולין

As the MT (with some emendations) is represented by the common English translations I will offer here only one possible translation of this dense poetry based on the unpointed MT/1QIsa[a]:

9 Woe to the one who contends with one's maker(s)[133]

A mute among the fabricators of earth

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[131] We see also the sole agency of Yhwh (cf. Isa 44:6 in which יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת is used) over against the many birth helpers, craftsmen-gods, and other deities called in to "help and to witness the birth" (Glover, *Getting a Word in*, 101). McDowell also describes the participation of child-birth deities involved in the creation of the statue: McDowell, *The Image of God*, 78–79. The significance of יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת being used only at Isa 44:6 and 45:11

[132] Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 253. In discussing the rendering of the LXX Blenkinsopp even refers to these veres as a "recalcitrant text."

[133] 1QIsa[a] sees euphony in רב and יצריו. Also possible soundplay on רב: "one who contends" / "many"

Would the clay (raw material) speak to its former, "what might you be making?!"
Or (to) your maker, "he has no hands!"
[10] Woe to the one who speaks to a father, "what might you beget?!"
Or to a mother, "what might you be writhing about in labor (with)?"

It seems reasonable to entertain a reading which sees robust irony in the the polysemous possibilities of חרש. The target is initially unclear due to the homonymic relationship between "mute" and "fabricator". [134] However, upon reading the whole it becomes clear that this mute object, among a bunch of fabricators, suddenly begins speaking. When it does it proclaims audaciously about its maker, "he has no hands!"[135]

Here we find a brilliant, multi-directional parody; a jesting in the *mīs pî*'s ritual imagery to declare to all (exiles and nations) just how wrong they are. We must recall the crucial regressive moment in the *mīs pî* ritual where the hands of the master craftsmen are bound with a red scarf and "severed" with a tamarisk dagger.[136] At Isaiah 45:9–10 the prophetic rhetoric humorously harnesses the imagery of divine image creation/crafting, right at the moment the sensory organs of the deity are to be animated (i.e., "come to life"). In this parodic employment, however, the clay beholds its makers with severed hands and cries out in alarm, "he has no hands!"[137] The irony of the scene is all the more incredible within Isa 40–48 , which has already established the mute witness of idols (especially to declare coming events), and the fact that they cannot see. Though the identity of the addressee is likely purposefully ambiguous here if we take the text of Isa 40–48 seriatim the exiles seem to be in view. First, there is continued emphasis on Yahweh as Israel's maker (45:11), with the following reference to "my sons" and "the work of my hands"

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[134] Yes, it is possible to read "shard" or "potsherd" here; or with Goldingay/Payne, "pot".

[135] There is arguably as much possibility that the ironic quote includes פעלך (thus something like, "your work has no hands!"). Note, however, that the verb in 1QIsa[a] is unambiguously the Qal ms participle. Blenkinsopp, for instance, renders this: "and your workman is not a human being who has hands." It is equally clear that we are talking about literal hands, and not the "handles" of a pot here. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 251. In any event, I find both emendations and strict adherence to the pointing of the MT to be unnecessary.

[136] This crucial step is highlighted in both incantatory and ritual texts: "Bring out this statue before Shamash / put again at their place … the master craftsmen who prepared it. / With a scarf bind their hands / with a tamarisk knife cut off the fists of the stoneworkers who touched him." Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 161–162, lines 82ab-86ab. Also: BR lines 49–53 cited already. For further points of possible correspondence see the reference to the "pure clay" of the divine image before the deity (Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 97, lines 1-2, Incantation Tablet 1/2) and the dialogue between Marduk and his father, Enki regarding the divine image (Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 161–162, lines 72a-75a, Incantation Tablet 3).

[137] It is, of course, possible that we read this with equally ironic imagination by seeing a limbless divine image, becoming prematurely animate and musing on the maker's unfinished business (itself): "hey, your workmanship has no hands!" In either event the metaphoric link between "hand" and "power" is well known in the ANE and is employed throughout DI.

building upon the birthing/crafting imagery from Isa 45:9–10.[138] Further, however we are to understand the exact meaning of 45:11-13, it is clear that the destiny of Jerusalem and exilic Israel is the focus. Given the rhetorical thrust of Isa 44 up to this point, the "imagine this" of Israel's responsiveness to the Cyrus annunciation likened to the (possibly unfinished) image suddenly speaking out against its maker is striking. Anthony Petrotta has underscored the rhetorical function of humor as an opportunity for perspective adjustment; an invitation to see differently, to transform our vision by showing obliquely what we overlook directly.[139] This theory of humor is related to our ability to respond to perceived incongruity, our ability to perceive "what things are and what they ought to be."[140] This is the way Yahweh seeks to "open the eye".

To summarize, we have seen that there are broad correspondences between that which would necessitate the renovation (or creation) of a divine image and the situation of Israel in exile. As divine abandonment or wrath lead to the removal of the deity's image and could hypothetically lead to the defacement thereof, so Israel has been burnt and is described as being both blind and mute.[141] Cyrus is the anointed ruler tasked to bring about Babylon's downfall and repatriate Yahweh's "functional equivalent" of the divine image.[142] Though the Cyrus cylinder mentions nothing of "mouth washing" or "mouth opening," it does testify to Cyrus' returning/resettling the (images of) the deities to the sanctuaries that had "been abandoned…"[143] If, however, we follow the detailed description in "Esarhaddon's Renewal of the Gods", which like the Cyrus Cylinder claims Marduk's direction, the lengthy process of returning the divine images included the *mīs pî/pīt pî* ritual. It comes as little surprise, then, that with the announcement of Cyrus the ritual's imagery would be employed satirically, using humor to unstop the ears and open the eyes: let me show you what you are *really* like! This, I will argue in chapters four and six, is also related to the construal of Israel as "blind witness".

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[138] Goldingay observes that comparison of God to *both* father and mother, as we have in the parallelism of 45:10, is a rarity. The *mīs pî* background may help illuminate the nature of this outlier. Goldingay/Payne, *Isaiah 40–55, Vol. II* ,36.

[139] Anthony J. Petrotta, *God at the Improv: Humor and the Holy in Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020), 6.

[140] Petrotta, *God at the Improv*, 3–4.

[141] Of course, both Jacob-Israel (the servant) and the idol craftsmen are described this way in DI's discourse. Cf. the description of the king's prayer to Aššur and Marduk in "Esarhaddon's Renewal of the Gods": "Does the renovation work appropriately belong to deaf and blind humans who cannot even understand themselves and who cannot determine their own fate? Instead, the creation of (images of) the gods and goddesses is in your hands; by yourselves you create a cella for your exalted divinity." Text from introduction to Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), 32.

[142] Isa 43:14, Isa 45:1–7, 11–13 together make clear that it was for the sake of freeing the exiles that Yhwh's sends Cyrus to Babylon.

[143] "The Cyrus Cylinder," trans. Mordechai Cogan (*COS* 2.124: 315–16).

Thus far a reading that seeks to entertain a likely "world behind the text," especially for the discourse immediately preceding Isaiah 45:14ff.[144] How determinative one feels this ought to be, what bearing it should have on the confession, "yet, you are a deity who conceals himself," will depend on other hermeneutically-charged decisions. For instance, to what degree does one see or construct a coherence internal to the pericope (see Westermann; 5.2.1).[145] For the purpose of this discussion, however, I find reason enough to read the pericope within the imaginative landscape as developed above. Further, there is the ambiguity of addressee in Isa 45:14 and speaker in Isa 45:15. This will have bearing on how one handles the thrust of this pericope against the detailed network of imagery and associations presented above. Regardless, DI's radical reconfiguration of the *mīs pî/pīt pî* (and broader Assyro-Babylonian network of associations) remains fecund ground for interpreting divine hiddenness.

2.6.2 Isa 45:14–17

To begin with, it should give us pause that once again in Isa 45:16, just following the confession regarding "hiddenness," we find a unique mention of idol-fabricators. Several observations on this strange form:[146] First, the hapax צִירִים is polysemous, relating to both manufacturing (and idols, specifically) and the travail of childbirth.[147] This word play connects back to the dual manufacturing and birthing imagery employed in Isa 45:9–11. Not only that but חָרְשֵׁי צִירִים is in construct form just as חַרְשֵׁי אֲדָמָה in 45:9.[148] This constitutes further

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[144] One might describe this activity as conjectural historical-reconstruction; another as a literary and intertextual enterprise. I understand the boundary-line as increasingly blurred. This attempt at providing a juxtaposition of *mīs pî/pīt pî* and Isa 40–48, of their respective background concerns, imagery, and telos is, admittedly, *one* reading; a reading I found increasingly compelling alongside a desire to understand the *deus absconditus* claim in its native discourse habitat.

[145] A whole host of hypotheses have been submitted for how these verses cohere (or don't) and how they came to be located in their present context. For instance, Morgenstern argued that Isa 45:14 is more closely associated with, perhaps even belongs with Isa 60. Westermann sees 45:14–17 as a jumble of separate verses. Dijkstra argues somewhat similarly that vv. 14; 16 have a separate origin from vv. 15; 17–19 and have been re-shuffled. Merendino posits vv.14–17 as later commentary on DI, though related to 45:9–13.

[146] Pun intended. J.L. Koole renders the construct as "craftsmen of forms." His survey of representative interpretations is helpful: 1) those taking the root as **ציר** II, "envoy" as in Isa 18:2 [e.g., Ibn Ezra]; those taking **ציר** as "grief" or "pangs" [e.g., Kimchi; also C.C. Torrey's take: 'the use of **צירים**, "pangs," in place of **צורות**, "images," is a characteristic bit of massoretic humor.' Charles Cutler Torrey, *The Second Isaiah: A New Interpretation* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1928), 208.] Koole traces the etymology ultimately to the verb **צור** IV used also "in e.g. Ex. 32:4 for the design and manufacture of Aaron's golden calf…" Koole, *Isaiah III*, 471.

[147] S. Paul relates the word to the Akkadian *uṣurtu* (denoting "design," with reference to idols, divine plan, or divination) as well as its use to describe travail or pangs of childbirth; cf. Isa 13:8: "They shall be seized by *pangs* (צִירִים) and throes, writhing like a woman in travail." Further, the Targum here renders צַלְמַיָּא. Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, 267. Cf. *CAD*, U-W: 292.

[148] 1QIsa[a] here reads not צירים חרשי בכלמה הלכו but וילכו

needling of the two important overarching images that scholars have noted for the *mīs pî/pīt pî*: craftsmanship and childbirth. The use of צִירִים here may be even more specifically related to the *mīs pî/pīt pî*. We find therein, just following the severing of the craftsmen's hands, accompanying a battery of incantations and the opening of the eye, an enigmatic use of "form." Several scholars argue that here the "god of the statue is…invited to enter the 'form' of the statue whereby it can become the divine presence."[149] Though we must be wary of too slavish a paralleling of Isa 40–48 and *mīs pî*, especially as the sequence in both is obscure, there may be further correspondence between the descriptions of theophany in the *mīs pî/pīt pî* and this section of Isaiah 45. The statement of the nations is certainly suggestive: "only with *(or in)* you is a deity, there is no other, no God besides!"[150] This is immediately followed by the apostrophe:

אָכֵן אַתָּה אֵל מִסְתַּתֵּר
אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹשִׁיעַ׃

2.6.3 Positive and Negative Possibilities of v. 15 as Israel's Witness

The statement is regularly interpreted as voicing astonishment (perhaps less often, dismay or bitterness). This would seem to be in contradistinction to descriptions of the deities' awesome appearance "in all the lands." If we interpret 45:15 as a positive admission, the paralleled self-concealment and salvation of Israel's deity could extol a radical new *notion of deity*. Put bluntly, the divine image's "awe inspiring radiance," "splendidly flashing," and magnificent manifestation brought about by the agency of human and divine craftsmen, is negated by the salvation of Israel.[151] This juxtaposition can be seen in Isaiah 45:16–17. The deliverance of Israel is Yahweh's argument for divinity. This is consistent with the argument through the whole of Isa

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[149] Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), BR, 82, n. 42. Here the authors cite the work of Winter (1992, 23). This understanding is, in part, based on comparison with the Nabû-apla-iddina text which mentions the finding of a "form of the statue" (*uṣurat ṣalmi*), the same word translated as "form" in the Babylonian Ritual text of *mīs pî/pīt pî*, line 57. Though considering this understanding, Walker and Dick ultimately reject it, providing an alternative reading for the Sumerogram GIŠ.HUR.ME, which renders it "magic circle." They argue that the participant being "invited to enter is not the deity whose statue is being consecrated, but probably the āšipu," since the Assyrian form of *errab* is "he enters." See, however, their rendering of *uṣurāti TU-* in the incantation ST 200, line 197: "you make (him/the god?) enter the form […….];" Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth,* 97.

[150] Though the imagery is similar to the wealth of nations traditions summarized above, this does not bar the possibility of poetic mashup that riffs on sacred and iconic ANE themes. For instance, the nations being placed בַּזִּקִים might follow naturally enough the thematic contours of imperial iconography while also playing on the hands of the idol craftsmen in the *mīs pî/pīt pî* (BR 51) being bound. Boyd, contra S. Paul's "wood of the hands", suggests leather as the material used in Isa 45:14's restraint mechanism. Boyd, "Two Instances of Language Contact in Isaiah 45:14," 416.

[151] See above Walker and Dick, *Induction* (Updated Critical Edition), lines 50ab-55ab, Incantation Text 3.

40–48: the deity who delivers, who actually saves, that one is truly "God."[152] This also accords with the reference to Israel as the locus or fulcrum of God's glory (Isa 44:23; 46:13). The weaving of concealment, salvation, and glorification language culminates in the overt confession of servant Israel in Isaiah 49:1–5 ('And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified"), which unsurprisingly also contains birthing and craftsmanship language alongside many of the lexemes or lexical roots of Isaiah 45:14–15.[153]

Yet, it is also possible to interpret Isa 45:15 as a somewhat more negative statement against this same backdrop. If, as I claim, the revelation of God's glory is inextricably bound up with the deliverance of Jacob-Israel from Babylon, then Israel's assent to DI's "theological interpretation" of contemporary events is equally imperative.[154] The poetry and rhetoric of Isa 40–48 play powerfully with the blindness trope over against the ANE literary motif of an exiled divine image in need of renovation or reanimation, especially with emphasis on the sensory organs. I have argued that in Isa 44:9ff DI inverts the mīs-pî (creation of the deity) *onto* the fabricator of the deity. Instead of the presence of the deity embodying the cult icon, the maker and worshiper of the deity becomes devoid of that innate mode of presencing the deity: perceptivity and discernment. If the construal of the speaker in Isa 45:15 is, whether the nations or Israel, in a state of blindness, then the confession "yet, you are a deity who hides himself," also extends the irony of the discourse. To my understanding this is even more fitting if Israel is the speaker, since the logic of the juxtaposition to the divine image in the ANE means Israel's mouth and eyes would be activated right around this point in the development of the discourse.

2.6.4 Looking Forward (and Struggling to See)

In the following chapters I will review the three representative reading strategies introduced in the first chapter. The reader will note the absence of this ANE background, these intertexts, in the discussions of the interpreters and their analysis. However, in chapter six I return to build on the reading provided here in chapter two, especially the aspect of Israel as

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[152] Isa 43:10; Isa 45:22; also the inability of lady Babylon's diviners, magicians, and astrologers to save or to deliver in Isa 47:13–15. In this vein not only is E. Petersen's taking creative liberties in rendering the Hebrew of Isa 44:10 (*The Message*) with "gods…that can't "god"" catchy, but it actually seems to catch it. This argument is inseparable with the parallel argument throughout Isa 40–48 and 45:9–25 specifically of Yahweh as creator.

[153] E.g., יגע סתר אבן. The speech of Israel in Isa 49:4 appears to draw the opening claim of the exiles against Yhwh in Isa 40:27 to a resolution. See 6.3.4.

[154] My use of "theological interpretation" here expresses the rendering of genuine events in a literary form that most befits their nature or reality. Even this puts the matter too superficially. For helpful reflections on the relationship between God as creator, God's self-disclosure to Israel, and form or genre see Karl Barth, CD III/I, 59–94, esp. 91–92.

Yahweh's functional equivalent to the Babylonian pantheon. This foregrounds my choice of Israel as the most natural choice for "original speaker" of v. 15 (chapters four and six). The reader is then meant, albeit ironically, to struggle to find God in the midst of this overpowering divine speech in Isa 40–48. By inhabiting this literary experience of hiddenness, and searching for both hidden speaker and hidden deity, the addressees/readers come to see themselves as blind confessors in need of being brought to their senses.

3. The Voice of the Nations

3.1 Preliminary Textual and Contextual Factors

The following three chapters offer discrete evaluative explorations of the most prevalent readings, or voicings, for Isaiah 45:15. The nested assumption is that the meaning of the statement is in some way contingent upon the one who makes it. As alluded to in the introduction to this work, Christine Pilkington, after asking something very similar to the research question of this work on Isa 45:15, "whose voice? which meaning?" concludes that the statement can *only* make sense if one understand it from the perspective of the prophet speaking as representative of the people. This statement will be significantly problematized by the findings of the following three chapters.[1] As Pilkington observes,"all the interlocking problems of Second Isaiah have a bearing on the interpretation of Isa 45:15."[2] The agency of various readers in arranging those problems and possibilities as they come to bear upon one's voicing of Isa 45:15 must then be in the purview.

This chapter will evaluate the majority voicing of Isa 45:15 as the continuation of the confession of the three African nations which begins in v. 14. Concurrent with this is the significant issue of whether or not the nations also voice vv. 16–17. In the introduction we considered a proposal for such a voicing in the curious case of Arnold Ehrlich, who interprets the paralleled participial verbs as the nations observing movement in the God-Israel relationship: from past divine displeasure (hiddenness) to present deliverance. Erhlich was not, of course, the first to posit such a reading. Bernard Duhm's commentary on these verses opens up several further exegetical questions: first, should v. 15 be taken as a continuation of v. 14? Second, what is the rationale for taking these nations as the speaker? Lastly, if the text is emended, how does a respective emendation fit into one's larger reading strategy? Duhm takes exception to what he classifies as the customary restriction of the address of the foreign nations to v. 14. He argues instead that v. 15 *could not be* spoken by the prophet, as Yahweh did not conceal himself in Israel (seeing v. 19 as proof of this, rather than as response to the original statement itself). Thus, the foreign nations must be the speakers of v. 15–17 as, "only for the Egyptians and so on (i.e., other nations) does he remain hidden."[3] Duhm follows August Klostermann in reading אַתָּה in

[1] As noted in the introduction, though one may favor this reading, the textual features of poetic ambiguity (as well as the interlocking features of the discourse which she mentions) are not weighed sufficiently.

[2] Christine Pilkington, "The Hidden God in Isaiah 45:15," 287.

[3] Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaia.* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892), 318.

v. 15 as אַתָּד – or "even better אִתְּךָ" Duhm's commentary on vs. 15 concludes by asking after whether this mention of a "hidden God" might not be an allusion to the Egyptian God, Amun.[4]

3.1.1 Isa 45:14–15 in the LXX

Long before the rise of modern historical criticism a proclivity to accentuate the voice of the nations may be denoted in versional differences. There are several features of the LXX which strengthen a reading of the confession as voiced unambiguously by the nations. Though the possibility certainly exists that the LXX here evidences a different *Vorlage* than the MT, it is worthwhile to consider other possible literary-theological aspects that may have informed the decision of the LXX translators to move in a specific direction. As Jacob Neusner and others have observed, "Theological Considerations influenced translations and certainly did so in the case of the LXX."[5]

> [14] οὕτως λέγει κύριος σαβαωθ ἐκοπίασεν Αἴγυπτος καὶ ἐμπορία Αἰθιόπων καὶ οἱ Σεβωιν ἄνδρες ὑψηλοὶ ἐπὶ σὲ διαβήσονται καὶ σοὶ ἔσονται δοῦλοι καὶ ὀπίσω σου ἀκολουθήσουσιν δεδεμένοι χειροπέδαις καὶ προσκυνήσουσίν σοι καὶ ἐν σοὶ προσεύξονται ὅτι ἐν σοὶ ὁ θεός ἐστιν καὶ ἐροῦσιν οὐκ ἔστιν θεὸς πλὴν σοῦ

[4] This reading is briefly registered by Goldingay and Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40-55* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 47. As seen in excursus one, such a reading interprets the אכן as a sudden realization, overturning a previously held but erroneous view. However, if we take seriously the syncretistic nature of Amun such a view is problematized. Hallo remarks that, "This is a statement of trinity, the three chief gods of Egypt subsumed into one of them, Amon." William W. Hallo, The *Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World, Vol. 1.* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 25. Etymological support for Amun meaning "that which is concealed" or having to do with invisibility is traced back to Plutarch, who followed the Egyptian chronicler Manetho. See Ronald J. Williams, "Some Egyptianisms in the Old Testament", in *Studies in Honor of John A. Wilson* (Chicago/London, 1969), 96. James P. Allen notes that "hiding yourself" refers etymologically to Amun's name (*jmnw*) which means "hidden". *The Context of Scripture*, *Vol. 1*, 24. fn. 11. Amun is described as "The one who crafted himself, whose appearance is unknown." *Context of Scripture, Vol. 1*, 23.

[5] Jacob Neusner, *What Is Midrash?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 25. For Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, which unlike the LXX, refer in some way to God being hidden or secret see Origen, and Frederick Field. *Origenis Hexaplorum Quae Supersunt, Vol. 2 (* Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1964), 522. After discussing the non-LXX renderings of the Hebrew, Eusebius picks up the "in you is God" of v. 14, interpreting the prophet as speaking Christologically about hiddenness: "It is remarkable how he calls Christ a hidden God, and gives the reason clearly, why he calls Him God alone…the dwelling of the Father in Him…For as the image of a king would be honoured for the sake of him whose lineaments and likeness it bears (and though both the image and the king received honour, one person would be honoured, and not two; for there would not be two kings, the first the true one, and the one represented by the image, but one in both forms, not only conceived of, but named and honoured), so I say the Only-begotten Son, being the only image of the Unseen God, is rightly called the image of the Unseen God, through bearing His likeness, and is constituted God by the Father Himself…" Eusebius of Caesarea, *Demonstratio Evangelica.* W.J. Ferrar (tr.) (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920), 5; 4. Accessed via: https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/eusebius_de_07_book5.htm

15 σὺ γὰρ εἶ θεός καὶ οὐκ ἤδειμεν ὁ θεὸς τοῦ Ισραηλ σωτήρ 16 αἰσχυνθήσονται καὶ ἐντραπήσονται πάντες οἱ ἀντικείμενοι αὐτῷ καὶ πορεύσονται ἐν αἰσχύνῃ ἐγκαινίζεσθε πρός με νῆσοι 17 Ισραηλ σώζεται ὑπὸ κυρίου σωτηρίαν αἰώνιον οὐκ αἰσχυνθήσονται οὐδὲ μὴ ἐντραπῶσιν ἕως τοῦ αἰῶνος

First, the LXX adds a third person verb of speech to the latter half of the nations' words in v. 14: καὶ ἐροῦσιν οὐκ ἔστιν θεὸς πλὴν σοῦ.[6] Second, the LXX renders the אָכֵן of v. 15 in the MT with γὰρ. Goldingay and Payne note that this decision, "plausibly invites us to assume the speakers remain the same."[7] Lastly, the LXX renders the MT's אֱמֶת אֱלֹהִים with the second person singular πλὴν σοῦ. This serves to draw a stronger link with the use of the second person pronoun in v. 15.[8] The LXX of v. 15 reads: σὺ γὰρ εἶ θεός καὶ οὐκ ἤδειμεν ὁ θεὸς τοῦ Ισραηλ σωτήρ. Bringing together the two elements of the nations' confession, then, we read: *and they shall say, "There is no God beside you; for you are God, yet we did not know it, God of Israel, Savior."* We find then a twist of interpretive irony in the LXX (when compared to the MT). In the LXX the issue of divine hiddenness has been taken off the table.[9] The onus for concealment in the LXX rests not on the deity (the MT's *hithpael* participle with reflexive sense) but on the speakers' ignorance or inability to acknowledge the God of Israel as the only god.[10]

3.2 Representative Interpreters

In the remainder of this chapter I will address the work of John Goldingay and Christopher Seitz before moving into a discussion of Cyrus as a possible, though often neglected, speaker of v. 15. The selection of respective interpreters is an outgrowth of their having written substantially on Isaiah 45:15, situating this with some degree of coherence to immediate and wider contextual rungs, and their explicit or implicit theological interests and

[6] Here the LXX makes explicit what all interpreters understand, that the last seven words of v. 14 belong to the nations.

[7] Goldingay and Payne, Isaiah 40-55, 45.

[8] The seemingly minor difference can be considered from the following angle: The rhetorical force of this address of the nations in the second person and against this backdrop is, secondly, more concretely allusiveness to the LXX of Exodus 20:3, "you shall have no other gods, beside me." (πλὴν ἐμοῦ) This is important for several reasons: first, as we have already seen, idol polemic constitutes much of Isaiah 44–46; secondly, the confession of the subject peoples (which includes Egypt), is a confession of those whom Jacob-Israel might expect to be just such fashioners of images. Further, the use of the second person singular πλὴν σοῦ here makes possible a more explicit dialogical connection back to the repeated asseverative of Yahweh in Isa 44–45 ("I am…" and "there is no other besides me" - πλὴν ἐμοῦ). All of this is suggestive background for understanding the LXX of 45:15.

[9] Hidden, we might say, by way of textual variation.

[10] The καὶ οὐκ ἤδειμεν seems reminiscent of Jacob's confession at Gen 28:16. Perhaps the translators were reminded of that very notable use of אכן.

literary approach as variously construed. First, how does each interpreter situate the smallest interpretive unit within a more overarching reading strategy? Then, what kind of focused moves are made particular to Isaiah 45:15 in its immediate context? How do decisions relating this verse to wider and more immediate cues work towards an interpretation of who the speaker is? How does the attribution of speaker contribute to the interpreter's understanding of divine hiddenness? What other literary, historical, and philological elements are drawn together as contributing factors in the meaning of hiddenness in this reading? Conversely, do decisions regarding God's hiddenness in this context affect other aspects of the reading of Isaiah 40–48? Lastly, how might the interpreter's decisions be illuminated through a better understanding of a larger 'project', chosen intertexts, and other theological views and commitments?

3.2.1 John Goldingay

John Goldingay has written extensively on the book of Isaiah.[11] Goldingay situates his work in the stream of post-modern scholars interested in an undoing of "the antithesis between the pre-modern and the modern approach."[12] This approach shares modernity's concern with locating the historical for Isa 40–55 in the sixth century. However, with the pre-moderns there is an interest in understanding how these chapters function in the whole of Isaiah's final form. Goldingay argued as early as 1976 for the thoughtful arrangement of Isaiah 40–55 (especially the sequencing of parallel poetic units in Isa 41–44) as a rhetorically shaped and coherent whole, possibly springing from one prophet's experience of Israel rejecting his message. He has since built heavily upon that scaffolding.[13]

Setting out the Speaker

Goldingay's interpretive tendency, often over against "the detached units theory" of someone like Westermann, is to read 45:9–25 as coherently relating back to Yahweh's

[11] See for instance, "Isaiah 40–55 in the 1990s: Among Other Things, Deconstructing, Mystifying, Intertextual, Socio-Critical, and Hearer-Involving," in *Biblical Interpretation* 5 (1997): 225–46. Reprinted as chapter 21, "How Does Poststructuralist Interpretation Work? Isaiah 40–55 as a Test Case" in *Key Questions about Biblical Interpretation: Old Testament Answers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011); *The Message of Isaiah 40–55* (London/New York: T & T Clark, 2005); John Goldingay and David Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40–55* (London/New York: T. & T. Clark, 2006).

[12] Goldingay, *The Message of Isaiah*, 3.

[13] John Goldingay, "The Arrangement of Isaiah xli-xlv." *Vetus Testamentum* 29:3 (1979), 289–99.

announcement to work with Cyrus.[14] Goldingay's unit headings reflect his understanding of 45:9–13 and 45:14–17 as thematically related to Yahweh's intention to restore Jerusalem and return exiles through the agency of Cyrus.[15] Isa 45:9–13 is understood as Yahweh's objections to the dismissal of this intention and 45:14–17 as Yahweh providing rationale for the intention.

Central to Goldingay's understanding of Isaiah 45 is the dramatic or literary-rhetorical device of what I refer to as stacked apostrophe. Apostrophe is classically defined by Alan Richardson as a "'turning away' of a speaker's utterance from a primary addressee to a second auditor."[16] Goldingay sees the series of addresses to Cyrus (45:1–7), to unidentified questioner (45:9–13), and the address of the nations (45:14–17) as a purposeful turning away from the primary addressee, the Judean exiles in Babylon, to secondary auditors.[17] These apostrophes are, however, intended to be overheard.[18] This series of apostrophic addresses move out from the primary address to Jacob–Israel in 44:21, through the climactic address to Cyrus and related sub-utterances, then back to primary address to Jacob–Israel in 46:3. As Goldingay concludes:

> Whether in the rhetoric Yhwh speaks, or angels speak, or the community speaks, or the prophet speaks, or the nations speak, or Babylon speaks, and whether in the rhetoric the audience is Yhwh, or Cyrus, or the nations, or the forces of heaven, all along behind these there is one reality, prophet speaking to people in the name of Yhwh.[19]

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[14] The reference is to C.R. North as quoted by Goldingay, "The Arrangement of Isaiah," 289. See also Goldingay/Payne's argument that even the subject under dispute in 45:9–13 would be totally obscure unless directly related to 44:24–45.8. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40–55* Vol. 2, 1.

[15] Headings for these sections, as many others, are the same or similar in *The Message of Isaiah 40–55* and the co-authored commentary in ICC series with David Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40–55* Vol. 2, cf. 31–41 in the latter for this section.

[16] Alan Richardson, "Apostrophe in Life and in Romantic Art: Everyday Discourse, Overhearing, and Poetic Address." *Style*, 36/3 (2002), 365. See also Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015), 211ff.

[17] This includes apostrophic address to heavens and earth in 44:23 and 45:8 as well as address to the nations in 45:18–25. In fact, Isa 45:14–17 would appear to address the exilic community directly, if not in 45:14 (due to 2fs), then more surely by the 2mpl of 45:17b following the mention of Israel in 17a. All the same, Isa 45:15 is apostrophic, regardless of speaker since the address to God turns aside from the initial address. Certainly within the wider literary context a sense of nested apostrophic address might be sensed.

[18] This is an essential element in Goldingay's argument. Alan Richardson seeks to demonstrate that apostrophic communication is far more quotidian and, "meant to be overheard by a second auditor." Richardson, "Apostrophe in Life", 367.

[19] Goldingay, *The Message of Isaiah 40–55*, 289.

I find this description, which builds on Beuken's "twofold audience," generally persuasive.[20] We will return to this language and discussion in chapters five and six.

Thus, regarding the question of who is being addressed in 45:9–13, which inevitably influences one's construal of 45:14–17, Goldingay argues that although the context will invite the understanding that Jacob–Israel is the real addressee, there is a rhetorical strategy in a disjoint between the actual addressee (exilic community) and explicit addressee(s) from 44:24ff. As the exilic community overhears the address **to** Cyrus in 44:28–45:8, so in 45:9–13 Goldingay suggests the exiles are similarly invited "to overhear an oracle formally addressed to an unidentified questioner who implicitly but not overtly expresses the community's own views."[21] Goldingay explains this rhetorical strategy as if the exiles are overhearing a *hôy* oracle addressed to the Assyrian king (Isa 10:5–11), by which they are drawn in with the purpose of revealing the community's own arrogance in preferring its own understanding of how Yahweh should marshal his *mišpāt* to that currently being revealed.[22] Goldingay presents the prophetic positing of the objecting party as pottery scorning the potter, even as the work is under way, as analogous to the exiles arrogance in presuming they know better than Yahweh how to run the world. Goldingay presents the preceding context in Isa 40–45 as an invitation to read the implied objection as coming from Jacob-Israel.[23]

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[20] In explaining Isa 45:18–25 Beuken presents God's address to the nations with Israel in earshot, "so that God's plea has a message for her too." He explains the "situation of twofold audience – one on the stage, the nations, and one in the house, Israel" as accounting for the complexity of the message's content and the situation of addressees. W.A.M. Beuken, "The Confession of God's Exclusivity by All Mankind," *Bijdragen* 35 (1974): 346–47.

[21] Goldingay, *Message*, 275. Richard Gerrig's extension of Clark and Carlson's theory of everyday language use as extended to literature is an interesting adjunct here, especially the simple observation that "utterances are often made in the presence of more than one individual," and are intended to have effects upon them. Richard J. Gerrig, *Experiencing Narrative Worlds. Yale University Press*, 1993, 103. Isa 40–48 is not, however, narrative. Culler, for instance, problematizes the notion of lyric as utterance overheard in *Theory of the Lyric*, 186–87.

[22] As Goldingay's survey of history of interpretation of this passage readily implies, there are as many possibilities for "subject of reproof" here as there are possible speakers for the confession of 45:15. Goldingay and Payne also note Elliger's proposal (*Verhältnis*, 179-83) that vv. 11–13 are adapted from a context of origin in which the nations' objections to Yahweh's activity with Israel were being rejected. Goldingay and Payne, *Isaiah 40–55*, 33.

[23] Goldingay, *Message of Isaiah 40–55*, 277–79. Goldingay's supporting evidence for Israel as addressee over against the other nations or their gods include Israel's "long tradition of describing itself as objecting to Yhwh's treatment of it (e.g., Exod. 17.1–7; Num. 20.1–13; Jer. 2.29; Pss. 95.8; 106.32)," and similarities in how epithets are levied in dispute in 45:9–11 and elsewhere in Isa 40–44. Goldingay recognizes that in other Isaianic passages Yahweh's children refers to the Israelites (cf. 1:2; 43:6) which might suggest the other nations or their gods as the quarrelsome addressee, "deriding Yhwh's way of looking after these so-called children." He decides, however, that the use of "children" and "handiwork" here both refer to Cyrus and the Medes. Though he doesn't draw attention to it, Beuken and others have shown links between the roots עשה and פעל in Isa 45:9b and Isa 41:4, both of which pertain to Cyrus. Yet, even Beuken takes בני as referring to the exiles. Given that the term "my children" as a reference to non-Israelites is unparalleled in the Hebrew Bible, I do not understand why Goldingay decides on this interpretation. The possible parallel between "his forger" (i.e., Israel's forger) in v. 11a and "my children" / "the work of my hands" seems to mitigate against this. Though Goldingay and Beuken both see Jacob-Israel as the

Goldingay takes the feminine singular addressee in v. 14 as the "exiled Jerusalem community of v. 13," which is supported by the continuation of the motif of wealth from the one to the other. He entertains the possibility of vv.16–17 continuing the foreigners' address to Israel, rather than a resumption to prophetic speech 'proper':

> By the end of v. 14 it is explicit that foreign peoples are speaking to the community. In turn it makes sense to see these foreign peoples as continuing to speak through vv. 15–17. This is so even where they describe the fate of image-makers as well as speaking of and to Jacob-Israel, though these might alternatively be taken as the prophet's words.[24]

Thus, Goldingay sees no indication for a change of speaker in v. 15.[25] He understands Israel as being spoken of in the third person in v. 15b, and believes this to constitute evidence against Israel as the speaker.[26]

Summary of Goldingay's Treatment of 45:15

Though Goldingay is consistent in his reading v. 15ff as uttered by the nations, his treatment varies considerably in other respects. Thus, in what follows I offer a summary of Goldingay's treatment of Isaiah 45:15 before moving into a more detailed analysis and evaluation.

(1) **God's hiding is inexplicable (and lamented as unfair)**: Goldingay describes the requisite background for understanding God's hiding as being within the lament psalms tradition. Within the laments God's hiding is inscrutable. Though Goldingay seems to think this is the most suitable backdrop for understanding the prophetic use of the term he, somewhat surprisingly, does not favor this interpretation. He concludes rather that (2) **God's hiding is a**

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ultimate addressee for 45:9–13, Beuken sees the nations as the immediate addressee. Goldingay on the other hand seems to take the whole pericope as something akin to theatrics, in which the address itself is meant to identify the audience in something like a "gotcha!" ruse. The ambiguity, then, would allow for Jacob-Israel to just as easily miss the point (that they are being pointed out).

[24] Goldingay, *Message*, 283.

[25] In Goldingay/Payne the LXX's γαρ is brought as plausible invitation for retaining the nations as speaker. However, it is admitted that "the lament/confession in v.15a would be appropriate on Judean lips." *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40–55*, 45. However, what Goldingay and Payne see as a lack of evidence leads them to discount any other possible speakers: prophet, Cyrus, or even image-worshippers (cf., Morgenstern).

[26] "God of Israel", a genitive construct in which the personal name "Israel" modifies the construct form "God," is understood to constitute evidence of "Israel being spoken of in the third person." This argument is not persuasive. We find "God of Israel," almost always following Yahweh, in communal address from the covenant community in the Psalms (cf. 41:14; 59:16, etc.), Ezra 9:15, 1 Chronicles 16:36, and elsewhere.אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל as an alternative of אֱלֹהֵינוּ is more conceivable than Goldingay entertains.

response to Israel's sin. Israel's apostasy has lead to Yahweh hiding himself during the exile. The parataxis of the verse, however, is interpreted as a confession of faith by the nations. Yahweh is turning from hiding to delivering in the historical moment of the textual world's immanent unfolding (similar to Ehrlich). In this sense, Goldingay reckons the confession as: i) put on the lips of the nations by God and prophet and ii) a sought after example, to be emulated by the exilic Israelite audience.

However, when commenting on the divine rebuttal in 45:19 Goldingay modulates this position by ascribing more (but, still limited) agency to the nations. In light of the divine rejoinder, which seems to take issue with the nations' confession in v. 15, he portrays the nations in v. 15 as echoing the original lament of the exiles in 40:27.

(3) **God's hiding as ontological axiom – revealing important truths to humanity about the knowledge of God and our own anthropology**: Goldingay presents brisk soundings from the rich history of interpretation in which, isolated from the originating Isaianic context, this statement about God's hiddenness has been something of a lodestone for theological reflection on the metaphysical or moral gulf between humanity and God. However, as his preference is to situate Isa 45:15 in its most immediate context (with special attention to the wider Isaianic tradition and the Psalter), he raises these strands only to contrast them ultimately with the biblical presentation of God as, though at times *hiding*, not fundamentally *hidden*.[27]

(4) **God's hiding is alluding to the Egyptian deity, Amun**: Given the witness in Egyptian sources to Amun as hidden deity Goldingay and Payne briefly entertain the possibility of the nations' coming to the realization that Yahweh is the real hidden God (whereas before, these peoples had wrongly acknowledged Amun as such).[28]

Discussion of Goldingay's Exegesis

Regarding the question of how best to take the **אכן** of v. 15 Goldingay and Payne note that although not always implying a contrast, they see it as more likely functioning contrastively

[27] See, Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology, Vol. 2: Israel's Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 136–38. Goldingay, *Message*, 286–288.

[28] See fn. 4 above. This is considered alongside the possibility that God's hiding is a satirical allusion to the theme of the deity's absence, as established in the Mesopotamian record. As seen in chapter two this was proposed by Jean-Georges Heintz, "De l'absence de la statue divine au 'Dieu qui se cache' (Esaïe 45,15)," 427–37.

here, over against what immediately precedes, as it does in Isa 49:4 and 53:4.[29] Here, the authors draw out the parallels between the end of v. 14 (to Zion) and the whole of v. 15 (to Yahweh):

> To Zion: 'Yes [*'ak̲*] — in you — *'ēl* —there is no other *ʾĕlōhîm*
>
> To Yhwh: 'But [*'ākēn*] — you — *'ēl* — *ʾĕlōhîm* who delivers[30]

This paralleling between the verses can be seen in the restrictive adverbs as well, the transliteration of which I have added in brackets, and which Goldingay and Payne see as influencing the unusual fronting of the pronominal subject אתה before the predicate אל מסתתר. Yet, what does the contrastive use imply here? Goldingay and Payne remark that v. 15 presents a contrast to 45:9–10 by "offering the right kind of acceptance of the fact that Yhwh sometimes acts inscrutably."[31] The right kind of acceptance comes in the form of understanding and accepting the fact that "the God who had turned away is now turning back." In fact, Goldingay goes so far as to read this (in light of 45:17) as the promise of ultimate resolution of Israel's dialectic relationship with Yahweh as seen in the psalter, vacillating between the experience of God as hiding and God as delivering.[32]

This is rooted in Goldingay's understanding of the internal parallelism of v. 15. Goldingay and Payne see the expression אלהי ישראל מושיע in the second colon as balancing אל מסתתר in the first. Yet, what is the nature of this balancing act, precisely?

> The two verbs, 'hide' and 'deliver', are simply juxtaposed paratactically. Neither is subordinated to the other. The relationship between them is left unexplained (*Balentine, pp. 110-11). But their background in the laments means that the hearers know how to relate them. The one who has been hider is now deliverer.[33]

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[29] Here the authors note the forced contrastive reading over against 45:12 in Waltke and O'Connor, *IBHS* 39.3.5d. Yet, they themselves take the contrast even farther back than Waltke and O'Connor – to 45:9–10. See Excursus 1 on אכן.

[30] Goldingay and Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40–55*, 46. This parallel is, of course, heuristic, and leaves out as much as it includes. For instance, "who hides" is left out of v. 15. Also, the *ʾĕlōhîm* in v. 15b, though the same noun, appears in construct form, *ʾĕlōhê yiśrāʾl*, in MT.

[31] Goldingay and Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40–55*, 46.

[32] Goldingay, 289.

[33] Goldingay and Payne, *Commentary on Isaiah 40–66*, 46. It is apposite to the purpose of this hermeneutical case study to point out that Goldingay/Payne do not entertain, or even mention as being within the realm of syntactic possibility, the opposite: That Israel's God, the Savior, is become a deity who hides himself!

According to Goldingay and Payne the hearer is sufficiently steeped in the requisite lament psalm background to appreciate that the sequence here is a chronological moving from punishment for sin (hiding) to deliverance. Yet, "the hearer" is certainly no given. Is this an ancient hearer, an original audience, as reconstructed by the contemporary interpreter, or is this a more contemporary hearer – the interpreter and her community? From Goldingay's work and statements elsewhere it seems safe to deduce that the former is being argued here. It is certainly plausible to imagine an original audience for whom the regular singing of lament psalms might furnish familiarity unto guidance in how to relate the verbs "hide" and "deliver." Yet, Goldingay's claim ("the hearers know how to relate them") needs further support. How this relationship logically stems from the lament psalms is left unexplained.

> In isolation the statement leaves open whether Yhwh's hiding was inexplicable, as in some laments, or whether the cause of Yhwh hiding was Israel's sin. The context in Isa. 40–55 as well as references to God's hiding that occur elsewhere in Isaiah suggest the latter. Thus the echo of the language of lament is sharper because of the prophetic awareness of sin, but in the context of a transition to hope.[34]

Though the authors rest on the work of Sam Balentine, they do not delve into Balentine's understanding of a prophetic adaptation of the language of the lament psalms turned against the supplicants.[35] For Goldingay the importance lies, rather, in the sequence of the confession of the foreigners as likely reflecting a similar chronological sequence in God's dealings with Israel: moving from punishment for sin (hiding) which is now giving way to a more palpable deliverance for the exiles (theophany?).

> "The links [between vv. 14 and 15] are implicit, but they hint that foreigners perceive that the events that prove Yhwh's deity and cause them to acknowledge Yhwh are also the events that mark Yhwh's turning from hiding to appearing – or more precisely to delivering…The one who has been hider is now deliverer. God and prophet put onto the lips of the nations that confession that God and prophet long for the community itself to come to. When God hides, the community of faith is called to come to terms with the

[34] Goldingay, *Message*, 285. Here he footnotes Balentine's "Isaiah 45" article. Also cf. Goldingay/Payne's situating the use of סתר in *niphal* and *hiphil* stems within the grief-stricken supplications of psalms of lament.
[35] Pilkington, "The Hidden God," 295–96.

reality of how things are and to find its way of formulating a theology of hope."[36]

According to Goldingay the perception of these foreigners is a prophetically managed perception. God and prophet are understood (presumably due to the introductory messenger formula) to posit the foreigners as rightly discerning the connection between their own fate in the unfolding political events (with Cyrus at the center) and the God of Israel turning from hiding from his people to delivering them.[37] This, then, leads to the Egyptian-Ethiopian acknowledgment of "Yhwh's sole deity envisaged in v. 6."[38] The material benefits which are unexpectedly presented as passing over not to the possession of Cyrus but to the "Judaean community in Babylon," signals a turn toward a situation in which "perhaps the slave is to become the slave-owner". As such, we are to see in the nations' response a surprising didactic counter to that which Goldingay understands as the exilic attitude revealed in 45:9–10.

Though granting the possibility of interpreting Yahweh's hiding as inexplicable if taken in isolation,[39] Goldingay argues that a careful reading that accords with the context of Isa 40–55, alongside other references to God's hiding elsewhere in Isaiah, suggests that Yahweh's hiding is

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[36] We have seen a similar dynamic already with Ehrlich. Goldingay, *The Message of Isaiah*, 286. Interestingly, the language in this concluding sentence (e.g., "community of faith" rather than exiles, Israel-Jacob, etc.) introduces the possibility and problematics of God's hiding in contemporary contexts. This is better understood through Goldingay's footnote to C.M. Pilkington's article "The Hidden God in Isaiah 45:15". He is essentially paraphrasing Pilkington (296–297). Yet, the use is odd. Pilkington presents Second Isaiah in light of Berkovits' *Faith after the Holocaust*, stressing analogous contexts while comparing and contrasting interpretive moves, especially regarding God's presence in history. See chapter 6. Pilkington draws upon Brueggemann, Terrien, and others to argue that in Second Isaiah we find the prophet as community representative struggling to formulate a theology of hope in the face of great suffering and doing so with the faith resources available to hand. Pilkington situates Isaiah 45:15 not in relation to Israel's sin or disobedience but, with Berkovits, as inherent to the nature of God. The community of the faithful must cope with God's nature and ultimately affirms God's concurrent hiding and saving. As Goldingay generally argues against the ontological argument, his use of Pilkington evidences his bold eclecticism. Yet, as Pilkington herself observes, "[t]here remains some inevitable confusion over" how to take this verse. C.M. Pilkington, "The Hidden God", 296. Even, as becomes apparent throughout this study, within the corpus of one scholar.

[37] Whether within psalms of lament context or the broader context of the book of Isaiah, Goldingay interprets the expression as conveying something of the converse of God's appearing or the shining of God's face. See Goldingay/Payne, 46. Cf. Samuel Balentine who argues against the drawing of the idiom הסתיר פנים into the realm of "cultic theophany." He sees attempts to parallel the "hiding of God's face" as an antithetical corollary to the "shining face of God" elsewhere in the Old Testament as "going beyond the evidence." Balentine's argument is that as the two terms are never actually collocated we should take care not to assume they are natural corollaries. Samuel Balentine, *The Hidden God*, 59–60.

[38] Goldingay, *The Message of Isaiah*, 285.

[39] As Goldingay and Payne explain, סתר in *niphal* and *hiphil* stems appears in this sense of inexplicability within the psalms of lament, particularly on the lips of grief-stricken supplicants.

in response to Israel's sin.[40] Goldingay and Payne also observe that the occurrences of הסתתר in reference to David in 1 Sam 23:19; 26:1; and superscription of Psalm 54 underscore that the use of *hithpael* here should be understood reflexively and translated as "to hide oneself" rather than passively ("to be hidden"). Goldingay reiterates that God's hiding himself in this passage is in response to sin at the conclusion of a lengthy discussion of the centrality of the passage in later Jewish and Christian theological reflection on divine hiddenness.[41] The apex of this discussion sees Goldingay suggesting that Eliezer Berkovits' setting of Isaiah 45:15 alongside 45:7 within a constructive theology of the Holocaust may be "a risky move," if the context, as Goldingay argues, points to a most likely meaning of 45:15 in God's hiding himself as a response to Israel's sin.[42] Elsewhere, however, Goldingay draws directly on the work of Berkovits, reflecting on the Holocaust as an example of "Yhwh's hiding and then delivering" in something of the sequence argued for in his understanding of Isaiah 45's move from hiding (exile) to delivering (through the agency of Cyrus *from* exile):

> For a decade from the mid-1930's to the mid 1940's, the God of Israel hid from the Jewish people and they paid a terrible price for being a people who stood for God. But in the late 1940s God turned from being one who hides to being one who delivers, and the State of Israel was born.[43]

Here Goldingay applies an understanding of the framework of Isa 45:15 as God's *inexplicable* hiding en route to deliverance as in some way appropriate to the Holocaust of European Jewry. Yet, he follows this immediately with the recognition that Isa 45:19 is either divine denial of hiding or a qualification of "the appropriateness of this framework," since, "in the exile, after all, Yhwh's withdrawal issued from Israel's sinfulness, so it was not the inexplicable kind of hiding that, for instance, Psalm 89 referred to." Though it is not his intention he seems to drift very close to the "risky move" he expresses unease about in Berkovits by applying Isa 45:15 to the Holocaust as seemingly inexplicable, then calling this into question by the qualification of Isa 45:19, before concluding more generally that:

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[40] Though the name of Israel's deity, Yahweh, is not used in 45:15.

[41] I have listed this as (3) in the summary of Goldingay's treatment above. Among others Goldingay includes some discussion of Ibn Ezra, David Kimchi, St. John of the Cross, Blaise Pascal, Luther and interpreters in his wake, Barth, von Rad, Buber, and Eliezer Berkovits, 287.

[42] The supporting contextual evidence brought by Goldingay and Payne are contexts where "it is assumed that human sin may be the reason for God's hiding (Isa 57.17) or for the hiding of God's face (8.17; 54.8; 59.2; 64.6 [7]; Jer 33.5, with respect to Jerusalem)."

[43] Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology (vol. 2)*, 138. Here he specifically cites Berkovits' *Faith After the Holocaust*; see fn. 254. For my discussion of Berkovits see 6.2.

> Over the centuries and in the exile Yhwh has been accessible to the people, not playing games with them by expecting them to seek out someone who could not be easily reached. The question is whether they have been turning to Yhwh (cf. Is 43:22; 48:16).[44]

Of course, it is more natural to read "over the centuries and in the exile" as one period following another in chronological order – in which case "over the centuries" would naturally refer to the pre-exilic period. A certain ambiguity is introduced, however, when conjoined to the present perfect "has been accessible" (of Yahweh) and even more to the question posited rhetorically of "the people" in the present perfect continuous, "have been turning." This ambiguity opens up the possibility of conflating the exile (prophetically interpreted as a response to Israel's worship of other gods and related wrongdoing) and any painful periods in Jewish history right up to the present, especially since Goldingay has just discussed the Holocaust as an instance of God's hiding. I do not think such conflation is Goldingay's intention, but the discussion and temporal structuring illustrate just how difficult it is to keep a vibrantly ambiguous text with a robust history of interpretation contained to its originating context.

Isaiah 45:16–17

Goldingay readily admits that the question of whether the nations continue the address on into 45:16–17 is not at all straightforward. Though Goldingay and Payne feel it is logical to "assume that the suppliants continue to speak," they modify and moderate this by adding, "though they continue to voice the statements of faith that the prophet wishes to hear from the people's lips."[45] In other words, this is the prophet putting choice words in the mouth of the nations. Goldingay sees v. 16 as those who "acknowledge Yhwh" contrasting their fate with "that of other gentiles" (namely those who fabricate figures/futility). Yet, it might be just as easy to see the nations' speech (however conceived) up through v. 15 and then a resumption to the prophet's own voice in v. 16–17. Goldingay admits that these verses "might alternatively be taken as the prophet's words."[46]

[44] Goldingay, Old Testament Theology (vol. 2): Israel's Faith, 138.

[45] Goldingay and Payne, 47.

[46] Goldingay, *Message*, 283. See also, Beuken, "The Confession," 349 and 354, where he sees 16ff / vss. 15–17 as prophetic resumption of speech after Yahweh speaks in v. 14.

The Problems Posed by Isaiah 45:18ff

Goldingay takes 45:18–25 to be the resumption of divine speech in dialogue with the same nations who have been speaking in 45:15–17:

> In relation to vv. 15–17, speakers and addressee are thus the same, but have changed places. As a whole, vv. 18–25 then constitute a plea to the nations to recognize that their gods are bound to disappoint them and that Yhwh alone is God.[47]

Yet, if Isa 45:18–25 is taken as a plea to the nations to recognize the impotence of their gods Goldingay's previous interpretation of 45:14–15 is problematized. For instance, Goldingay understands the rebuttal לֹא בַסֵּתֶר דִּבַּרְתִּי בִּמְקוֹם אֶרֶץ חֹשֶׁךְ (v. 19) in the following way: We are suddenly to see in Isa 45:15 the foreigners' acceptance of Jacob-Israel's original claim (in Isa 40:27), which posits Yahweh's hiding himself as the community's being inexplicably "abandoned by YHWH and clueless about what YHWH is doing."[48] It is, of course, the lexical link between נִסְתָּרָה in Israel's claim against Yahweh (40:27), the assertion that Israel's deity is מִסְתַּתֵּר (45:15), and Yahweh's counter claim that he has not spoken בַּסֵּתֶר (45:19) that presents the possibility for a relationship between these three statements. Yet, such a reading of 45:15 constitutes a disjoint from Goldingay's earlier position that 45:14–15 be taken as exemplary confession, "put onto the lips of the nations" by "God and prophet".[49] If "God and prophet" are putting onto the nations' lips a confession that "they long for the community itself to come to," then v. 19 is self-contradictory as response to this.[50] For this reason Goldingay must make an interpretive sidestep by granting more independent agency to the nations in making the confession. Thus, "Yhwh takes issue with the comment that this God had hidden (v.15a)," since the foreigners have "apparently accepted at face value" Jacob-Israel's claim.[51]

In the first interpretive option the nations of Isa 45:14–15 are more a rhetorical device.[52] The desired end in this scenario is that Jacob–Israel would overhear the dialogue and learn a lesson about appropriate speech about, and to, its God.[53] However, once we encounter Isa 45:19,

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[47] Goldingay, *Message*, 289.

[48] Goldingay, *Message*, 291.

[49] Goldingay, Message, 286.

[50] The possibility that v. 15 and v. 19 address different points is rarely taken up by interpreters.

[51] Goldingay, *Message*, 291.

[52] See opening discussion. Goldingay, *Message*, 284. This is, of course, a possibility, regardless of how we conceive of the nations as speaking agent.

[53] See fn. 10–12.

the nations are posited by Goldingay as parroting not God or prophet but the exiles' own earlier lament (40:27)! Reading retrospectively, the agency of the nations in the confession of v. 15 must be at least robust enough to justify divine rejoinder. In either case, however, the confession and the divine response in this interpretation are spoken "for the sake of Jacob," who is watching the prophetic portrayel.

Goldingay understands 45:18–19 to address the question, "Is Yhwh *really* a God who hides?" which is raised by v.15. He takes 45:19a as YHWH's rejecting the framework presented in 45:15.[54] This, of course, troubles his favored interpretation that hiddenness refers to the experience of the exile, a response to Israel's sin, now giving way to deliverance (option 2 in summary of Goldingay's interpretive spectrum). For this reason he falls back on a version of the foreigners' speech as echoing the lament-framework of Israel-Jacob. Yahweh contradicts this assertion, claiming that he has spoken openly, was "accessible, not absent or hiding."[55] Though one might argue that vv. 18–19 deal with issues unrelated to vv. 14–15, Goldingay notes thematic and lexical parallels that tie the two together.[56] For instance, the אֲנִי יְהוָה of v. 19b corresponds to the אַתָּה אֵל מִסְתַּתֵּר of v. 15, and the participles in דֹּבֵר צֶדֶק and מַגִּיד מֵישָׁרִים correspond to the two "equivalent participles" in v. 15. Thus, in his reading the correspondence between vv. 18ff and v. 15 is polemical. He introduces the importance of צדק to the entire section through the work of H.H. Schmid, who argues that צדק is related in the ANE and Israelite worldview to "world-ordering."[57] In this vein, Israel's destiny within Yahweh's purpose stands "firmly in the foreground when it uses the word *sedeq*."[58] The connection of the lexical

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[54] Here I can make little sense of Goldingay/Payne's statement that 45:18–25 as a section, "supports the overall perspective of vv. 14-17 in both its aspects." (51) Not even their own exegesis of the passages in question supports this. Though there is important lexical overlap, the correspondence serves importantly to rebut or qualify the previous claims in several striking instances.

[55] Goldingay, *Message*, 291.

[56] The point in 45:19 seems to be more explicitly about the clarity of Yahweh's speaking. However, the entirety of this section has to do with the prophet revealing God's plan to exact vengeance on Babylon and restore Israel through Cyrus alongside responses to this plan.

[57] See H.H. Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung: Hintergrund und Geschichte des Alttestamentlichen Gerechtigkeitsbegriffes*, Beitrage zur Historischen Theologie, 40: Tubingen: Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1968. For commentary on Schmid's thesis, that "righteousness" reveals a far more comprehensive world-ordering, see Henning Graf Reventlow, "Righteousness as Order of the World: Some Remarks towards a Programme" in Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman, *Justice and Righteousness: Biblical Themes and Their Influence* (JSOT Supplement Series; JSOT Press: Sheffield), 1992, 163–72. Of some interest for this section of Isaiah are Reventlow's reflections on Schmid's later work in which he seeks to illustrate how the term "righteousness" is used in parallel with other terms that are similarly related to world-ordering; Reventlow, 171. See also Patrick Miller, "Cosmology and World Order in the Old Testament: The Divine Council as Cosmic-Political Symbol" in Patrick D. Miller, *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 267. Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, 422–444.

[58] Goldingay/Payne, 55.

links between צדק and ישר relate back to 45:13, Yahweh making Cyrus' paths smooth, supports this.

Related to this is a similarity in the structure of argument at Isa 45:12–13, 45:18–19, and Isa 48:12–16. Each relate Yahweh's on-going world-ordering activity to the claim that He is the one who created and founded the world. The argument of Isa 40–48 is that since Yahweh, not any other of the deities, created the world, so He, and no other deity, is raising up Cyrus for His purposes. The overall argument has everything to do with the hearer-reader properly identifying Yahweh as the only deity. The prerogative of Yahweh to order the world anew is based on the fact of his creation of the cosmos and this continuity is inexorably bound up with His speaking.[59] Though interpreters differ on whether the speaker of 48:16 is Yawheh or the prophet, the presence of the assertion שָׁם אָנִי immediately following בַּסֵּתֶר דִּבַּרְתִּי לֹא מֵרֹאשׁ may signal that the issue here is still related to whether or not Yahweh is hidden.[60] Since the context of 48:16 parallels 45:19 in other important respects this could support the possibility of 45:18–19 relating back to 45:15.

Thus, Goldingay's adjusted interpretation of v. 15 makes sense of the content (contrastive parallels to v. 15) and context (trial scene) of 45:18–25. Yet, the possibility that in v. 14–15 members of this fettered foreign workforce are confessing their own conversion, or even being employed rhetorically to goad Jacob-Israel toward an exemplary confession of Yahweh, seems less likely if read in light of 45:18–25.

Analysis and Evaluation of Goldingay's Interpretation

Though Goldingay entertains different possibilities, his preferred reading is that the nations come to the conclusion, in light of the Cyrus event and their participation therein, that God is moving from hiddenness (in response to Israel's sin) to deliverance (through Cyrus). Though Goldingay suggests the nations are something of a rhetorical device there is significant slippage in how to understand the intended rhetorical function of 45:15.

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[59] It is even possible that both 45:19aα and 48:16aβ refer to God's speech at creation and 45:19aβ and 48:16b refer to God's present speech to Jacob-Israel (in re-creating Israel).

[60] In one sense identifying the speaker here as prophet *or* Yahweh misses important dynamics inherent to DI's hiddenness; the prophetic personality overshadowed by the overwhelming presence of the divine voice. In even simpler terms: divine presence is manifested by means of the prophet. Where and when God speaks, *there He is*. For an interesting discussion of somewhat relatable dynamics in Jeremiah see Andrew G. Shead, *A Mouth Full of Fire*: *The Word of God in the Words of Jeremiah*. New Studies in Biblical Theology, Vol. 29 (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2013), esp. 62; 113–15; 285. Michael Fishbane argues differently in reference to shifts in voice at Isa 58:11–14 that, "the individual prophet [is] struggling to suppress his own authority." Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 478.

In the last section we saw that the trial scene of Isa 45:18ff can be taken as a corrective to aspects of the nations' confession in Isa 45:14–15. The polemical edge of this trial speech, alongside unexpected invitation to deliverance in Yahweh alone, makes best sense of the nations' confession neither as exemplar to Israel or echoing of Israel's lament-framework. The former nuance, whatever its merits, becomes contradictory in light of the subsequent trial scene. One way around the contradiction would be to suggest that in 45:16 the three nations of v. 14, "contrast their destiny with that of other gentiles," specifically those who fabricate-forms/forge-futility. Yet Goldingay realizes that even if this is so, the prophet's "imaginative vision" does not clarify the "relationship between [those] who come in this way [i.e., acknowledging Yhwh "in a positive act of religious enlightenment"] and [those] who worship images."[61] The form and content of 45:18ff suggest rather that Yahweh contends with all the nations, perhaps quite specifically with the language and conceptualities of v.14–15.

However, vv. 16–17 raise potential problems for this last proposal. If the nations are understood to continue the address on into vv. 16–17 this proposal becomes less consistent. The use of Yahweh at 45:17 could suggest that the nations were not at all confused about the divine identity. The address in v. 15, though omitting the personal name of God, may nonetheless be properly directed. Yet, this seems to be complicated by the same features in the trial scene just presented. For this reason, I find it more likely that the prophet presents the speech of the nations in vv. 14–15 and then circles back to reflect on their speech in vv. 16–17. Koole, for instance, mentions that one might object to taking the entirety of 45:14–17 as the nations' speech on the grounds that in Isa 40–55 the nations are customarily given only brief quotations. Against this position he argues that, "in almost all cases this applies to reprehensible statements which are immediately refuted by the prophet."[62] Koole rests on the assumption that there is nothing objectionable in Isa 45:14–15. Even if not immediate prophetic refutation, the prophet could observe the shame and disgrace of the nations in v. 14 who will "go in fetters" and reflect in v. 16 that such idolaters "go off in humiliation" (v. 16). In v. 17a the prophet offers further commentary on the second predicate in the confession of the people in v. 15b – The declaration that it is "in YHWH" that Israel is saved may be a modification, building on the nations' address. The prophetic address then concludes with direct address to Israel based on the affirmation of v. 17a.[63]

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[61] Goldingay, *Message*, 288.

[62] J.L. Koole, *Isaiah III*, 465.

[63] Cf. Isa 44:6-8 which, though the entirety is much more straightforwardly divine address, opens as does v. 14, with a messenger formula כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה and continues on at the conclusion with verbs in 2mpl: וְאַל־תִּפְחֲדוּ וְאַל־תִּרְהוּ Although, note that in 45:17 the verbs in the LXX are in the third-person.

The work of John Goldingay raises important interpretive issues. To begin with, the passage's inherent ambiguity alongside the richness of allusive possibilities makes consistency difficult. Even among the work of one scholar we find these features giving rise to multiple, sometimes competing, interpretations. Secondly, we find the interpretive tendency to see the nations in 45:14–15 as a rhetorical device. This raises important questions both interpretive about the rhetoric as envisioned and theological/ethical: How complicit is the interpreter in this putting of words in the mouth of another?[64] What sort of interpretive mechanics are involved in determining this prophetic rhetorical strategy? According to Goldingay, for instance, it is the much more overarching prophetic and imaginative constructs that shape his understanding of the rhetorical function of Isa 45:14–17. Assuming that the prophet was utilizing something like the "wealth of nations" tradition, to what degree are we as interpreters complicit with a tendency to instrumentalize these nations by limiting their agency? More positively, perhaps there are things we can learn only when another (or, "the other"?) utters them. Perhaps only when the most unexpected party articulates or acknowledges a truth are we properly shaken, revealed, and made ready to wrestle it down to its core. Goldingay's understanding(s) of Isa 45:14–17 as the speech of the nations (imaginatively construed through prophetic mediation) opens up the issue of identification of or inclination towards intertexts.[65] As we will see in the next section on the approach of Christopher Seitz, commitments and preunderstanding regarding the nature of scripture and the Christian interpretive tradition have significant bearing on the construal (identification of nations as speaker, the nature of the confession as positive confession, and one's situating of the specific material in the book of Isaiah more generally).

3.3 Christopher R. Seitz

As Goldingay, Christopher Seitz has invested much of his scholarly energy to the interpretation of the book of Isaiah.[66] His interest in Isaiah is marked, among other things, by his commitment to grapple with what it means for Christians to be a people of and forged by a two-

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[64] Or, more poetically: "Sunlight asking us how we can know / The words to put in the mouth of another?" "Round Up" in Micheal O'Siadhail, *The Gossamar Wall*, 107.

[65] We have seen, for example connections to the Psalms or other parts of Isaiah as well as to the Hymns of Amun in relation to the meaning of סתר. However, there are possible intertexts that Goldingay does not to follow up or make much of. A minor example can be seen in the use of מושיע (Isa 19:20) in the same context as Egyptian swearing of allegiance to Yahweh (וְנִשְׁבָּעוֹת לַיהוָה צְבָאוֹת), which could serve as a possible intertext to Isa 45:14–15 and 45:21–23.

[66] For Seitz's complete bibliography as well as reflections on his theological development and contribution see the *festschrift*: Donald Collett, Mark Elliott, Mark Gignilliat, and Ephraim Radner (eds), *The Identity of Israel's God in Christian Scripture* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2020), esp. 5–30.

testament Bible. Though conceived rather differently, with Goldingay he shares a commitment to reading the final form of the entire book of Isaiah. One of the main differences between their respective approaches is in how each articulates a commitment to interpreting the Old Testament as Christian Scripture in light of a concomitant commitment to honor the discrete witness of Israel's scriptures. This is distilled in Seitz's formulation of the "literal sense" which he argues must be, "more than reconstructing an authorial intention within a putative 'historical context'."[67] The concern of Seitz is with the ramifications of overly historicizing the literal sense of the Old Testament to the extent that it, "would lose its capacity to speak of Christ, economically *and* ontologically."[68] Where Goldingay strives towards an "undoing of the antithesis between modern and pre-modern approaches," Seitz traces theological fault lines between the two, hesitant to assume that which is antithetical might be so easily bridged. With the pre-moderns Seitz believes that the Christian canon coalesces, "generations of testimony into a coherent, if challenging final form," which results in the literal sense of scripture having a theologically consistent referential dimension.[69] Many of these interpretive threads come together in Seitz's adapting the Barthian conception of Christian theology as commentary on the divine name YHWH- *kyrios* and a grappling with, "how to speak of the God of Israel by his personal name."[70] As will be seen in the following analysis, Isaiah 45 figures prominently in this endeavor.

Isaiah 45:14–15 and Seitz's Contemporary Theological Concerns

Isaiah 45 features in Seitz's wider interpretive framework, especially as it touches upon contemporary theological concerns. In an essay entitled, "God as Other, God as Holy: Election and Disclosure in Christian Scripture," Seitz argues for a renewed understanding of scripture's own plain sense regarding the relationship between disclosure (his preferred term for revelation) and election. For Seitz to speak of God at all is to be thrown headlong into the "scandal of particularity."

> …"disclosure" is only comprehendible within the framework of election. It cannot be abstracted or universalized; it is a particular perspective to which one must be made privy, through adoption or ingrafting.

[67] Christopher Seitz, "Canon, Narrative, and the Old Testament's Literal Sense: A Response to John Goldingay, 'Canon and Old Testament Theology.'" *Tyndale Bulletin*, 59:1 (2008), 33.

[68] Christopher Seitz, "Canon, Narrative, and the Old Testament's Literal Sense", 32.

[69] Christopher R. Seitz, *The Elder Testament Canon, Theology,Trinity.* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2018), 37.

[70] Christopher Seitz, *Figured Out*, 137.

Then, in what immediately follows Seitz appeals to Isaiah 45:14-15:

> Now where is the rest of humanity during all this?...Isaiah proclaims that those beyond Israel's boundary will come and find fellowship with God within the relationship established with Israel: "They will make supplication to you, saying, 'God is with you only, and there is no other. . . . ' O God of Israel, the Savior" (45:14, 15)[71]

What are the specific exegetical constraints when "outsiders" appropriate Israel's scriptures? Seitz seeks to illustrate how Christian parameters, predicated upon the New Testament understanding of adoption, play out in reference to the theology of God's otherness and holiness.[72] The outsider-made-insider, the gentile Christian "read into a will, a first will and testament, by Christ," is constrained *by* Christ, "who is our only point of access," to handle Israel's witness to God quite differently than a Jewish or agnostic reader (among others) since, "what we know of God [in the Old Testament] is related to what we know of God in Christ."[73] Indeed, Seitz's own correlation of "adoption or ingrafting," alluding to Ephesians 2 and Romans 11, with Isaiah 45:14–15 exemplifies this christological constraint.

In another chapter entitled, "The Divine Name in Christian Scripture" Seitz addresses contemporary arguments for a revision of the Bible's language for God (e.g., addressing God as "Father," the use of masculine singular pronouns, etc.). For Seitz this issue is subsidiary to the more fundamental question of whether we are entitled, "to call God anything at all."[74] Seitz responds by revising ill-defined notions of a generalized monotheism, which is assumed to be biblical in nature: "'We all worship the same God' is a statement foreign to the Bible's logic."[75] Seitz argues, rather, that the Bible speaks of a process by which foreigners come to discover that YHWH is the only God worthy of allegiance.

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[71] Seitz, *Word Without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 19-20. Interestingly, here the assertion, "Truly, you are a God who hides himself," is swallowed up in an ellipsis. For a more extended discussion on this tendency in Seitz see fn. 120 below.

[72] Otherness is defined in the following way: first, generally, as "outside," "beyond," or "different" as opposed to "present," or "similar"; second, in relation to the nations, as lying beyond their knowledge; third, for Israel in apostasy, as essentially and ironically, the same as for the nations – "knowing *other* gods"; and, last, *within* Israel, where to call God "the Holy One *of Israel* implies presence, not absence…" and is itself revealed or disclosed via rungs of proximity or election. Seitz, *Word Without End*, 22-23.

[73] Seitz, *Word Without End*, 21.

[74] Christopher Seitz, *Word Without End*, 252.

[75] Seitz, *Word Without End*, 251.

> The notion that God has a proper name and can be differentiated from other deities with proper names is absolutely clear in the Old Testament. Other gods (elohim) lay claims on humanity, but Israel is to have no god (elohim) before or beside YHWH (Exod 20:3). Moreover, the character of the name is itself a matter of reverence, since the name really coheres with the God it names (20:7)…To name God YHWH is not to call him something else, and it is also to distinguish him from other deities with other proper names, other peoples, and other narratives. It is a commonplace in handbooks to Old Testament religion to describe a movement from what is called 'henotheism' toward what is called 'monotheism.'… The shift to what is called 'monotheism' is argued to have taken place with Second Isaiah (the prophet Isaiah 40–55 working in the early Persian period, ca. 550). Theoretically, the elimination of all other gods might render superfluous the proper naming of Israel's YHWH. Yet that never happens in these chapters … To put this [all] in modern terms, nowhere in Second Isaiah would 'monotheism' amount to a practical elimination of all gods but one, such that it could be said, 'we all worship the same God.' Precisely the opposite is true in these chapters: representatives of other nations "shall make supplication to you, saying, 'God is with you only and there is no other, no god besides him'" (45:14). That is, they will make the same sort of claim Israel was commanded to make in the Ten Commandments, that against the rival claims of other gods, YHWH demanded sole allegiance.… This is not a sublime monotheism capable of differentiation from a more concrete henotheism – rather, it is a henotheism of a particularly potent stripe."[76]

Seitz harnesses the Isaianic tension between Yahweh's demand for sole allegiance (exemplified by the nations confession in Isa 45:14) as set over against the rival claims of other gods in the context of his contemporary argument. This is not accidental, but central, to Seitz's project. God's self-revelation is through privileged points of access: the particularity of the divine name of Yahweh in the Old Testament and the very specific name of Jesus in the New Testament. Seitz, again in the language of Ephesians 2:12–13, argues that non-Israelite access to the divine is only through the name of Jesus: "It is only through Jesus that we share in the divine

[76] Christopher Seitz, *Word Without End*, 253–255. Regarding the understanding of Isaiah in the development of monotheism see John Barton, "'The Work of Human Hands' (Ps 115:4): Idolatry in the Old Testament," in *Ex Auditu*, Vol. 15, *Idolatry and the Understanding of God* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 2000), 71.

life at all, being at one time strangers to the commonwealth of Israel. The specificity of the personal name YHWH, for Israel, naming her God and the only God, is now matched for Christians by the specific name Jesus."[77]

Seitz then makes a trenchant contemporizing turn while discussing God's benevolent action in providing privileged access to the divine life. In doing so he again appeals to Isa 45:14–15 in a blending of the biblical and contemporary horizons:

> We cannot 'get at' the divine life by means of general reflection, for the one God of creation revealed himself in a special and providential way with a particular people Israel, who knew his name and his character, and knew that these two aspects cohered perfectly (Exodus 3–14). We are introduced to this special relationship by Israel's own Lord, and in so doing we take our place with those whom the prophets envisioned, who confess that 'God is with you only, and there is no other' (Isa 45:14). The God who hides himself (45:15) we outsiders see and know in Jesus. Zechariah speaks of a time when 'those from the nations of every tongue take hold of the robe of a Jew saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you"' (Zech 8:23). That is the confession that we outside the household of Israel make, grasping the robe of Jesus.[78]

The collocation and deployment of prophetic passages is rhetorically forceful. In both passages a messenger formula introduces speech of non-Israelites who use the phrase "God is with (or among) you." The prophetic passages provide a confession of non-Israelites to the particularity of God's presence with or among the nation of Israel. After each confession Seitz makes a contemporizing, Christological interpretive move. According to Seitz, we (I.e., we being non-Jewish Christians) join those of whom the prophet speaks.

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[77] Christopher Seitz, *Word Without End*, 260. The argument above is extended further in a chapter entitled "Handing Over the Name: Christian Reflection on the Divine Name YHWH" in Christopher R. Seitz, *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture* (Louisville, KY: Westminister John Knox Press, 2001), 131–144. Here Seitz extends the work of David Yeago, who traces Philippians 2's description of Yahweh's handing over His name to his Son, as understood against the backdrop of Isaiah 45. Seitz concludes that the upshot of this surrendering of the divine name to Jesus is not only a radical two-way identification, Jesus with Yahweh and of Yahweh with Jesus but also, "what it means for God, the LORD, the maker of heaven and earth, to share himself with those outside Israel in the person of his Son." *Figured Out*, 143. See also David S. Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis." *Pro Ecclesia* 3, no. 2 (Spr 1994), 152–64; especially 154–58. For a critique of Yeago's argument which employs the exegesis of Athanasius and Eusebius of Caesarea see Lewis Ayres, "Is Nicene Trinitarianism 'In' the Scriptures?" *Nova et vetera* 18, no. 4 (2020): 1285–1300.

[78] Seitz, *Word Without End*, 260.

For Seitz the two prophetic passages work in a complementary, rhetorically reinforcing, way (and here I employ Seitz's own first person plurals): We not only make the imploring confession of Zech 8:23, but our grasping of the robe of "a Jew" (Zech 8:23) is, in fact, our grasping the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Seitz understands God to be hidden not to Israel, but to the nations.[79] As we will see later in Seitz's work in the NIB Commentary on Isaiah, it is by witnessing Yahweh's dealings with Israel through the agency of Cyrus that the nations come to grasp Israel's cherished revelation and make Israel's confession their own. God is no longer hidden to them, but in a very real sense, revealed as *with* Israel.[80] This is how it is now for outsiders in the wake of the Christ event as well: they apprehend "the God who hides himself (45:15)" in Jesus.[81] This is a distinctively Christian appropriation of Isaiah's prophecy, constrained or focused by a New Testament understanding of adoption or Gentile inclusion in the household of God.[82] These interpretive constraints and proclivities will be kept in mind as we turn to Seitz's exegetical engagement with the overall passage.

Setting up the Context

In *Isaiah 40–66* (NIB Commentary) Seitz endeavors to interpret Isaiah 45:14-17 within the larger section of Isaiah 45:9-25, though he readily admits that the delineation of this section is determined, "as much by external as by internal factors."[83] Seitz notes the general difficulty in ascertaining structuring principles or in classifying the genres of smaller units therein which has lead to a widespread lack of interpretive consensus. Therefore, the individual interpreter's wider sense of thematic unity or, alternatively, perceived lack of cohesion among smaller units – whether through form-critical or redactional considerations – will play a larger governing role to

[79] Seitz, *Isaiah 40–66*, 448. I see nothing in either work that hints at anything but uniformity of view on this point.

[80] Though Cyrus is not explicitly mentioned by Seitz in the context of *Word Without End*, there is enough of an analogy in the agency of these anointed ones, Cyrus and Jesus, revealing the once-concealed to those who historically stand outside of the community of Israel.

[81] In Seitz's application of the confession of the nations from Isaiah there is a break in the quoted material between v. 14 and v. 15: "…we take our place with those whom the prophets envisioned, who confess that 'God is with you only, and there is no other' (Isa 45:14). The God who hides himself (45:15) we outsiders see and know in Jesus." Though Seitz undoubtedly understands v. 15 "as an extension of the quoted acknowledgment of the nations doing homage," (Seitz, *Isaiah 40–66*, 448) in this speaking into the contemporary context something important takes place in his breaking off of the quoted material. From v. 15 the prophecy is presented *presently*. It is actualized for appropriation in the present. The God who hides himself is both the God who *was* hidden to us as at one time (cf. Ephesians 2:12) as well as the God who *is still* hidden, in some very real sense, in Jesus – yet we are now able to perceive (cf. Ephesians 2:13).

[82] Seitz states that his parameters are explicitly Christian ones, "based upon the New Testament's understanding of adoption." Seitz, *Word Without End*, 22.

[83] Seitz, *Isaiah 40–66*, 446.

do interpretive backfilling. Though Seitz here maintains his preference in reading smaller pericopes as "fully subservient to the dramatic structure of the literary composition," (that is the whole of Isaiah 40-48 within the book of Isaiah) he admits that his treating 45:9-25 together, "is in some sense a matter of convenience."[84]

The agency of Cyrus in accomplishing God's work is put forth as the "governing concern" of Isaiah 44:24-48:22: Cyrus' commission (44:24-45:7) is responded to by a hymn (45:8), and then by a stretch of discourse that Seitz places under the umbrella of disputation (45:9-25). The continued language and imagery of trial setting (e.g., the call to assemble in 45:20) as well as a continuing of divine direct address from the divine council (with an emphasis on unmediated first-person divine speech) are identified as markers of thematic or structural unity with Isaiah 40-44.[85] It is out of this perceived cohesion that Seitz argues for a particular development: "…the disputation has taken a different turn with the commissioning of Cyrus."[86] The agency of Cyrus, Seitz argues, is central to reestablishing Israel as Yahweh's servant by releasing from captivity (42:7) in order that Israel "though blind and deaf" might see, hear, repent and be forgiven (44:21-22). Israel, rather than the nations, "stands at the center of these calls to listen and assemble," and must "attend to the former things to grasp the logic of what God is up to (46:9-11)."

Some of the ramifications of this "different turn" are the following: First, within this disputative discourse the possibility of idolatry now lies well within the purview for Israel, as opposed to "its former role as an absurdity to be…satirized or condemned (44:25; 45:16, 20; 46:1-2, 6-7)."[87] Though I disagree with Seitz on such a clear demarcation of 'before and after' regarding the possibility of Israelite idolatry, his oblique drawing together of Israelite idolatry with the response of Israel to the commissioning of Cyrus is perceptive. In the very least DI seems to make a rejection of the prophecy coterminous with rebellion and idolatry. Secondly, within 45:9-25, Seitz sees a shift to "something of the intermingling of Israel and the nations…"[88] Though admitting of the following examples' inherent subtlety Seitz sees the

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[84] Seitz, *Isaiah 40–66*, 409; 446.

[85] See, for instance, Seitz's consideration of the centrality of formal markers relating to the trial setting (e.g., appeals to draw near, to present evidence, produce witnesses, alongside the sentencing of Babylon in chap. 47) working together to draw other diverse forms and adaptations of older works into "a larger conceptual design" extending from 40-48. Seitz, *Isaiah 40–66*,408-409.

[86] Seitz, *Isaiah 40–66*, 441.

[87] Seitz, *Isaiah 40–66*, 441.

[88] Seitz, *Isaiah 40–66*, 441. In a similar vein, in the previously mentioned article "God as Other, God as Holy" Seitz identifies the central plot line of the book of Isaiah as being "about Israel becoming like the nations and then forfeiting its capacity to hear, until a new generation emerges and is brought back into fellowship, now in the

confession of Egypt and Ethiopia (Isa 45:14-15), the mention of survivors of the nations (Isa 45:20) and the call to all the ends of the earth to "turn to me and be saved" (Isa 45:22-23), as possibilities of a new beginning for the nations.

Isaiah 45:14-17

Seitz interprets Isaiah 45:14-15 both in relation to the immediate context of Cyrus as YHWH's "unwitting agent" (Isaiah 45:1-7) as well as in relation to favored intertexts in Isaiah 36-39. In the immediate context of Isa 45 Seitz sees v. 6 as naturally anticipating vv. 14–15. The latter of these intertextual interpretations, however, stems from Seitz's larger interpretive proclivity to read Isaiah 40-66 in relation to "the former things" of Isaiah 1-39. He argues that, "the material in chapters 40-66 self-consciously functions in relationship to earlier Isaiah chapters and other 'former things'."[89] His discussion is part of a more extended portrayal of Cyrus as both a typical and a distinctive agent of Yahweh. Typical in the sense that, like Assyria (Isa 10:5–15), Cyrus is unwitting; distinctive in that, unlike the "former" Assyria, Cyrus is commissioned in order to lead those outside of Israel to a recognition of Yahweh as God.[90] In this vein, Seitz suggests that the prayer of Hezekiah in Isa 36:20, "that with the deliverance of Jerusalem, 'all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the LORD,'" is with the agency of Cyrus "on the horizon of fulfillment." Seitz conjoins the exile-foreshadowing scene of Hezekiah's showing off, "everything found in his treasures" (באצרת) in Isa 39:1-8 with the "treasures of darkness" (אוצרות חשך), handed over to Cyrus in 45:3. The confession of the nations in Isa 45:14–15 is interpreted by Seitz as, ultimately, fulfillment of Hezekiah's prayer.

company of the very nations who had once been outside, agents of God's judgement without their knowledge of it, now to be brought near themselves." Seitz, *Word Without End*, 23.

[89] Seitz, *Isaiah 40–66*, 391.

[90] Seitz understands Isa 45:3 to mean that Cyrus is unwitting at the time of his commissioning. Though he initially states: "no scene, such as we witness for Egypt and Ethiopia (vv. 14–15), involves Cyrus in a comparable way," he then goes on to entertain the possibility that with the return of exiles and rebuilding of Zion "perhaps…the author could anticipate Cyrus's gaining knowledge of God." Seitz goes as far as to grant the possibility that Cyrus makes the confession with the nations in 45:14–15. At the outset Seitz suggests Cyrus' inability to recognize Yahweh as the result of idolatry (by cross-referencing the "though you do not know me" of 45:4 with the idolaters in 44:18 who "do not know"). In his choice words elsewhere, "Strange as it may seem, Balaam's ass and Cyrus the Persian have more in common than either do with Israel." *Word Without End*, 23. Yet, the presence of Isa 45:3 puts pressure on Seitz to desire a textual development culminating in a moment of Cyrus' acknowledgment (even Balaam's donkey was given utterance!). Given all of this, it is fascinating that Seitz does *not* explicitly suggest v. 15 as the confession of Cyrus following the confession of the nations in v.14. As we have already observed the canonical pressures and contemporary concerns come to bear on Seitz's interpretation as much as the literary and rhetorical developments internal to Isaiah. Seitz, *Isaiah 40–66*, 443.

> Perhaps with their return and with the rebuilding of Zion/Jerusalem, the author could anticipate Cyrus's gaining knowledge of God. That particular scenario is depicted at vv. 14–15 when treasures ("wealth," "merchandise") are at last presented; confession then follows by the nations in fulfillment of Hezekiah's former prayer, "God is with you alone, and there is no other…O God of Israel, the Savior" (vv. 14b–15; cf. 36:20).[91]

The ellipses in Seitz' above quoting of 45:14b–15 obfuscates the parallel assertion, "Truly, you are a God who hides himself." A similar propensity towards avoiding divine self-concealment is found elsewhere.[92] Yet, how does Seitz handle v.15 in his commentary? To begin with, he sets up his interpretation in contradistinction to the "Amen gloss" proposal of Claus Westermann, which he refers to as an "an astonished, but favorable, response to God's work in Cyrus," which is "independent of the preceding confession made by the nations." [93] Seitz grants the "religious insight" of Westermann's reading which he summarizes as follows:

> What is hidden is the activity of a God who had formerly fought openly on behalf of the people, and occasionally against them, but who now no longer would do so: 'Henceforth God's action in history is a hidden one.' This is the response of a writer interpolating his favorable reception of God's action in Cyrus.

Seitz rejects this proposal because it "asks us to see unwarranted discontinuity between God's action in Assyria and God's action in Cyrus, of a sort that occasioned an independent one-verse response, unmarked but there nonetheless."[94] First, Seitz denies the possibility of a later interpolation on the grounds that this is "impossible to establish." Yet, he does not specify what

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[91] Seitz, *Isaiah 40–66*, 443.

[92] We have already witnessed this tendency above. See, *Word Without End*, 19–20. Similarly: *Isaiah 40–66*, 447. "Cyrus' accrual of wealth and merchandise is not for himself, but for Israel and ultimately unto the acknowledgment of "the God of Israel, the Savior" (v. 15)" Why does Seitz regularly omit the confession, "Truly, you are a God who hides himself"? It is clear from the placement of the ellipses within the internal quotes (alongside Seitz's treatment later in the commentary and what we have already discussed) that Seitz understands this as the gentile address. From his reasoning in "God as Other, God as Holy," that which implies *presence* ("God of Israel, redeemer") is in this verse fused into a relationship with, if not absence, certainly concealment ("surely, you are a God who hides himself"). It is puzzling why he does not devote more time to explaining this relationship between presence and concealment. As Seitz interprets Isaiah 45:14–15 through the lens of Ephesians 2:11-22's imagery of gentile adoption into Israel's covenant, perhaps such a confession was determined to be in too great a dissonance with his contemporary concerns and his overall understanding about divine disclosure and gentile inclusion in Israel's covenant.

[93] Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 170. See 5.2.1.

[94] Seitz, *Isaiah 40–66*, 448.

kind of criteria might be used in order to better establish the claim, outside of what we might assume from his "unmarked, but there nonetheless" comment as an inverted appeal for some kind of scribal or textual feature to make such an interpolation identifiable as such.[95] Secondly, Seitz objects to the implication in Westermann that with the agency of Cyrus we have entered a truly new phase in God's history of dealings with Israel. This appears to be objectionable to Seitz for two reasons. The first, relating to Seitz's overarching Isaianic reading preference of continuity and interconnectedness: God's actions via Assyria, though mapping onto the category of "former things" are still to be seen as categorically analogous to God's agency via Cyrus.[96] The second, I propose, relates to Seitz's more contemporary concerns. Seitz may be equally nervous about Westermann's understanding of the Cyrus event as absolute rupture, terminating an era characterized by God's discernible activity in history. This simply cannot square with Seitz's theological program. For Seitz, the implications here might also lead a reader into seriously considering the possibility of discontinuity in divine action, also in the present era.[97]

Seitz, rather, understands the "God of Israel" to be revealed as "Savior" in the discernable agency of Cyrus commissioned to deliver a recalcitrant Israel through which the nations come to recognize Israel's God.

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[95] Nor does he deal with Westermann's discussion of v. 15's text in its context. Though there is markedly less evidence to support Westermann's preferred reading of v. 15 as an interpolation there is the somewhat analogous אכן statement made at Isa 40:7, for which the evidence is better. To begin with, the LXX does not contain the MT's 40:7. As I understand it prior to 1QIsa^{a} scholars understood the LXX to be defective owing to homoioteleuton. However, in 1QIsa^{a} that which we know as 40:7b–8a from the MT has been added between lines and in the margin. On this point one must grapple with the work of Hugh Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah*, 255–56. Williamson argues on exegetical grounds that the MT is the better reading, since in the shorter form (LXX and the original hand of 1QIsa^{a}) the flow of the text is more confusing, especially as only one voice would then be speaking. I agree with Williamson that the MT is to be preferred as the אכן constitutes a change of voice and mood that better suits rhetorical development in the wider context. However, to my mind Williamson does not thereby put to rest the possibility that "the longer MT developed by accretion from the shorter text." Why not reject the others' grounds that אכן חציר העם is a gloss (due to disruption of meter and use of עם for mankind), while retaining the possibility that the text still makes better sense *because* of a gloss or interpolation? Westermann, for instance, reads these three words at Isa 40:7 "between the prophet's objection and its answer," as the comment of a deeply moved reader Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 42. We turn to this in chapter 5.

[96] Seitz here responds to Westermann's referring to v. 15 as a response to God's use of a pagan monarch as "a breakthrough, leading to a change in the mode of his action," and an "unprecedented act of God." Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 170.

[97] Here, again, we might reflect on tonalities of theological reflection on God's hiddenness in the present that Seitz wishes to avoid. In the very least we might consider Westermann's own immediate post-Holocaust context to be pressuring the prose. However, it is worth noting that Westermann's own winking christological moves are not, interestingly, taken up for discussion by Seitz. Westermann's treatment goes on: "Henceforward God's action in history is a hidden one. But one further thing needs to be said. There is one place at which the God who hides himself is revealed—the place where he becomes his chosen people's saviour. This is here indicated in the predication with which the verse ends, 'God of Israel, a helper (or, a saviour)'." Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 170.

> God's actions are not hidden to Israel in some new way, hitherto unexperienced [contra Westermann]. They have been and remain hidden to the nations, who come to know God and God's ways only as they witness God's actions with the people Israel, here ironically and mysteriously accomplished through a foreign ruler. The contrast with the exodus is striking. Here we have a foreign liberator who does not know God, whose liberation of Israel leads to the acknowledgment of God by foreign nations, who is greeted with resistance by God's own people, Israel.[98]

Some tension exists between the process of disclosure as drawn out by Seitz (by which the nations come to recognize the God of Israel) and their actual direct address to God, "…you are a God who hides himself." What exactly do the nations mean by addressing God in this way at this particular juncture? If, as Seitz argues, the acknowledgement of God relates to their witnessing "God's actions with the people Israel," then it stands to reason that the bit about God's hiding himself should also refer to those same actions *with Israel*. The closest Seitz comes to elucidating the meaning of "hiddenness" from within his given interpretation is when he later treats the relationship between v. 15 and vv. 18–25. There he states that, "the confession by the nations that the God of Israel, from their perspective, keeps hidden (vs. 15)," triggers a reflection in which God "intends to clarify the confession of the nations for Israel and introduce the trial speech of vv. 20-24."[99] Thus, the possibility that the nations themselves might be misinterpreting God's actions with Israel is first saluted by introducing the phenomenological and perspectival nature of the confession and then by acknowledging the need for divine clarification in what follows. There is clearly a problematic dimension to the nations' claim to God's "hiddenness" (אל מסתתר), witnessed in the use of "secret" (בסתר) as a key word in the divine counterfactual of v. 19. The clarification is, however, for Israel's sake – to avoid *their own* further misinterpretation.[100] Here Seitz walks a very thin line between the constraints of the text and his

[98] Seitz, *Isaiah 40–66*, 448.

[99] Seitz, *Isaiah 40–66*, 448.

[100] Seitz understands the massive trial scene of Isaiah 40-48 as fundamentally related to Israel's misunderstanding its place within the larger created order, a more general misinterpreting of God's superintendence of that order (Seitz, 404). Thus, Israel has failed to understand how it's right (משפט) is constituted, since, "apart from God Israel has no identity…so any question of Israel's right that truly merits response will have to be taken up in the wider context of the coastlands, the peoples, and the "gods" that are no gods." Seitz, *Isaiah 40*–66, 415.

own preferred reading.[101] Perhaps it is for this reason that what the nations' may have meant by the God of Israel "keeping hidden" is left substantially untreated.

Isaiah 45:16–17

Before jumping ahead to vv. 18–25, however, we need to address how Seitz understands vv. 16–17 and their relationship to v. 14–15. Though Seitz has little to say about the content of vv. 16–17, his reflections on how these verses relate to the overall context are insightful.

> The final two verses [16–17] serve to conclude the unity by offering a contrast between shamed worshipers of idols and an Israel saved by God, unashamed to all eternity. The "Savior," referred to by the nations in acknowledgment, here speaks on behalf of his people. If vv. 14–17 constitute a traditional form-critical unit, these final verses would mark it as an oracle of salvation. The oracle is delivered in the specific context of acknowledgment by the nations (vv. 14–15), which is itself closely tied to the oracle commissioning Cyrus (v. 6).

In vv. 16–17 Seitz proposes something of a resumption to the prophetic voice (i.e., the voice of the "Savior"), speaking on "behalf of his people."[102] Yet, his general attention is moved away

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[101] Seitz's preference for reading this section alongside Ephesians 2 and Romans 9–11 is further evidenced in his desire to interpret that which "the nations cannot bear testimony to" as "their own salvation and inclusion in god's designs." (Seitz, 449) Similarly, in presenting the possibility of vs. 25 as the continuation of the confession in 24 over against hearing it as the divine voice, thematic symmetry with "vv. 14-15 is what comes to the fore. The nations will confess the lordship of Israel's God, and also the righteousness obtained by God's people, Israel." (Seitz, 449). There is certainly a similarity in the language used in 14-17 and in 24-25. There is also a similar ambiguity of speaker in the two. However, Seitz does not adequately present the interpretive options. For instance, the similarity between "*Only in Yahweh*, it shall be said of me," (אַךְ בַּיהוָה of vs. 24) and "*Only in/with you* is God," (אַךְ בְּךְ אֵל of vs. 14) can be read as a corrective, or at least fine tuning, to the nations' confession.
Given Seitz's theological reflections which coordinate Isaiah 45:9-25 with Romans 9-11 and Philippians 2, I find his lack of an attempt to bring Isaiah 45:14 into conversation with 1 Corinthians 14:25 somewhat surprising: 'After the secrets of the unbeliever's heart are disclosed, that person will bow down before God and worship him, declaring, "God is really among you."' Here Paul has read hypothetical unbelievers into the place of the nations and the hoped-for congregational context at Corinth as Zion, the temple of the living God. Florian Wilk has concluded that, "Paul took Isa. 45:14–22 to be a prophecy of the eschatological overturn of unbelief as anticipated by the conversion of unbelievers in the midst of an assembly of prophesying Christians." Interestingly, the obeisance in this appropriation is now directed unambiguously to God. It is also possible that the presence of τὰ κρυπτὰ to refer to "the *hidden things* of his heart" – made manifest through the prophetic activity within the church – suggests influence from a Greek unlike the LXX or a Hebrew similar to 1QIsa[a] or MT for Isa 45:14-15. Wilk suggests, alternatively, that 1 Cor. 14:24–25 corresponds to the LXX of Daniel 2:46–47 before moving on to his analysis of the profession of the outsider in vs. 25 as an allusion to Isa 45:14. See Wilk's chapter, "Isaiah in 1 and 2 Corinthians," in Steve Moyise and J.J. Menken Maarten, eds., *Isaiah in the New Testament.* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 143–44.

[102] Given this reading, it seems natural to correlate the 3pl subject of vs. 16 (*all of them together have been put to shame, even disgraced / the forgers of idols proceed in ignominy*) with the verbs of motion and 3pl in Isa 45:14 (*the toil of Egypt and the*

from the fine textual grain of 14–17 towards grappling with how 45:9–25 might work as a unity. He continues…

> The other way to describe this is not that smaller, independent units are here juxtaposed by an editor, but that a longer, single composition (vv. 9–25) attempts to comprehend the range of concerns sparked by the decision to commission a foreign ruler to save Israel (vv. 1–7). The author proceeds by simply examining various facets of this decision and reactions to it. This gives 'units' in the chapter the appearance of having been loosely strung together on the basis of catchword. But, in fact, here we are simply observing the mind of the author at work as he moves from one aspect to the next, one association giving rise to another.[103]

Analysis and Evaluation of Seitz's Interpretation

Seitz's preferred reading of v. 15 is to see this as the natural extension of the nations acknowledgement in v. 14. Yet, he does not elucidate the meaning of divine hiddenness, especially as it stands as the nations witnessing to God's actions with Israel. Given the length of his discussion on the agency of Cyrus and whether, within the world of the text, the foreign ruler ever comes to acknowledge the God of Israel, it may seem surprising that the possibility of v. 15 as the confession of Cyrus is not raised explicitly by Seitz. Once, while offering an intertextual reading with Isa 36–39, he does conclude: "When treasures are returned a

?nd Zion is adorned again, confession by the nations, including even Cyrus, will follow."[104] Yet, in the commentary which follows Seitz backs away from this. Yet, this seems like a somewhat obvious "aha" moment for Cyrus as *he* observes both the nations and Israel. Further, it would keep the testimony of "hiddenness" in the realm of the gentiles, something that Seitz is keen to do. This interpretation would also fit the montage proposal for vv. 14–17 suggested above. As

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commerce of Ethiopia, and the Sabeans, tall of stature, shall pass over to you and be yours, they shall follow you; they shall proceed in chains and bow down to you)? There is also a possible word play between the rare use of the ambiguous צִיִּים in 45:16 and the appearance of Egypt מִצְרַיִם in 45:14.

[103] Seitz, *Isaiah 40–66*, 448. Another way of envisioning this would be analogous to a scene from a movie in which a major piece of news is revealed (imagine early 20th century newsies shouting, "extra, extra, read all about it…," or the stack of international newspapers in *Citizen Kane* heralding the death of the tycoon) followed by varied public reactions to the news. This is, of course, somewhat different to "the mind of the author" moving from one aspect to the next.

[104] Seitz, *Isaiah 40*–66, 394.

we have seen above, the pressure exerted on Seitz's reading of Isa 45:14–15 by various New Testament texts seems to preclude this possibility.

Further, Seitz avoids the possible connection between the subjugation of the nations (*to* Israel and *in* chains) and their acknowledgement of the God of Israel as one who hides himself. Seitz takes up the issue of slavery in his reflective commentary on Isaiah 45:14, which posits readerly problems, namely that the assumptions of "modern men and women in the West" regarding subservient postures are readily "traceable to the misuse of power."[105] As an interpretive antidote Seitz prescribes reading the text "within its own frame of reference," which he understands as a fulfillment of "former" references to Ethiopia and Egypt in Isaiah 18-19.[106] However, as J.L. Koole states, reading the nations' homage in light of this eschatological expectation, "is hard to reconcile with בַּזִּקִים = 'in chains'."[107] The use of לָךְ יִהְיוּ also seems to signal that both the toil and the toilers are passing into Zion's outright possession. Though these specific nations' lives and labor, even becoming the possession of the temple itself, *might* be read figurally as gentile Christians becoming part of the temple itself in a Pauline sense, Seitz does not spell this out in his commentary.

Christological Affirmations of the *Deus Absconditus*

Seitz does, however, affirm God's hiddenness more overtly elsewhere in the commentary. This is not his exegesis of the passage, per se, but appears in an earlier theological reflection on the pericope of Isa 44:24-45:8. Here he applies Isa 45:15 christologically: "The God who keeps hidden (Isa 45:15) makes Divinity fully known, in birth and death."[108] Seitz's structuring of this statement (ontological affirmation of God's hiddenness in reference to Isa 45:15a, followed by a reference to Jesus in reference to Isa 45:15b) is similar to the contemporizing and christological moves we observed above. For Seitz, as with many other Christian interpreters, God's hiddenness in Christ, is the consummation of God's paradoxical disclosure.[109]

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[105] Seitz, *Isaiah 40–66*, 450.

[106] Specifically, that the Ethiopians, "a people tall and smooth," will bring gifts to Mount Zion (Isa 18:7) and blessings will come upon Egypt, to the degree that, 'together with Israel, it will be called "my people" (Isa 19:25).' Though thematically similar, Isa 18:7 and 45:14 employ different Hebrew terms in referring to both the people group as well as different idioms for their stature.

[107] J.L. Koole, *Isaiah III*, 467.

[108] Seitz, *Isaiah 40–66*, 396.

[109] As we saw when discussing the non-LXX versions above. Tertullian understands Isaiah to be speaking directly *to* Christ in Isa 45:14–15, from "God is in you" drawing the conclusion: εν τινι δε ο θεός άλλ' ή εν Χριοτω Ιησού τω πατρωω λόγω καί τω μυστηρίω της οικονομιας. See the analysis of Tertullian's prosopological exegesis in Matthew W. Bates, *The Hermeneutics of the Apostolic Proclamation: The Center of Paul's Method of Scriptural Interpretation* (Waco, TX:

For Seitz we may assume some genre differentiation between his exegetical engagement of the text and his theological work with overt contemporary or pastoral concerns (both within the NIB commentary and without).[110] In the former, God's hiddenness (v. 15) is the (possibly faulty) perspective of the nations which elicits further clarification (v.18) from the God they are just coming to reckon with and recognize. In the latter the revelation regarding God's hiddenness is paradoxically disclosed to *us* as focusing onto the person of Jesus. Our vista is not limited by that of the context of origin. Though we too are outsiders-made-insiders who take up the confession of the nations, in the wake of the manger, the transfiguration, and the cross we now see how God keeps hidden and saves in ways the nations then could not.[111]

3.3 Amplifying the Voice

In what follows I offer two different ways of nuancing the voicings, both of which seek to clarify and problematize aspects in the work of Goldingay and Seitz. In Goldingay's work we were introduced to the likely rhetorical function of the three nations. What I present in the first reading is something of a thought experiment in which I ask: what happens if we augment the agency of the nations? I do not, however, argue that this is organic to the purposes of DI. In the second section I take up an existing, but often neglected, reading which voices v. 15 as Cyrus.

3.3.1 Intentional Augmenting of Agency in the Voicing of the Nations

If we turn our attention to these three African nations as they appear previously in the final-form of Isaiah, we see the likelihood of Isa 45:14 gathering up motifs from Isa 1–39 (esp. Isa 18–20; 30) in which, as John Goldingay states, Sudan and Ethiopia, "appear mostly as makeweights rather than for their intrinsic significance," and that in 45:14 this rhetorical overtone may apply to Egypt as well.[112] Marta Hoyland Lavik somewhat similarly concludes that the Cushites in Isaiah 18 serve as a literary motif in which the effect of Cush bringing tribute is

Baylor University Press, 2012), 185–198. In sketching the cultural background to prosopological exegesis in antiquity Bates describes the move from the world of drama (where πρόσωπον referred to the face/countenance as well as a physical mask) to the world of oratory and grammarians to describe rhetorical techniques. Part of this move from the dialogical flux of the world of drama, where various voices punctuated dialogue with direct addresses to the audience, so practitioners of prosopological exegesis scrupulously followed shifts in speaker and addressee.

[110] This is how, for instance, when interpreting Isa 45:7 Seitz can argue against the universalizing theological abstractions of other authors for a reading that is more organic to the text's own intentions.

[111] I use the first-person plural here in order to follow Seitz's own voice and intention as charitably as possible.

[112] Goldingay, *Message*, 284.

to demonstrate to the intended Judahite audience that even this powerful people that you are tempted to rely upon will ultimately rely on and submit to Yahweh.[113]

Though intrinsically very likely that the nations are more a literary-rhetorical device than speaking "their own mind," the textual ambiguity regarding whether the people or tribute are the objects in 45:14 works to confirm it. That is, it may be purposefully unclear whether the nations are to be understood as speaking subjects, or as objects like those they carry in tribute. This is strengthened by the presence of the fetters which, in the very least, bind the Sabeans, if not all three peoples. Even if one argues the bondage is not literal, it is at least literary.[114] Additionally, the six 2fs pronominal suffixes alongside the third person verbs which agree with the nations (or, their tribute/goods) focus the address to the overarching addressee of Israel/Zion.[115] Finally, the messenger formula with which v. 14 opens, alongside the imperfect verbs, further suggests that the speech of the nations is mediated. Having determined that the African nations' are more a rhetorical device, in which the prophet participates in the wider wealth of nations tradition, we may still ask after the relationship between the degree of agency attributed to the nations and a contingent meaning of v. 15. Such an exercise will also helpfully foreground later discussions in which exilic Israel is identified as the speaker (chapters four and six).

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[113] Marta Hoyland Lavik, *A People Tall and Smooth Skinned*, 231. Lavik argues that scholarly interests of a more straightforwardly historical and geographical nature have regularly eclipsed significant literary-rhetorical features of Isaiah 18. Lavik, *A People Tall*, 9 and 17. Her conclusion is that Isa 18 evidences a "rhetoric of entrapment" in which "the constant shift of characters functions to confuse the audience when it comes to *who* will be judged" Lavik, 231. There is a similarity in the constant shift of speaking voices in Isa 45:9–25. Cf. Isa 11:11 and 20:3–5 for appearances of Cush and Egypt together without Sabeans. For a survey of *Kusu*, *Kusi*, and *Kush* in Egyptian, Assyrian, and Israelite sources see David T. Adamo, *Africa and the Africans in the Old Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 11–15. See also David T. Adamo, *The Images of Cush in the Old Testament* in Mary Getui, Knut Holter, and Victor Zinkuratire *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa: Papers from the International Symposium on Africa and the Old Testament in Nairobi*, October 1999 (Peter Lang, 2001), 73.

[114] In other words the presence of the fetters ironically underscores that the nations are to be seen here as a literary-rhetorical device. Though, one should interrogate why a decision has been made for taking the fetters as either literal or symbolic.

[115] Or, as we shall see further, to Cyrus. Beuken argues that from the rapid-fire repetition of the six prepositions in vs. 14 a sense of surprise is evoked that all of this should belong "not to the new world-leader, Cyrus" but specifically now to the exiles. Beuken, W. A. M. *Jesaja Dl. IIA* Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1979, 247. Duhm was so troubled by the stacking up of prepositional phrases here that he exclaims, "*was ist das für ein wunderliches Durcheinander!*" (i.e., "what kind of curious chaos this is" or maybe "…marvelous mess…") One way to "clean up" this mess would be to coordinate יְגִיעַ מִצְרַיִם וְסֹחַר־כּוּשׁ with עָלַיִךְ יַעֲבֹרוּ וְלָךְ יִהְיוּ אַחֲרַיִךְ יֵלְכוּ בַּזִּקִים יַעֲבֹרוּ and סְבָאִים אַנְשֵׁי מִדָּה with וְאֵלַיִךְ יִשְׁתַּחֲווּ אֵלַיִךְ יִתְפַּלָּלוּ. This is merely (and perhaps a bit woodenly) to follow the *waw*s. Though less common the verbs הלך and עבר can take non-human/inanimate subjects (cf., Gen. 7:18 and 32:22). This also opens up an intriguing possibility of reading the זִקִּים as relating only to the tribute and not the bearers of tribute. Perhaps, following Boyd's suggestion of זק as an Aramaic loanword referring to "leather straps" the reference in v.14 could be exclusively to the binding up of goods? Unlikely, given the use of זִקִּים everywhere else in the OT referring to the binding of human subjects.

If one allows, even as a thought experiment, that these African nations speak from their own perspective, then their cultic and religious expectations and background (e.g., Amun as hidden one) could feature more prominently in one's interpretation or reconstructive work.[116] If agency is augmented, then the possibility of v. 15 constituting a legitimate "aha" moment would increase in commensurate fashion. Yet, what elements in the wider context contribute towards an understanding of the speakers' intonation and intention?

First, we can link Cyrus' instrumentality in causing some sort of world-wide acknowledgment of Yahweh's divine pre-eminence (vs. 6) and the substance of the nations' confession in vs. 14. However, if vs. 15 is seen as the continuation of the nations' confession, even with an intensification of the address turning more directly to Yahweh in the MT, might there be a similar connection to the events depicted in the Cyrus oracle?

Isa. 45:3 can be interpreted in light of the historical background of Cyrus's conquest of Babylon and the plundering of their treasures. As Isaiah 42:22ff describes Israel as a people plundered and hidden, and then goes on to speak of their restoration in Isaiah 43, so the giving of "treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places" to Cyrus is done "for the sake of my servant Jacob" (vs. 4). There is a tacit connection deserving further exploration between Isaiah 43:3 and Isaiah 45:3 and 45:15:

Isaiah 43:3	Isaiah 45:3	Isaiah 45:14-15
כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ קְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹשִׁיעֶךָ כָּפְרִךָ מִצְרַיִם כּוּשׁ וּסְבָא נָתַתִּי תַּחְתֶּיךָ׃	וְנָתַתִּי לְךָ אוֹצְרוֹת חֹשֶׁךְ וּמַטְמֻנֵי מִסְתָּרִים לְמַעַן תֵּדַע כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה הַקּוֹרֵא בִשְׁמְךָ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל׃	יְגִיעַ מִצְרַיִם וְסֹחַר־כּוּשׁ וּסְבָאִים׀ אַנְשֵׁי מִדָּה... וְאֵלֶיךָ יֵשְׁתַּחֲווּ אֵלֶיךָ יִתְפַּלָּלוּ אַךְ בְּךָ אֵל וְאֵין עוֹד אֶפֶס אֱלֹהִים׃ אָכֵן אַתָּה אֵל מִסְתַּתֵּר אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹשִׁיעַ׃

In Isaiah 43:3 Israel is assured that Egypt, Ethiopia and Sabea are given in exchange for Israel by "Yahweh, your God, the holy one of Israel, your deliverer." In Isaiah 45:3 Cyrus is going to be "given hidden treasures" in order that "you might know that I am Yahweh…the God of Israel" In both 43:3 and 45:3 we find not only the verb **נתן** employed in a context of

[116] See fn. four above.

people or possessions being given over to a foreign sovereign, but also the declaration **כי אני יהוה**…linked to an asseverative formula declared about Israel's God. However, as Goldingay states, "..the benefits that were to come to Cyrus (cf. vv. 1, 3, 5) are due to come to the Judean community…links with vv. 1-7 (and with 43.3) will continue in vv. 15-17."[117] Verse 15 as a confession in the mouths of the Gentiles is illuminated when read against this backdrop: The **כי אני יהוה** in Isa. 43:3 and 45:3 is answered by the nations in vs. 15 not with "*Surely* you are Yahweh…"; instead, with "*Yet*, you are a god who conceals yourself, god of Israel, deliverer" What is interesting in this respect is the further possible wordplay and rhetorical development between Isaiah 45:3's מַסְתָּרִים / אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל and 45:15's מִסְתַּתֵּר / אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. There may be a note of bitter sarcasm in this confession of the god of Israel as "deliverer" alluding to the 'hidden treasures' delivered over to Cyrus, for these are quite possibly imagined as the very treasures of the subject nations' and their very own souls, now devoted to the construction of Jerusalem and her temple. As we saw in the last chapter, the wealth of foreign nations taken as tribute alongside their subjugation functions as a motif in both ANE iconography and written sources.

Isaiah 45:13 returns to the instrumentality of Cyrus on Yahweh's behalf in "building my city" and sending out "my exiles" and this לֹא בְמְחִיר וְלֹא בְשֹׁחַד. These themes dramatically introduced in 44:28 (i.e., the rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple by the agency of Cyrus) are returned to. Following the messenger formula in vs. 14 the use of **יגיע** connects to vs. 13's **מחיר**, the two terms being collocated in Isaiah 55:1-2.[118] This financial link between vss. 13-14 is noted by Koole, Goldingay, and Beuken, all of whom note the importance of Isaiah 43:3 as background, but do little to tease out the implications of these same African nations resurfacing here. Beuken argues that vs. 14 reconciles a possible contradiction between Isaiah 45:13 and 43:3.

The feminine singular of both **עיר** and **גלות** in vs. 13 make for ambiguity in the addressee of vs. 14 as the feminine singular is used in the repeated prepositions there.[119] Goldingay has suggested that it is natural "for the meaning of Jerusalem and exile community to slide into each

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[117] Goldingay, *The Message of Isaiah 40-55*, 284. Yet, as Boyd points out, the influence of Isa 43:3 in the mind of the interpreter may also contribute to misunderstanding Isa 45:14. The two verses are similar in that each "the three nations function for the benefit of Israel." They differ, however, in the "mechanism through which that benefit accrues to Israel." In 43:3 Israel gains return from exile by means of the ransom and exchange of the three nations; in 45:15 the prophet "describes a situation of bearing tribute." Boyd, "Two Instances," 407.

[118] J.L. Koole, *Isaiah III*, 464.

[119] See also Berges, "Folgt man dem massoretischen Text mit seinen Personalsuffixen der 2. Person Singular feminine halt der Kontext zwei Möglichkeiten bereit, auf die sich die Suffixe beziehen können…Beide Bezüge sind möglich und schließen sich nicht aus.." in Ulrich Berges. *Jesaja 40-48*. Freiburg: Herder, 2008, 418.

other" here, and this seems to be suggested elsewhere in Isa 40–48 (cf. Isa. 40:1-2).[120] The mention of the toil or wealth of Egypt and the 'trade profit' of Ethiopia along with stature of the Sabeans may, in fact, point to the use of both the goods and the foreigners themselves in the reconstruction of the city and temple. Koole, synthesizing the creative exegesis of Beuken and Bonnard, summarizes that, "Cyrus takes possession of the nations with all their wealth and manpower, but now gives them to Israel, chains and all."[121]

If the subjected peoples pass over to the exiles in order to carry out the tasks of reconstruction, I suggest employing a royal inscription to serve as parallel to Isa 45:14–15 for heuristic purposes. The Susa Foundation Charter (Dsf) was found among the debris of King Darius' palace and describes not only the construction of the palace and how the foundations were laid (c.f. Isaiah 44:28), but also from "whence construction materials were brought, and even the nationalities of the artists and workers involved in the specific aspects of the project."[122] An excerpt follows:

> The silver and the ebony were brought from Egypt…The ivory which was wrought here, was brought from Ethiopia and from Sind and from Arachosia…The goldsmiths who wrought the gold, those were Medes and Egyptians. The men who wrought the wood, those were Sardians and Egyptians. …The men who adorned the wall, those were Medes and Egyptians.[123]

The Foundation Charter is not here intended to ground the prophecy in historical actuality, as the charters themselves were not simplistic accounts of fact, but could be imaginative imperial rhetoric framed as "straightforward enumeration of tasks allotted to the subject peoples and raw materials from their lands."[124] Rather, such iconographic evidence as intertexts can furnishes the readerly imagination as we seek to augment the agency of these nations in this particular reading. With this background in mind, if the subject nations are seen as speaking in vs. 14-15, what is the sense of their testimony or confession? I suggest as one interpretive possibility that a double-meaning could be detected that is resonant with grief

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[120] Goldingay and Payne, *A critical and exegetical commentary on Isaiah 40-55. Vol. 2.* (London: T&T Clark), 44. A similar ambiguity is detectable in Isa 18:7 surrounding the use of שַׁי - understood as tribute brought to Yahweh on Mt. Zion. Marta Hoyland Lavik notes, "it is somewhat unclear whether the people themselves are to be understood as the gifts, or if they carry gifts with them to Yahweh on Zion." Lavik, 227.

[121] Jan Leunis Koole, *Isaiah III* (Kampen: Kok Pharos), 467. Beuken translating עָלַיִךְ יַעֲבֹרוּ as "passes over into the possession of" Cf. Lamentations 4:21 and Ezekiel 48:14.

[122] Richard N. Frye, and Margaret Cool Root. "The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art. Essays on the Creation of an Iconography of Empire." *American Journal of Archaeology* 85, no. 2 (1981), pp. 7-8. See also 2.3.2, esp. fn 69.

[123] Frye and Root, "The King and Kingship," 7–8.

[124] Frye and Root, "The King and Kingship," 7–8.

expressed over divine concealment, a common theme in ancient Near Eastern laments with the use of סתר.[125]

In this reading I propose taking vv.14–15 as follows: v.14 is spoken so as to be heard as ostensibly orthodox to external ears; whereas v. 15 expresses the speakers' internal ruminations as directed to the deity, rife with caustic protest or lament. This reading takes seriously the fettered reality of the nations as well as the change of address from exilic Israel/Zion to the god of Israel. That which is said to the former (v.14) is said for all to hear, while the latter (v. 15) is said to the deity alone. However, even if someone should be listening, it is nevertheless a veiled disclosure. Such a reading also sees intended polysemy in the ambiguity of the particles אך and אכן. Drawing back to the excurses study on אכן we might see the אך and אכן functioning here in a way similar to their collocation in Zephaniah 3:7: "I said, '*Surely* (אך) the city will fear me, it will accept correction; it will not lose sight of all that I have brought upon it.' *But* (אכן) they were the more eager to make all their deeds corrupt."[126] Though expansive, such a reading for v.15 might be entertained: "Surely a god is with you, and there is no other god besides (our gods now vanquished)…But (actually), you are a god who hides himself (overturning our fortunes, once hidden…concealing yourself to us in the very thing by which you declared that we would acknowledge you), god of Israel, "deliverer" (Israel's deliverance is our undoing, we are fettered as they go free)"[127] This sarcastic rendering of "deliverer" is permissible in that there is no pronominal suffix appended to the participle מושיע.

In summary, this reading posits a confession that stems from the nations' own existential reality. The reading is an imaginative reconstruction that attributes more agency to the nations than is often done. It renders the adverb אכן in the adversative sense, though admittedly with more elasticity than is often done. There is a real reading *in* to the text by choosing to hear v. 15 as biting or sarcastic. In this sense, the confession that God is with Israel/Zion alone and that

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[125] See Balentine, *The Hidden God*, 22–44. Though note his remarks (p. 39) that the Egyptian motif is more general in nature and lacking the same resonances of lament in the idiomatic use as evidenced in Babylonian and biblical texts. This further mitigates against such a reading on the grounds of historical or reconstructive plausibilty.

[126] It has been conjectured that a prophet Zephaniah of African descent (cf. Zeph 1:1 בֶּן-כּוּשִׁי) is associated with this text. See Ehud Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study of the Book of Zephaniah*, 43–45, though also 348–50 cautioning against focus on author as an individual; David Petersen, *The Prophetic Literature*, 203. The territory of Cush is mentioned at Zeph 3:10, as part of a promised international restoration, in which worshipers come from beyond the rives of Cush. The use of מנחה both here and in Isa 18:7 may point towards traditional or stock imagery (cf. also Isa 66:20 in which the nations bring the dispersed of Israel as an offering to Zion). For various proposals see Ben Zvi, 227–230. Scholarly comparisons of Zeph 3:9 to Isa 45:20–25 have been made. Arvid S. Kapelrud, *The Message of the Prophet Zephaniah: Morphology and Ideas* (Universitetsforlaget, 1975), 69.

[127] This countenances the reality that, "the process of God's saving Israel somehow injures the interests of the nations." Beuken, "The Confession of God's Exclusivity," 353.

"there is no other…besides him," can be read not as straightforwardly cheerful Gentile inclusion within Israel's established relationship with God – but, part of a mini-narrative of these nations acknowledging defeat. This reading, though only one possible option, makes sense of both the complex of contextual factors and historical background, but also the juxtaposition of the fates that follow in vss. 16-17. It could lend coherence to seeing 45:19 as divine rebuttal to vs. 15. This interpretation is, to my mind, the maximal augmenting of the nations' agency. It seems to respect the originating context (while not pushing for conversion language). Yet, as we have seen, it moves away from the broader literary-rhetorical intentions of DI, transforming a "bit character" into a main role. It also argues for a reconstructive-imaginative application of Mesopotamian background literature to the three African nations in an inorganic fashion. For these reasons we move on to a voicing that is more natural to DI's literary-rhetorical and historical environment.

3.3.2 Is Cyrus Also Among the Prophets?

At this point we raise the question taken up briefly in connection with Seitz's exegesis: could not v. 15 be understood as the confession of Cyrus, spoken while observing the respective fates of Israel and the nations?[128] I treat this interpretive possibility as a distinct subset within the voicing of the nations. This reading builds further upon the above intertextual resonances between Isa 45:3 and 45:15, though pivots in a different direction.

Reading Isaiah 45:15 as the confession of Cyrus is certainly a minority opinion. One of the few recent scholars to engage with this interpretation in depth is John D.W. Watts.[129] Watts' commentary is a unique approach to the entirety of the book of Isaiah as a unified drama; something akin to a script, with lines parceled out to different characters.[130] With this framework in mind, Watts himself raises the natural question: "Is it credible that Cyrus plays a speaking role through…much of the book?...The idea is worth exploring…"[131] For Watts the choice to bolster

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[128] This title, along with my naïve notions of personal ingenuity, predates my discovery of the similarly titled-article: Dominic Rudman, "Is the Rabshakeh Also among the Prophets? A Rhetorical Study of 2 Kings XVIII 17–35." *Vetus Testamentum* (50:1; 2000), 100–110.

[129] John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*. Word Biblical Commentary 25. Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2005.

[130] The Bible translation *The Voice*, which uses a "screenplay format" to denote dialogue and avoid quotation marks, also identifies Cyrus as the speaker for 45:15–17. See the helpful overview of dramatic approaches to Isaiah 40-55 by Annemarieke van der Woude, "'Hearing Voices While Reading': Isaiah 40-55 as a Drama" in Chatelion Counet, Patrick and Ulrich Berges. *One Text, a Thousand Methods: Studies in Memory of Sjef van Tilborg.* Atlanta: SBL Press, 2005, 149–73.

[131] Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 699.

Cyrus' speaking voice is partially influenced by his desire for cohesion when reading from Isaiah 40-48, 49-55, and on into 55-62.[132]

Watts refers several times to Baltzer's description of Isaiah 45:1 as, "the installation of Cyrus," and relates the term and imagery of משיח to David, who was "chosen to subdue nations within the territory assigned to Israel and thus to establish YHWH's sovereignty over Canaan. Now that task is being assigned to Cyrus."[133] He interprets the references to Cyrus as shepherd and anointed one as royal titles of Israelite kings. Watts' interpretive tendency, both generally and in Isaiah 45 more specifically, is for internal thematic and theological coherence. Along these lines he understands the woes of 45:9-10 to confront the exiles' implied rejection of Yahweh's stated intentions regarding Cyrus and "the role that is now assigned to them [i.e. the exiles]."[134] In an even more focused way, Watts' decision to posit Cyrus as a speaking character seems governed by his desire to see Cyrus' confession in Isaiah 45:15 as an actualizing of Isa 45:1-7. In Watts' account both the nations' recognition of YHWH's incomparability and Israel's knowledge of divine agency through Cyrus is dependent on Cyrus' properly identifying God:

> In Isaiah, the point is that Cyrus may identify the God who is supporting him as YHWH King of Israel (vv 3-5) so that everyone may recognize that he alone is God (vv 6-8) and that Israel may know that YHWH is working through Cyrus to reach her goals: "He builds my city, and he sends out my exiles" (v13). *When I assign* vv. 15-17, 23-24 to the voice of Cyrus, thus having him explicitly acknowledge YHWH, *I think this is the Vision's way* of emphasizing that YHWH is empowering and sending Cyrus. The recognition

[132] Watts' conjectural dating of the Isaiah 49–62 material in relation to the possibility of an "expanded provenance for Cyrus's role in the book" in order to make the whole of the Vision (i.e., Watts' vision of the Vision) more unified serves to underscore the degree to which readerly motive and interpretive moves are bound up together.

[133] Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 700.

[134] Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 702. This is based on Watts's understanding that the exiles, "apparently expected God to make Israel the new ruler of the empire." This expectation is, however, nowhere clearly related to the text of Isaiah. The new role which Watts discerns for Israel within Isaiah 40-48 is as servant and messenger, "commissioned to bring good news to Jerusalem" (Isa 40:1-9). Though the application of servant language and imagery to Israel is certain in Isaiah 40-48, the degree to which Israel is itself to act as messenger to Jerusalem, is less clear. For instance, the parallel of "my people" with "Jerusalem" in Isa 40:1 might make exilic Israel's heralding agency less convincing. Related to this is the prophet(s) task as comforter of exilic Israel and destitute Zion. An argument along Watts' line can be maintained in light of poetic parallel of city with people in Isa 40:1 in that it works to clarify the address to Zion (i.e., read as "my people") in the 2fs, heralding the coming of King Yahweh to the "cities of Judah" in 40:9-11.

> of God's use of persons other than his chosen people to accomplish his purposes is one of the remarkable features of the book of Isaiah.[135]

Is Isaiah 45:15, taken as a confession from Cyrus, convincingly construed as an explicit acknowledgment of Yahweh? In fact, the name Yahweh is absent in 45:15, conspicuously so when juxtaposed to what I take to be Watts' central intertext of Isa 45:3b.[136]

Isaiah 45:3b:

וְנָתַתִּי לְךָ אוֹצְרוֹת חֹשֶׁךְ וּמַטְמֻנֵי מִסְתָּרִים
לְמַעַן תֵּדַע כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה הַקּוֹרֵא בְשִׁמְךָ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

"I give you dark treasures and hoarded goods of secret places
in order that you may know *that I am YHWH*, who is calling you by name, *God of Israel*."

Isaiah 45:15:

אָכֵן אַתָּה אֵל מִסְתַּתֵּר אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹשִׁיעַ
"Certainly you are a God hiding himself,
O God of Israel, Savior!"

If we entertain Cyrus' אכֵן אַתָּה אֵל מִסְתַּתֵּר as a response to YHWH's כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה especially with the use of אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל in both parallel constructions it becomes striking that although Yahweh makes use of Cyrus' name (44:28, 45:1), Cyrus does not reciprocate.[137] In this light, taking the אָכֵן as an adversative could make better sense. The possible implications of this, however, seem an uncomfortable fit with Watts' interpretive inclination. This might be among the reasons for Watts' extension of Cyrus' speech through vs. 17, where YHWH is explicitly acknowledged, and in such a way as to be fruitfully read over against the agency of Cyrus for the sake of Jacob-Israel as declared in Isa 45:4. Watts thus reads 45:16-17 from the mouth of Cyrus as a confession of astonishment in "recognition of YHWH's saving work on Israel's behalf."[138]

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[135] Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 701. Italics here are my own. Note the revealing conflation of "the Vision's way" with Watts' own voicing and parceling out of these verses.

[136] In order to take full account for his presentation and analysis of the passage it seemed more straightforward to keep with Watts' rendering of the verses from the MT. Though, italics are my own.

[137] See 1 Samuel 3:9–10 for a possible analogue in Samuel omitting the divine name (possibly out of reverence?) from the words put in his mouth by Eli.

[138] Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 706.

What does Cyrus' confession mean then, according to Watts? After tracing a few scriptural examples of what it means for God to hide himself, Watts comments: "But here in this context the words are grudging admiration for the surprising ways in which God does his work, undetected. If Cyrus means that God has been hiding himself to this point, it could be read 'a God who has been hiding himself' (see Skinner and Buber as cited in *IB*)."[139] Though Watts does not elucidate the grounds on which he ascertains Cyrus' tone to be "grudging admiration" my conjecture is that this description stems from a felt dissonance between the kind of acknowledgment Watts might like to see in 45:15 (אָכֵן אַתָּה יְהוָה) and the more knotty reality of the confession (אָכֵן אַתָּה אֵל מִסְתַּתֵּר). Watts additionally underscores the inherent ambiguity of the passage by introducing the possibility of rendering the participle מִסְתַּתֵּר in English with the present perfect continuous. Here he is building on Muilenberg's use of Martin Buber's treatment of the passage: "YHVH, according to their [the nations] opinion, had hidden Himself on the other side of history, so to speak, but now He has shone forth as the liberator of Israel and all of them."[140] It seems likely that Watts brings this into his own discussion because he sees the movement from God as once hidden to now disclosed as conducive to his understanding of Cyrus moving from a state of ignorance vis-à-vis the identity of YHWH (וְלֹא יְדַעְתָּנִי twice in Isa 45:4-5) to an explicit acknowledgment of YHWH as disclosed through the deliverance of Israel. However, Buber's treatment here introduces a rather different note, actually. According to Buber the confession is not only from the mouth of the nations, but is posited as a phenomenological claim, not an ontological axiom.

Despite these possibly dissonant threads in his treatment, Watts sees Cyrus' confession as a reflection on the "very unexpected ways" in which God is going about his work undetected. If מִסְתַּתֵּר can be interpreted this way, then, not even Cyrus – agent of Israel's deliverance – can fully follow Yahweh's s tracks. A note of dramatic irony can be sensed in this reading: one of the central characters in the *dramatis personae* of Isa 40-48, previously veiled (in Isa 41-43) and just now revealed (44:28-45:13), finally takes to the stage and instead of being represented as a significant actor in his own right (subduing nations, stripping kings, smashing bronze doors) Cyrus' confession may be read as his own retrospective reframing of expectations – expectations which the hearer may share – regarding the agency and efficacy of a world emperor. Indeed, the statement can be read as Cyrus' own reckoning with what Buber describes as Deutero-Isaiah's

[139] Watts, *Isaiah 34*-66, 706.

[140] Muilenberg, 530; Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith*, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), 216–17.

"theology of world history,"[141] in which Yahweh's agency in steering world history is radically free of competition. Yet, can this reading be grounded in the text? In what follows I will argue that the nature and content of the Cyrus oracle actually enable a persuasive hearing of 45:15 as the voice of Cyrus.

In Isa 45:1 there is a promise to "subdue nations" before Cyrus and 45:3a more specifically states, "I will give you treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places." These promises, which might be thought easily coordinated with the procession of Egyptian and Ethiopian wealth and merchandise and Sabeans in chains coming to Cyrus, actually run up against the consistent 2fs suffixes in the MT's pointing of Isa 45:14, which preclude Cyrus as addressee unless one points the suffixes as 2ms. Despite notes and evaluations of a textual-critical nature on many other aspects of Isa 45:14-25, Watts does not address these six prepositions with 2fs suffixes in 45:14, which he interprets as a herald reading YWHW's writ to Cyrus. In order to read 45:14 as an address to Cyrus one needs to depart the MT, that is remove the Tiberian pointing, which then allows for either a m. sg. or f.sg.[142] Omission of any discussion on this point, especially given Watts' usual preference for maintaining the MT,[143] does not bolster the persuasiveness of his reading 45:14 as directed to Cyrus. Yet, one need not argue for 45:14 as addressed *to* Cyrus to entertain the possibility of 45:15 as a confession *from* Cyrus. In fact, maintaining the MT to read 45:14 as an address of the nations to the exiles (reading the fs referent of vs. 14 as vs. 13's גָּלוּת), as Beuken and Childs do, makes good sense of a rendering of 45:15 as Cyrus' bewildered reply. In this account of things, that which was expected to flow freely to Cyrus (acc. to 45:1-3a) veers off in the direction of the exiles. If לְמַעַן תֵּדַע כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה in 45:3b is understood as a telic clause expressing the intended purpose of the preceding main clause of 45:3a, this works toward a more reasonable account of what I previously outlined as a disjoint between 45:3 and Cyrus' confession in 45:15. Even the expectations of Cyrus are ultimately upended in Yahweh's divine governance.

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[141] Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith*, 209.

[142] Jerome, Ibn Ezra, Skinner, Mowinckel and others do read this as an address to Cyrus. In any event, what one does with v. 15 is not dependent on this point. It is possible to envision the nations speaking to Zion/exilic Israel in v.14, before zooming in for a "close up" on Cyrus' confession. Though 1QIsa[a] understands the pronouns to be feminine. See Michael J. Chan, *The Wealth of Nations*, 66–68.

[143] Several instances of many from his notes for Isa 45:14-25 will suffice: Against the *BHS*'s suggestion of taking the noun יְגִיעַ "product, wealth" as instead the participle in construct יֹגְעֵי, "laborers of" on 45:14a he concludes: "Keep MT." Of the *BHS's* suggested emending of 15a's אַתָּה "you" with אִתְּךְ "with you (fs)" Watts rightly notes that the MT "is supported by 1QIsa[a] and LXX." He argues along the same grounds for the MT against the BHS's recommended deletion of 45:16's כֻּלָּם יַחְדָּו.

The nature of this upending can be further illuminated by reading Isa 45:14–17 in light of Isa 45:4–8. According to Watts 45:16–17a continues Cyrus' reflection and 45:17b becomes an address of Cyrus directly to the exiles. Though I do not think reading 45:15 as a confession of Cyrus necessitates 45:16–17 as a continuation of his voice, I will entertain this for the sake of continuity in the present reading. Isa 45:4–6 introduces two further telic clauses, the first relating Yahweh's activity of supporting Cyrus to the benefit of Israel-Jacob, and the second, in order that the entire inhabited world might rightly identify YHWH and acknowledge the exclusivity of his agency. The idolaters walking in shame (הָלְכוּ בַכְּלִמָּה חָרָשֵׁי צִירִים) contrasted with the eternal security of Israel (יִשְׂרָאֵל נוֹשַׁע בַּיהוָה תְּשׁוּעַת עוֹלָמִים) in 45:16-17a can be read as Cyrus reflecting on the scene of 45:14 in light of the proclaimed activity of YHWH in 45:7, forging light and peace (for Israel) and darkness and calamity (for forgers of images).

There are two further interrelated dimensions of this proposal to read 45:15 as the voice of Cyrus which deserve deeper consideration. These have to do with how we are to understand Cyrus' role as "anointed," with its important theological background related to a divinely installed king, alongside the historical background of the Persian Empire. In what follows I will mainly be in conversation with the work of Lisbeth S. Fried, while pushing further to consider reading Isa 45:14-17 as a theological rebuttal to the implicit theology of the Cyrus Cylinder.

Though there is extensive scholarship on how to understand the historical and literary relationship of Cyrus to Deutero-Isaiah,[144] there is little detailed engagement with Isa 45:14-17 as it pertains to these issues. Though I am not interested in questions regarding the *terminus a quo/ad quem* of Isa 40–48, it is clear that one's proclivities regarding this matter will come to bear on other interpretive moves made. In this regard I find compelling Fried's summary that, "It is likely that the prophet wrote sometime during the reigns of Cyrus the Great and Cambyses, and before the sixth year of Darius."[145] It is against this background that Fried argues for a specific understanding of the application of the term "YHWH's anointed." To do this she first asks what the term משיח meant by analyzing its use throughout the Old Testament. After describing the process of anointing as, "a mechanism of divine selection for a specific task," citing examples of the High Priest as הכהן המשיח (Lev 4:3, 5, 16; 6:15) as well as Elijah's anointing Hazael as king of Aram, Jehu as king over Israel, and Elisha as prophet in his stead (I Kgs 19:15-16), she distinguishes from these the use of "YHWH's anointed" and closely related uses of משיח to refer to "the one selected by YHWH to be the legitimate ruler of the Judean people, either under

[144] Lisbeth S Fried, "Cyrus the Messiah? The historical background to Isaiah 45: 1." *Harvard Theological Review* 95/4 (2002): 373–93.

[145] Fried, "Cyrus the Messiah?," 379.

the United Monarchy or in Judah alone."[146] In considering this term in the Old Testament Fried finds thirty references: among others ten refer to Saul, three to David, and eight surface in the Psalms. From an extended treatment of Psalms 2 and 89 Fried argues that the term, more than just titular, "connotes a theology,"[147] which sees the Davidic King as an idealized, numinous, Judean ruler, who is both divinely sanctioned and protected.

The application of the term "anointed" to Cyrus is understood by Fried within a wider trend in the early Persian period, in which the "priests of powerful temples delivered up to their Persian conquerors the titles and ideologies of their local kings."[148] Cambyses, for instance, received "full Pharaonic titulary," and, thus, following previous pharaohs was proclaimed to be Mesuti-Re (Offspring of Re) and Horus. Similarly, a statue of Egyptian origin and craftsmanship of Darius which was found at Susa, includes an inscription on the right end of the emporer's broad belt which reads: "The Perfect God, Master of the Two Lands, Darius – may he live forever," and another on a ledge of the statues reads:

> "The Perfect God, Master of the Two Lands, Darius – may he live forever. – Image made to the exact resemblance of the perfect god, Master of the Two Lands, that His Majesty made in order that a monument of him might be lastingly established and that one might remember his person, after his father Atum…"[149]

In other words, "Darius is Atum in effigy." Fried similarly demonstrates how Cambyses participated in the Akitu festival as crown prince, in which the emperor "took the hand of the god" Nabû and lead him before Bēl at the Ésagil, while here presumably became king of Babylon and coregent with Cyrus.[150] The purpose of Fried's analysis is to ask the reasons why Deutero-Isaiah, like Egyptian priests and the priests of Marduk, "delivered up to the Persian conquerer (sic) the entire theology that had defined the local king." She concludes that these reasons were, in essence, the same for all: "to facilitate local acceptance of the foreign ruler."[151] Deutero-Isaiah refers to Cyrus as Yahweh's anointed because he fulfills the role of a legitimate Judean king: rebuilding the temple, restoring to it the vessels, and returning the Jews to worship therein.

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[146] Fried, "Cyrus the Messiah?," 379.

[147] Fried, "Cyrus the Messiah?," 380.

[148] Fried, "Cyrus the Messiah?," 384.

[149] Fried, Cyrus the Messiah, 385.

[150] Fried cites texts which are dated to "the first year of Cyrus, king of lands, and Cambyses, king of Babylon."

[151] Fried, Cyrus the Messiah, 392.

From author- to reader-hermeneutic

In what follows I turn from Fried's work, which employs an author-hermenutic, to an exploration of Isa 45 alongside biblical and Mesopotamian intertexts from a more reader-oriented hermeneutic. If we entertain that Cyrus is posited in Deutero-Isaiah with imagery and epithets associated with the Davidic king (nations falling under his feet; trampling rulers as the potter treads clay, referred to as "My Shepherd"; cf. Isa 41:2–4 and 45:1–2 with Ps 2:8–9 and Ps 18:39, 45), what might the evidence of 45:14–17 as the confession of Cyrus either contribute to this picture, or problematize it? To begin with, insufficient attention has been paid to the fact that all other uses of מְסִתַּתֵּר in the Old Testament are situated in the narrative arc of David's journey between his being anointing as a youth and his eventual installment as king over Israel (1 Sam. 23:19; 26:1; Ps. 54:2). All three refer to David's hiding himself from King Saul in the wilderness of Ziph. More specifically all three are presented as the words of the inhabitants of Ziph, who have come to reveal David's location to King Saul.

Though it is not my contention that the use of מְסִתַּתֵּר in these narratives and the superscription to Psalm 54 (cf. 1 Sam 23:19) be seen as determinative of meaning for Isa 45:15, this narrative offers a suggestive intertextual backdrop against which to read the confession. I am not arguing any typological intention of the author, but rather a reading which emerges from the confluence of robust resonances (Mesopotamian and Israelite).

In 1 Sam 23 Saul responds to the Ziphites by requesting they supplement their reconnaissance with up to date eyewitness accounts to make David's location certain because as Saul states, אָמַר אֵלַי עָרוֹם יַעְרִם הוּא. The context here is thus a dialogue between two parties hostile towards and seeking a third elusive entity. It is also of some interest that David in the narrative episode that follows that of the Ziphites outing him, is portrayed as cunning indeed: he secretly cuts off a section of Saul's robe in symbolic act while Saul is concealed in a cave, relieving himself. However David seems struck by conscience pangs afterward and demands of his comrades that no harm be done the king on the basis of Saul's status as מְשִׁיחַ יְהוָה (2x 1 Sam 24:7; 1 Sam 24:10).

1 Sam 26:1 begins in similar fashion with the Ziphites coming to Saul and declaring הֲלוֹא דָוִד מִסְתַּתֵּר opposite Jeshimon, again in the wilderness of Ziph. David is posited in the narrative in a similar way here as in 1 Sam 24 by staying an avenger's hand on the grounds that Saul, as מְשִׁיחַ יְהוָה, can be deposed by YHWH alone. The phrase מְשִׁיחַ יְהוָה is employed four times in this chapter (1 Sam 26:9, 11, 16, 23), in every case spoken by David about King Saul.

In 1 Sam 23–26 we find the sense of dramatic irony rather pressing the reader into the question of "Who is Yahweh's true anointed?" King Saul is the de facto anointed, of course.

Ironically, however, it is the *also*-anointed David, sought out from hiding, who must constantly reiterate this point and the ramifications of its theological import. From the confluence of these concurrently anointed figures emerges a certain tension or ambiguity regarding what it means to be anointed of YHWH at all. Within the development of Isa 40-48 Yahweh Himself has already been declared the "King of Israel" (Isa 44:6) and "King of Jacob" before that in Isa 41:21 (which introduces a passage alluding to Cyrus; cf. 41:26). That Cyrus would confess the God of Israel as a hidden savior may imply something about God's concealed or compatible agency – saving Israel through the agency of Cyrus, His anointed for the task. It may also serve to remind the hearers that exilic experiences, long stretches in which the revelation – let alone realization – of YHWH's salvation is less than clearly understood, even to the anointed, may also be transferrable upon Cyrus.

What Cyrus represents as the anointed of Yahweh in Isa 45 takes further definition when juxtaposed to the previously mentioned descriptions of early Persian emperors in Egyptian and Babylonian inscriptions. Watts follows Fried very closely in paralleling the content and motives of the respective priests of Babylon and Egypt with that of Deutero-Isaiah.[152] However, it is not the similarities but the differences that are of interest to me here. As previously mentioned Yahweh's grasping Cyrus' hand in Isa 45:1 is an inversion of the Babylonian imagery of the ruler taking the hand of Bel,[153] which both extends the overarching idol polemic from Isa 40–44, and significantly relates to the explicit upending of the whole host of Mesopotamian priests and diviners alluded to in Isa 44:25. This polemical edge continues as we compare the wording of the Cyrus Cylinder to that of Isaiah. In the Cyrus Cylinder Marduk "called out his name," "pronounced his name to be king," and refers to the activity of Cyrus as "shepherding with justice and righteousness."[154] Though, as Fried and Watts, similarities between the Cyrus Cylinder and Isa 45 can be read as simply an Israelite instantiation of support for Cyrus. However, in Isa 45 the repeated claims to exclusivity are unmistakable: אֲנִי יְהוָה וְאֵין עוֹד The fact that the first instance of this (Isa 45:5) follows directly after the statement to Cyrus "I called you by your name," can be taken as an ironic jab. Cyrus has not known Yahweh as such, nor has he called him by his appropriate name. Later in the Cyrus Cylinder we we read:

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[152] Of Isa 45:1 he writes, "What Babylonian and Egyptian priests had done for Cambyses in Babylon and in Egypt, the book of Isaiah does for Cyrus in this text, declaring that Jerusalem's God appointed Cyrus as the city's legitimate ruler." Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 697-700.

[153] Similar language can be seen in the *mīs pî/pīt pî* ritual texts.

[154] "The Cyrus Cylinder," trans. Mordechai Cogan (*COS* 2.124: 315–16).

> By his [*that is Bel's, or Marduk's*] exalted [word], all the kings who sit upon thrones throughout the world, from the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea, who live in the districts far-off, the kings of the West (lit: Amurru), who dwell in tents, all of them brought their heavy tribute before me and in Babylon they kissed my feet. From [Ninev]eh (?), Ashur and Susa, Agade, Eshnunna, Zamban, Meturnu, Der, as far as the region of Gutium, I returned the (images of) the gods to the sacred centers [on the other side of] the Tigris whose sanctuaries had been abandoned for a long time, and I let them dwell in eternal abodes.[155]

Here we have a roughly parallel scene to that of Isa 45:14 with the tribute of Egyptians, Ethiopians and Sabeans alongside the formal gestures of obeisance. However, by merely positing (as Fried and Watts do) the analogue of the Cyrus Cylinder's representation of the return of the images of gods with what we know from the composite literary record, that the temple vessels were returned, a crucial detail is omitted. If Isa 45:15 is juxtaposed with the above section of the Cyrus Cylinder, the moment in which Cyrus should find and return the image of Israel's deity, we find him declaring instead, אָכֵן אַתָּה אֵל מִסְתַּתֵּר אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹשִׁיעַ. Whereas in Egypt the Persian emperor is posited as Atum embodied, here we not only have Cyrus declaring that the God of Israel is מִסְתַּתֵּר (perhaps "a deity who hides himself" is more tongue-in-cheek, like "he can't be found!"), but through the parallel, that his chosen mode of disclosure is through his saving activity.[156] That what follows immediately thereafter is a sober reflection on the fate of idol-fabricators over against the salvation of Israel through the agency of Yahweh seems to corroborate this. Just following the above quoted material from the Cyrus Cylinder we find Cyrus beseeching: "May all the gods whom I settled in their sacred centers ask daily of Bel and Nabu that my days be long and may they intercede for my welfare."[157] That Isa 46:1–2 opens with a scathing caricature of these exact Babylonian deities seems to suggest vivid repudiation of this decree by the hands of the Marduk priests, and offers further support for reading Isa 45:14–17 in the above light.

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[155] The Cyrus Cylinder," *COS* 2.124: 315–16; lines 28-36.

[156] For a similar reading see Jean-Georges Heintz, "De l'absence de la statue divine au 'Dieu qui se cache' (Esaïe 45,15)." J.L. Koole, following Heintz, also decides that the meaning of v. 15 is best informed by reading it against broader themes of the icon's absence in Mesopotamian literature. Koole, *Isaiah III*, 469–70. Both read vv. 14–15 as the speech of the nations.

[157] The Cyrus Cylinder," *COS* 2.124: 315–16.

3.3.3 Concluding Remarks

From the above analysis and readings it is striking the degree to which one's preferred intertexts shape one's interpretation of this pericope. How one *should* determine an intertext or a network of intertexts, is an important question.[158] As we engage this richly ambiguous text we can observe how intertextual resonances, so unavoidably knotted up in one's theological preunderstanding and approach, are also determinative. Goldingay, for instance, sees the key to understanding and coordinating v. 15's participles in the psalms of lament. Seitz's interpretation of v. 14–17 is pressurized by his deeply Christian theological program, given direction by Ephesians 2, among other texts. Both there and in the last reading which entertains Cyrus as the speaker a more substantial role is given to the Cyrus Cylinder (alongside features more native to Isa 44–45 and to 1 Sam 23–26).

Our engagement has been largely with Christian interpreters, the majority of whom do not entertain Cyrus as speaker in v. 15. How might canonical considerations be operative, even if not acknowledged, in such a proclivity? Jon Levenson states, "…just as each piece on a chessboard changes the meaning and value of every other piece, so does each text in the Bible change our reading of all the others."[159] Christians and Jews operate with different "canonical gameboards", the pieces of which move differently. This can be seen in the distinctly Jewish canonical-biblical theology of Richard Elliot Friedman's *The Hidden Face of God*.[160] The central thesis of this work can be summarized as follows: over the course of the Hebrew Bible God withdraws, becoming more and more hidden, while humanity's roles and responsibility increase. The fact is, however, that the "last word" is given to very different speakers in the Jewish and Christian canonical arrangements. In the Hebrew Bible Cyrus speaks the final word, which is fronted heavily with a messenger formula, usually reserved for Yahweh Himself: כֹּה־אָמַר כּוֹרֶשׁ. Though Friedman does not draw specific attention to 2 Chronicles 36:23, Cyrus having the last word dovetails well with his argument that over the course of the Hebrew Bible "*apparent* control is shifting" and human authority increases, alongside "the diminishing *visible* divine presence."[161]

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[158] Or, put differently, attempting "to discern how far and in what sense to explore" such texts. Richard S. Briggs, *The Virtuous Reader: Old Testament Narrative and Interpretive Virtue.* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010), 114–15.

[159] Jon Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, The Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 104.

[160] Richard Elliott Friedman, *The Hidden Face of God* (New York: NY, HarperCollins, 1997). Originally issued as: *The Disappearance of God: A Divine Mystery* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1995). For a summary of this work as Jewish biblical theology see Benjamin Sommer's "Dialogical Biblical Theology: A Jewish Approach to Reading Scripture Theologically" in *Biblical Theology: Introducing the Conversation*, 6.

[161] Italics in original. I was convinced of having read Friedman on 2 Chr 36:23. However, I have since scoured the work and found nothing. Friedman, *The Hidden Face*, 57–58; 97. It could be he avoids, while accentuating God's

Perhaps, Cyrus is not only among the prophets, perhaps he is presented as the last prophet of the Hebrew Bible, a most *unlikely* prophet like-unto-Moses figure – his placement as crucial to this understanding as is his pronouncement. Though this reading strains away from the immediate context of Isa 40–48, if we hear Cyrus speaking not only at 2 Chronicles 36:23, but also at Isa 45:15, he presents the paradox: personally manifesting the promised deliverance of Israel's God, working through him in ways incomprehensible.[162]

absence in Esther, because 2 Chronicles 36 harkens back to Jeremiah's prophecy while also mentioning Yahweh by name. He understands divine hiddenness, alongside the increase of human authority, to be intrinsic to the "plot," offering coherance to the HB's canonical arrangement. Friedman acknowledges that this is a certain meta-narratival perspective (80). Cf. Brent Strawn, *The Old Testament: A Concise Introduction*, 3–14 and 168–174.

[162] From his pronouncement in 2 Chronicles 36:23, that he does come to ultimately acknowledge Yahweh. The question is, as in Isa 40–48, how will the intended audience respond to this rhetoric?

> The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him! Let him go up.

4. The Voice of the Exiles

4.1 Preliminary Textual and Contextual Factors

This chapter presents something of a minority report: the reading of Isa 45:15 as the confession of exilic Israel. It was only relatively recently in the history of interpretation that the voice of the exiles was heard at v.15. There appears to be no patristic or rabbinic witness for such a reading. As we saw in the last chapter, interpreters have regularly taken the shift to direct address in v. 15 as either a continuation of the foreign nations or as the voice of the prophet. This interpretive binary is reflected in Muilenburg's comment from the early 1950's:

> Who is the speaker here?...some scholars hold it to be the prophet; others, the nations. There is much to be said for either view, but on the whole it is more probable that the nations are here continuing their witness…[1]

Factors that help account for the absence of this reading in the early church include the preponderance of the LXX alongside Christological interpretive proclivities.[2] Yet, the reading of v.15 as the "voice of Israel" was also bypassed by those like Jerome, Luther, Calvin, and others with access to or proclivity for the MT. Calvin, for instance, rejected both "the Jewish writers [who] commonly interpret it to mean that the Lord will hide himself from the Gentiles, but will reveal himself to his people," as well as earlier Christological interpretations, which he saw as "too far-fetched" (i.e., "Christ is a hidden God, because his divinity lies concealed under the infirmity of the flesh."). Yet, Calvin's ecclesiocentric interpretation might have been profited by reading v. 15 as the confession of the exilic community. As Amy Plantinga Pauw has noted, Calvin held that the people of God were linked throughout all history in a single covenant of grace which was mediated by Christ. For this reason Calvin refers to Isaiah's community as "the church." I suspect that for Calvin, in order to establish continuity with the Reformation church of the 16th century, v.15 could only be seen as authoritatively spoken by the Prophet: "[God] calls himself 'a hidden God,' because He appears to withdraw, and in some measure to conceal

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[1] James Muilenberg, *Isaiah. The Interpreter's Bible: Vol 5* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952), 531. Muilenberg's exegesis was published in 1952, and he makes no mention of another option; Westermann, writing in Muilenberg's wake, does not entertain the interpretive possibility that Israel might be the speaker of v. 15, but, as we shall see considers this an "Amen gloss". It is possible that Delitzsch is referring to the exilic community when he hears the voice of v. 15 as "no longer the language of the heathen (Hitzig, Ewald), but the response of the congregation (*Antiphone der Gemeinde*)" Franz Delitzsch, *Commentar über das Buch Jesaja*, (Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1889), 463 (cf. Beuken, 248).

[2] See chapter. 3, fn. 5.

himself, when he permits his people to be afflicted and oppressed by various calamities; and, therefore, our hearts ought to be encouraged by hope."[3]

It isn't until the late 20th century that interpreters begin attributing v.15 to the exilic community. One of the first is Meindert Dijkstra, in an essay dedicated to and catalyzed by the scholarship of his teacher, Prof. J.L. Koole.[4] In a fusing of form-critical and literary-critical considerations he argues that v. 15 is a phrase or fragment from the communal laments of Israel ["…*als Satz oder Fragment aus der Klage des Volkes*…"]. Dijkstra posits that what we have is a phrase of direct address to God [*Redeform der Anbetung*], quoted within the prophetic address, which is to be heard within the Deutero-Isaianic context as a complaint [*Klagewort*] e mente opponentium.[5] Contra Duhm and other interpreters Dijkstra maintains that this "*el mistatter*" in reference to Yahweh is organic to Israel's faith and liturgy. Similar to what we will see later in the chapter in the work of Samuel Balentine, Dijkstra seeks to show how the phrase "hiding one's face" is formulaic in the lament psalms. He raises the question, "How can a self-concealing God be appealed to as, concurrently, the God of Israel, the Savior?" He finds his answer in the background of the communal lament-psalms of Israel, which were "born out of the experience of the exile as a time of God's hiddenness (e.g. Ps 44, 74, 79, 89, Isa 63:7 - 64:11, Lamentations)" and, though they include traumatic descriptions of suffering, are nevertheless "not without hope." He then correlates "accusatory questions and statements about Yahweh's wrath and concealment (Ps. 44:25…Ps. 74:1-10ff)" with "the remembrance of his saving work (Ps. 44:4, 74:2-12…)" as well as requests to come to the aid of the people in deliverance.[6]

Though Dijkstra demonstrates how a phrase can be quoted without a quotation formula in prophetic proclamation, his argument regarding Isaiah 45:15 is not rooted in any one text *as quoted* from the Psalter, or elsewhere. The strength of his argument in helping us recognize the voice of Israel in Isa. 45:15 is actually based not on his arguments from the lament Psalms, but from his proposal that we must look to the immediate Isaianic context in order to find distinguishing elements which relate back to a possible quote. Here he connects 17a to 15b via "a formulation which recalls a line from the hymnic frame of the blessing of Moses" in Deut. 33:29.[7]

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[3] Amy Plantinga Pauw, "'Becoming Part of Israel': John Calvin's Exegesis of Isaiah" in Claire Mathews McGinnis and Patricia K. Tull (eds.), *As Those Who Are Taught* (Atlanta: SBL, 2006), 203, 218–19.

[4] Though shortly thereafter, see R.P. Merendino, *Der Erste und der Letzte: Eine Untersuchung von Jes 40–48* (Brill, 1981), 435. He posits a break from speech of nations at v.14 as, "v.15 becomes understandable in the mouth of Israel."

[5] Meindert Dijkstra, „Zur Deutung von Jesaja 45:15ff" *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft.* (89:2, 1977), 217-218.

[6] Djikstra, „Zur Deutung von Jesaja 45:15ff," 218.

[7] Dijkstra „Zur Deutung von Jesaja 45:15ff," 221.

In this reading, then, in v. 17 the prophet responds to Israel's statement in v.15, alluding to the words in Deut, which is followed by Yahweh's further response to 45:15 in v. 19.

Isaiah 45:15	Isaiah 45:17	Deuteronomy 33:29
אָכֵן אַתָּה אֵל מִסְתַּתֵּר אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹשִׁיעַ׃	יִשְׂרָאֵל נוֹשַׁע בַּיהוָה תְּשׁוּעַת עוֹלָמִים	אַשְׁרֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִי כָמוֹךָ עַם נוֹשַׁע בַּיהוָה

The prophetic address responds to Israel's complaint (rooted as it is in Isaiah 40:27) by accentuating the very promise of salvation and deliverance raised in v. 15b through specific allusion to the last words of direct address from Deuteronomy. Dijkstra notes that such a complaint about Yahweh's hiddenness, as a reaction of divine wrath to the guilt of Israel, finds "its theological justification within the framework of the so-called Deuteronomistic history (Deut. 31:17, 32:30)."[8] It is beyond the scope of his article, however, to offer an intertextual analysis of Deut 31–33 and Isa 40–48 with specific attention to how the interplay between the two might inform the meaning of this confession in the mouth of the exiles. Towards the end of this chapter I offer a reading which attempts this. However, before this, we turn to representative interpreters who hear in Isa 45:15 the confession of exilic Israel. Walter Brueggemann, and to an even greater extent, Samuel Balentine, have interrogated causal links for Yahweh's hiding, whether stated in the scriptures or inferred from them, ultimately emphasizing the inexplicable nature of divine hiddenness.

4.2 Representative Interpreters

4.2.1 Walter Brueggemann

Though Walter Brueggemann's corpus is vast we will give attention in this chapter primarily to his 1998 WBC biblical study guide, *Isaiah 40–66*, alongside his *Theology of the Old Testament*.[9] Brueggemann locates his own work within canonical and theological approaches to scripture, which draw from the historical-critical method, yet move well beyond it. Israel's God, as Brueggemann reads the Isaiah corpus, is, "endlessly surprising, disjunctive, and elusive, so that the book of Isaiah does not yield a smooth presentation of sovereignty, but proceeds by disjunctive fits and starts, some unbearably harsh and some astonishingly healing… a text that

[8] Dijkstra „Zur Deutung von Jesaja 45:15ff," 219.

[9] Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah: 40-66* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998); *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1997).

dares to make this Disjunctive One available through artistic imagination…"[10] Brueggemann finds the artistic medium of a "mighty oratorio" a fitting analog to describe the kind of thing Isaiah is: a confluence of many, even dissenting voices. Brueggemann argues that such characteristics of form and artistry are predicated or demanded by the nature of engagement with the above described "Disjunctive One":

> Like any oratorio, this work requires a rendering, and because each interpretive rendering (including this one) takes on a peculiar character, no one rendering may claim to be the correct one…All said, the book of Isaiah is a remarkable artistic achievement wherein the artistry is a match for the awesome, inscrutable Character whose tale it tells.[11]

Brueggemann's attentiveness to the pivotal role of textual layering and interaction of voices may influence his reading of Isaiah 45:14-17 in its context. It will help to further contextualize his interpretation of Isa 45 from within the wider conceptual scaffolding of his *Theology*, which is constructed from the understanding that, "speech is the reality to be studied."[12] Brueggemann describes this approach under the encompassing rubric of testimony, with its attention to the relationship between the "how" of Israel's God-talk and the "what" (or, perhaps more appropriate to a dialogical context, the who). Brueggemann's conception of the process and product of Israel's God-talk (testimony) is "a mass of detail, a collage of discrete texts," which requires of the hearers/interpreters — Brueggemann's guiding metaphor is that of a courtroom — "to construe or imagine a comprehensive characterization of Yahweh based on the details of Israel's testimony."[13] In his chapter introducing the analysis of Israel's cross-examination of its own testimony Brueggemann discusses the hiddenness of Yahweh, and places Isaiah 45:15 at the very center of the discussion:

> The core testimony of active verbs speaks of Yahweh with the claim that Yahweh was known and seen directly in the ongoing life of Israel. A strong and crucial counterclaim, however, maintains that the God of Israel is hidden: "Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, Savior" (Isa 45:15).

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[10] Brueggemann, *Isaiah*, 2.

[11] Brueggemann, *Isaiah*, 1.

[12] Brueggemann, *Theology*, 118.

[13] Brueggemann, *Theology*, 267.

Brueggemann has argued cogently for the nature of Israel's countertestimony as context-derivative, distilling his definition by describing Israel's need to regularly "speak about injustice through complaint in exile." His aim is to demonstrate how Israel sought to both safeguard and challenge its own core witness, maintaining that God was active, present, and attentive to Israel – even if imperceptibly. Thus, the confession at Isa 45:15 and many others are taken as positive affirmations, despite stemming out of historical circumstances in which Israel is "grappling with the vagaries of life in distress."[14]

As we move to Brueggemann's commentary on Isaiah we can observe how a dialectical conception of Israel's witness — the very substance of the Old Testament in his view — has bearing on his choice to hear Isa. 45:15 as the voice of Israel.[15] Brueggemann's general construal of Israel's witness to God as testimony and countertestimony syncs with the context of Isaiah 40–48, which is rich with forensic imagery and the call to offer up witness to Yahweh. He calls attention to the fact that Israel is addressed in verses 14 and 17. Yet, perhaps in part due to the pericope's disjunctive flow, which Brueggemann describes as "a series of brief, disconnected statements," his exegesis of these verses lacks attention to Yahweh as Israel's interlocutor. His treatment is not significantly informed by the literary-rhetorical development of chapters 42–44, in which Yahweh repeatedly calls on Israel to witness. He does not specifically discuss Isa 45:15 as Israel's responding to Yahweh in the context of an ongoing dialogue.[16]

Brueggemann is sober to two facts which underwrite the present study: Isa 45:15a constitutes "an exceedingly important theological motif, even if its intent here is not self-evident." It might seem like, prima facie, such a lack of clarity regarding the meaning of hiddenness sends Brueggemann into a rehearsal of hiddenness as a theological axiom: "intrinsic to Yahweh's character and…not simply a response to human sin…" and belonging to His "unfettered freedom and refusal to be contained or even known by conventional categories."[17] However, this mention of "conventional categories" alongside what follows – that "Yahweh is hidden in the coming of Cyrus…a way of Yahweh's coming not at all evident in the world"[18] –

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[14] Brueggemann, *Theology*, 333.

[15] Though the ambiguity is marked out in his describing of v. 15 as God being addressed "apparently by Israel." Brueggemann, *Isaiah*, 81.

[16] Though he identifies vv. 9–11 as the exilic community's rejection of Cyrus as deliverer. Despite my criticisms, which no doubt relate to the confines of the genre within which he writes, Brueggemann's constructive theology relating Israel's bearing false witness, or an inaccurate construal of Yahweh to idolatry is generative. Brueggemann, *Theology*, 135-137.

[17] One might conclude similarly from his brief discussion of divine hiddenness in Luther (the *deus absconditus*, God's power hidden in the weakness of the cross) and the Pascalian litmus test for true religion.

[18] Brueggemann, *Isaiah*, 81–82.

draws the reader back to Brueggemann's setting out of Isa 45. There he draws a typological connection between Cyrus and Jesus in the following way: the appointment of both Cyrus and Jesus as means of deliverance is scandalous to the covenant community. In both cases "Israel's conventional categories of faith and hope," are pushed beyond the scope of acceptability. Brueggemann pushes yet further, drawing the arch of this principle, God's choice of those deemed "conventionally unacceptable," into the pews and politics of his own contemporary context. Prophets of the present age may include Freud, Marx, and a great many others traditionally marginalized: "minorities, women, the poor, homosexuals."[19] This accent on God's sovereign prerogative to choose and work through agents who scandalize the expectations of the "faithful" foregrounds Brueggemann's discussion on divine hiddenness. Thus, then as now, "God works and impinges on the world in ways not discernable except to the faithful." Implicit in such statements is a logic analogous to that which I see threaded through Isa 40–48: only those who discern and act upon the prophet's Yahweh-centric interpretation of geo-political events show themselves to be Israel, the faithful. In this way, the convention-stretching nature of Yahweh's agents of deliverance are unavoidably a means of testing.

There is, thus, a fascinating tension in Brueggemann's explicit statements that Yahweh's hiddenness is, on the one hand, related to His nature and unrelated to human sin; yet, on the other hand, within his typological and contemporizing moves, there is an implicit judgment regarding the accountability of the addressees (both ancient and modern) and the (in)ability of the faithful to apprehend the elusive work of Yahweh. The nature of this paradox can be explained in this way: Yahweh may conceal Himself in order to know those who are faithful (or not).[20]

However, at the risk of generalizing and before resting upon such a maxim, we must return to the immediate context of Isaiah 45:14–17.[21] Brueggemann does not see the link between vs. 15 and 16 as self-evident since vs. 16 is concerned with "a general polemic against idols and their makers."[22] This comment is reflective of a scholarly inability to grasp idolatry and

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[19] Brueggemann, *Isaiah*, 75–76.

[20] The commentary of 2 Chronicles 32:31 is suggestive: "God left Hezekiah in order to test him, to know all that was in his heart."

[21] Regarding generalizations Brueggemann's use of "human sin" rather than relating specifically to Israel or idolatry is understandable given that the intended audience of this "rendering" is church laity. Granting constraints placed upon him by the genre, the lack of attention to the "world of the text" is still surprising given his call for careful attention to the rhetorical intention of passages such as 45:7 and the problems that arise when such statements are taken in a speculative way or as a metaphysical claim. See Brueggemann, *Theology*, 119, fn. 5; 354 and Brueggemann, *Isaiah*, 77.

[22] Brueggemann, *Isaiah*, 82.

idol fabrication as central to the entirety of Isaiah 40-48's rhetorical framework in its final form.[23] Brueggemann does, however, push forward to answer the underlying reader-oriented question: How *might* the confession of verse 15 be understood in relation to idolatry and idol-fabrication in verse 16? Seen as an intentional contrast between the *hidden God* (vs. 15) and *idol*: the idol is "completely exhaustible upon contact"[24] and Yahweh's incomparability and being beyond domestication. Presumably in this reading Israel is still the speaker of vs. 16. Brueggemann is not exercised by this question, however. Furthermore, there is no consideration given to the possibility that this confession, on the lips of Israel, may still sound notes of bitter complaint. In the next section we will turn to the work of Samuel Balentine, which is avowedly more closely attuned to the literary-rhetorical development of Isa 40–45.

4.2.2 Samuel Balentine

Samuel Balentine's treatment of Isaiah 45:15 can be categorized in three largely chronological works: 1) his DPhil-turned-benchmark-monograph, *The Hidden God: The Hidden Face of God in the Old Testament* (1983). 2) his article "Isaiah 45: God's 'I Am,' Israel's 'You Are'" (1994) and 3) his engagement with God's hiddenness especially in the third section of the more theologically constructive and exploratory *The Torah's Vision of Worship* (1999).

The Hidden God

The Hidden God is a philologically rigorous treatment of the Ancient Near Eastern background and use of the idiomatic collocation סתר+פנים throughout the Hebrew Bible. There will be occasion for a deeper engagement with several aspects of Balentine's historical and philological work on aspects of divine hiddenness in our discussion of Isaiah 45:15. Here, however, I limit myself to questions related to Balentine's use of Isaiah 45:15 in this study. How does this verse function in the monograph and why?

Balentine's discussion of Isaiah 45:15, however brief, is of paramount importance to his overall thesis: the prophetic proclamation closes not only his last chapter — on the significance of the motif of סתר+פנים for Old Testament Theology — but, constitutes a proof-text at the conclusion of his monograph. Balentine lauds Samuel Terrien's efforts at a constructive biblical theology centered around the paradoxical reality of the Old Testament witness to the "presence

[23] The contrast between *Yawheh hidden* (vs. 15) and the *confused idol makers* (vs. 16), which he sees as resulting in Yawheh's unequaled ability to save (vs. 17), is noted. He does not relate this to any broader consideration of the theme in Isaiah 40-55. Brueggemann, *Isaiah*, 82.

[24] Brueggemann, *Isaiah*, 82.

of an absence," and draws attention to how this understanding is related to Terrien's rendering of מסתתר in Isa. 45:15 not passively (a hidden God) but according to "the full force of the verbal reflexive in the Hebrew original" (a self-concealing God).[25] Yet, Balentine rightly criticizes Terrien's erroneous conflation of all examples of God's hiding in the Psalter to a confession of sin. Though Balentine does not deny the existence of God's hiddenness as a response to human sin, especially in the prophetic literature, his own theological agenda seeks to elevate the motif of divine hiddenness to a more positive place in our understanding of faith, both ancient and modern. In this vein Balentine asserts the following:

> God's hiddenness is not primarily related to his punishment for disobedience. It is not basically a reflection of man's inability to understand or even to perceive God's presence in the world. It is manifest to both these ways, but it is not restricted to them. It is rather an integral part of the nature of God which is not to be explained away by theological exposition of human failures or human limitations. God is hidden just as he is present; he is far away just as he is near. Once this fact is given due consideration, then it is possible to understand the Old Testament's witness to the absence of a present God: 'Truly thou art a God who hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Savior' (Isa. 45:15).[26]

In tracing Balentine's concluding argument I endeavor to relate each component step to his overarching project. First, a governing concern throughout the work is to grapple with the positive dimensions of Israel's coping with divine aloofness, especially as it is given legitimate expression in the psalter as a component of Israel's dialogue with God. Related to this is Balentine's working assumption that as concerns the application of סתר פנים in the religious history of Israel we move from God's hiddenness in a cultic lament context to that of prophetic judgment and restoration.

b) Similarly, given what I consider to be a theological privileging of the psalter and a reclamation effort of its unique witness to God's hiddenness (in reaction to prior scholarly accenting of hiddenness as response to sin), it is worth asking: Why suddenly fall back upon an exilic prophetic text in order to state this fact of the Old Testament witness? Simply stated, in the wake of such a carefully constructed, analytically demarcated lexical study, sensitive to a whole host of contextual factors, we find Balentine disregard the Isaianic context of Isaiah 45:15

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[25] Samuel Eugene Balentine, *The Hidden God*, 174. Samuel L. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: The Heart of Biblical Theology*. Religious Perspectives, V. 26. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978).

[26] Balentine, *The Hidden God*, 176.

in the service of his own theological proclivity. God's hiddenness is axiomatic, "an integral part of the nature of God." The development of Balentine's hermeneutic deserves careful tracing out: First, God's hiddenness, accepted as fact, must be duly considered, *then* it is possible to understand the Old Testament's witness to the paradox of God's present absence. Yet, there are many different kinds of facts and the nature of the paradox is not further considered. Nor is the specificity of this witness observed in its own habitat. Suddenly, at the conclusion, there is a disjunctive loosening of attentiveness to the discrete witnesses and their development. Now, it is not only the witness of exilic prophet, but "the Old Testament" that witnesses. The speaker, then, is seemingly the canonical text itself. The antecedent rhetorical and literary development and how it influences one's understanding of the meaning of divine hiddenness in Isaiah 45 is not here addressed. Happily, Balentine returns to address some of these very questions in an article written a decade later.

"God's 'I Am', Israel's 'You are'"

Though the title of Balentine's article is "Isaiah 45" the subject of the study is more specifically an exegetical reexamination of Isaiah 45:15 in its biblical context. As this study is the most systematic and persuasive treatment of Isaiah 45:15 as the voice of Israel it will receive detailed attention in what follows. I will begin with an analysis of the interpretive moves Balentine makes (what he does and how he does it), followed by a critical evaluation, and lastly an assessment of where this leaves our wider discussion of Isaiah 45:15 as the voice of Israel with a view to understanding the meaning of hiddenness in this statement.

In his introduction Balentine mentions K. Miskotte and Samuel Terrien as representative Christian theologians for whom God's hiddenness is a central theological assertion, before devoting greater attention to Blaise Pascal and Karl Barth's respective appropriations of Isaiah 45:15, seeing them as paradigmatic of, "a tendency to isolate Isaiah 45:15 from its biblical context and to relocate it within various theological or religious systems of thought."[27] Balentine, like many before him and as the structure of the present work testifies, identifies the issue of speaker to be central. He then outlines the goals and plan of his study: By proposing the confession of Isaiah 45:15 as the voice of exilic Israel he hopes to, "restore to the theological discourse something of both the surprise and the anguish that seem to me to inform this biblical assertion." The first section of the study is a structural and rhetorical overview of Isaiah 44:24-45:25 followed by an attempt to understand what this assertion of God hiding himself means

[27] Samuel Balentine, "Isaiah 45", 103.

"within the context of this particular literary unit."[28] The second section seeks to understand Isaiah 45:15 "within the larger context of the metaphor of divine hiddenness in the Book of Isaiah"[29] and, indeed, throughout the entirety of the Hebrew Bible.

In the first section Balentine overviews what he sees as the main literary units which become the sections of an exegetical discussion which follows: Isaiah 44:24 – 45:7 (Yahweh addressing Cyrus), 45:8 (hymnic interlude, Yahweh addressing heaven and earth), 45:9-13 (Yahweh addressing Israel), 45:14-19 (where the identity of speaker is less clear, though v. 14 and vv. 18-19 include the standard כה אמר יהוה formula) and 45:20-25 (Yahweh to the nations and Israel).[30] Balentine refers to this thread of divine speeches as a "quasi-dialogue between God, on the one hand, and the nations and Israel, on the other" in which Yahweh's incomparability and superiority, especially in his delivering of Israel through the agency of Cyrus, is the main theme. Yahweh's uniqueness, his "resume" as Balentine refers to it, is presented through a repeated use of the self-predication formula (I am), the rhetorical purpose of which Balentine concludes is "to elicit from Israel (and the nations) the affirmative response, "You are."[31] Secondly, in his interpretation, both heaven and earth as well as the Gentiles "make the appropriate response concerning the superiority of God," where as Israel's counter witness provokes a further response from Yahweh. Though Balentine argues this persuasively, there are several textual features that suggest this second rhetorical feature may be more Balentine's than Deutero-Isaiah's.

In Balentine's treatment Isaiah 44:24-45:7 is subdivided into 44:24-28, addressed to Israel, and 45:1-7, "ostensibly addressed to Cyrus." These units are linked by a similar divine asseveration in 44:24 ("I am the LORD who makes all") and 45:7 ("I am the LORD who makes all these things"). The rhetorical effect is to articulate God's supremacy in both acts of creation and through the agency of Cyrus on behalf of Israel – an *argumentum a fortiori* – as attesting to Yahweh's uniqueness as God. A parallel also exists between the hymnic interludes of 44:23, preceding the Cyrus oracle, and 45:8, which follows it, to demarcate the unit and its import. In Isaiah 45:8 Balentine notes how important the introduction of the collocation of "righteousness"

[28] If one reflects on the contours of the introduction it will be clear how influential Balentine's work has been on this project. Though my approach and conclusions may differ, our interests share a family resemblance.

[29] Balentine, "Isaiah 45", 104.

[30] Though Balentine initially mentions the addressee of this trial speech as "the nations" he thereafter consistently refers to Yahweh summoning both the nations and Israel in his discussion. His presentation of the addressees in all sections outside of Isaiah 45:14-19 as being reasonably straightforward oversimplifies the interpretive challenges.

[31] Balentine, "Isaiah 45", 105. Balentine draws on the conceptual framework of Martin Buber's *Ich und Du*, thus importing a certain gravitas.

(צדק 2x) and "salvation" (ישע) is in God's summons to heaven and earth. Examples of *righteousness* in relation to the previously enigmatic figure called by Yahweh from the East (revealed as Cyrus in this unit) can be seen in Isaiah 41:2, 41:10 and possibly 42:6.[32] In setting up the dialogue in Deutero-Isaiah between God and creation up to this point, Balentine argues that "all is in order."[33] This will, of course, change in the next unit.

Following Muilenberg, Balentine refers to Isaiah 45:9-13 as the sole invective in Deutero-Isaiah. In the face of ambiguity of addressee in this passage Balentine sides with those who see Israel as the intended audience, and thus, the implied contending or opposing party to God's Cyrus-initiative.[34] Though he leans on other scholars without providing specific rationale, this interpretation certainly provides continuity between Israel as the addressee in Isaiah 44 and the interpretation that Balentine will propose for hearing Isaiah 45:15 as the voice of Israel. As before, when referring to the rhetorical function of the repeated use of "I am YHWH" (5x: 44:24; 45:3, 5, 6, 7) as a formula to "establish an intimate I-Thou relationship between God and humankind," Balentine again presents the repetition and anaphoric implementation of אני/אנכי in verses 12-13 as placing "rhetorical emphasis on God's intended "I-Thou" relationship with the created order."[35] This discussion of the rhetorical features leads into Balentine's lengthy exegetical discussion of Isaiah 45:14-19.

Balentine identifies and introduces many of the thorny interpretive issues relating to verses 15-17: ambiguity of speaker after a change of addressee from v. 14 to v. 15; change from imperfect verbs to perfect verbs when moving from v. 14 to v. 16; the question of whether verses 16-17 pick up the speech from v. 14 and if so, whether or not this should be read as the prophet's voice or rendered as direct divine speech. Balentine then summarizes the main interpretive proposals relating to v. 15. The first, proposed by Duhm and many after him, is to emend vs. 14 so as to render v. 15 as a continuation of God's announcement of the nation's proclamation, we have already considered. The second, retaining the text as is, interprets the speaker as either the prophet or a later gloss from "an anonymous and subsequent reader of the Cyrus oracle."[36] Balentine sees no textual or semantic justification for emendations and no

[32] These connections as a line of argumentation are mine, not Balentine's.

[33] Balentine, "Isaiah 45", 106.

[34] Childs, on the other hand, follows Leene and Beuken, in arguing for a disputation between Yahweh and the nations here, since "Israel is addressed always in the third person, whereas the objection of the nations turns on the calamity that they have experienced from Cyrus's arrival, all for the sake of Israel." Childs, *Isaiah*, 351. I find this argument, or at least Childs' articulation of it, unconvincing.

[35] Balentine, "Isaiah 45", 107.

[36] Balentine, "Isaiah 45", 108. See chapter 5.

compelling reason for reading this as a theological reflection by the prophet or later glossator on God's mysterious ways. He thus proposes verse 15 as Israel's response to the "rhetoric of persuasion" evidenced in the previously employed divine asseverative formula and asks the fundamental question as to the substance of this response: What, then, does it mean?

Balentine interprets the אָכֵן in vs. 15 as contrastive rather than asseverative, functioning to "restrict or qualify what has immediately preceded." In other words, in reply to the nation's confession we should read this as "Yes, but you are…" As we noted in the introductory excurses, such an interpretive move is reasonable. The second person pronoun here is a structural signal, calling attention to God as the addressee in response to the many "I / I am" statements which have preceded it. The two fronting words, Balentine argues, purposefully disrupt the line form, unbalancing it toward the beginning in order to call attention "to the sudden shift in speaker and addressee that has occurred"[37]

Leaning heavily on his own prior philological work relating to the collocation סתר+פנים as well as the work of John Sawyer on the root ישע and the participle/agent noun מושיע Balentine turns his attention toward the question: What kind of parallelism is intended between *mistattēr* and *môšia*? First, Balentine furnishes evidence to demonstrate that both verbal roots are used in the Hebrew Bible with specific reference to divine activity. Though this is the only occurrence of סתר in the *hithpael* participial form with reference to God Balentine, without furnishing any further argument, concludes that "its meaning here cannot be very different than that which informs the collocation *histtîr pānîm*."[38] Given the centrality of teasing out the contextually-derived meaning of *mistattēr* to his overall argument, it is worth posing the question: "Could it *not* mean something different?" Further, even if the meaning is quite similar to the collocation סתר+פנים this needs to be confirmed through more detailed engagement with the text of Isaiah 40-48.

Balentine then argues that in the prophetic literature *hôšia* always occurs with God as the subject of the verbal action and that in Deutero-Isaiah the term *môšia* becomes a special title for God, in that YHWH alone is the "champion of justice". As this is the only collocation of the two terms in the Hebrew Bible in reference to divine activity, the question is semantic in nature: "in what sense can God's hiding/hiddenness be parallel with God's saving/delivering?"[39]

[37] Balentine, "Isaiah 45", 109.

[38] Balentine, "Isaiah 45", 110.

[39] Balentine, "Isaiah 45", 110.

Balentine, following the work of A. Berlin on Hebrew parallelism's blending of equivalence and contrast, argues that the parallelism in Isaiah 45:15 is a "complex parataxis" which blends assertions of equivalence (אל / אלהי ישראל) and contrast (מסתתר / מושיע).[40] The nature of this relationship, which must be taken as one assertion comprised of two related statements, is left unspecified and begs elucidation.

Taking the אכן as contrastive, Balentine argues that Israel's speech "responds positively to God's self-declarations in preceding verses, and at the same time, asserts that God is hidden in ways that confound Israel's expectations." Like creation (45:8) and the nations (45:14) Israel recognizes God's superiority. Unlike creation and the nations, where God essentially puts "the words of affirmation on their lips", Israel's response is unmanaged.[41]

At this point in his discussion Balentine moves to vss. 18-19 without any comment on vss. 16-17. Thus, his observation that vss. 18-19 "return this unit to divine speech" stand in some tension and ambivalence when coupled with his earlier position regarding how to interpret the speaker of vss. 16-17, wherein he tentatively concludes that a continuation of divine speech is to be favored over the prophet's own voice. If vss. 16-17 really are a continuation of the divine speech from vs. 14, then vss. 18-19 are not the "return" to divine speech, vss. 16-17 are! Balentine downplays the rhetorical importance of vss. 16-17, perhaps because tackling them would hamper his own rhetorical development. Verses 18-19 are seen to serve as a parallel to verses 11-13, both of which begin with the same divine speech formula and conclude with the asseverative formula, and "affirm and dispute assertions that have been offered."[42] More importantly to his understanding of the rhetorical progression of the units, though, Balentine sees vv. 18-19 as the divine response to the nations (vs. 18 corresponding to vs. 14) and Israel (vs. 19 corresponding to vs. 15).[43]

Balentine identifies a parallel between the conclusion of vs. 18 (אֲנִי יְהוָה וְאֵין עוֹד) and the confession of the nations in vs. 14 (אַךְ בָּךְ אֵל וְאֵין עוֹד אֶפֶס אֱלֹהִים) as God accepting the nations' confession. However, supposing this is interpreted as a partial response to the nations' confession, it is just as likely a counter-assertion, in that neither the nations (v. 14) or Israel (v.15) has addressed Yahweh by name. Given that Balentine has accentuated the rhetorical function of YHWH's "I am," calling forth a response of "You are…" it is strange that he does not identify

[40] Berlin where relationships of equivalency serve to disambiguate and relationships of contrast offer more polysemic, often ambiguous, interpretations

[41] Balentine, "Isaiah 45", 111.

[42] Balentine, "Isaiah 45", 111. The symmetry in form that Balentine purports in this specific instance is debatable.

[43] Though, differing addressees in vv. 18–19 seems prima facie implausible as there are no formal elements signifying a split nor are there lexical elements that overtly draw the reader back to v. 14 in the way Balentine suggest.

the relationship between a lack of "You are Yahweh" in both the affirmation of the nations (v. 14) and Israel (v. 15) and the disputational use of "I am Yahweh" in vss. 18-25. I submit that interpreting vs. 18 as disputational is further supported by formulations of the asseverative אֲנִי יְהוָה (vss. 18, 19, 21) and the repeated assertions that only in or through the agency of Yahweh will Israel be saved and justified (vss. 17, 25). Similarly, the construction of vs. 24 (אַךְ בַּיהוָה לִי אָמַר צְדָקוֹת וְעֹז) with its opening and the possibility of a subjunctive verb form[44] calling for direct speech unmistakably parallels the beginning of vs. 14 (אַךְ בָּךְ אֵל וְאֵין עוֹד אֶפֶס אֱלֹהִים), the speech of the nations. These words in vs. 14 follow the nations' prayerful prostrating after verbs of motion in the imperfect, much like the would-be-words in vs. 24 both follow a divine proclamation that every knee will bow (vs. 23) and continue on into a verb of motion in the imperfect (vs. 24b).

Balentine is more exercised with God's "reinterpretation of Israel's assertion" in vss. 19-25.[45] He seeks to demonstrate that Israel's confession is critically evaluated and modified by the Lord in v. 19 and then further in the trial speech of vv. 20-25. Yahweh states that he has not spoken in secret (לֹא בַסֵּתֶר), but rather with righteousness (צֶדֶק). The pairing of *segolate* nouns with sibilants suggests a very clear juxtaposition: YHWH declares that "righteousness" and not "hiddenness" is his "norm defining" activity. Balentine sees vss. 14-19 as "assertions and counter assertions" by three parties in a kind of revolving dialogue. Vs. 19 closes the "counter assertions" with the "stage set for the trial speech of verses 20-25" in which both Israel and the nations are summoned once again to complete what is lacking in their testimony.

Balentine calls attention to the divine preoccupation in this chapter with צֶדֶק which steadily reaches fever pitch in the trial speech of vss. 20-25.[46] This concentration is importantly interspersed with various forms of the root ישע (vss. 20, 21, 22).[47] The reinterpretation of Israel's confession culminates in v. 21 wherein God declares that He is אֵל־צַדִּיק וּמוֹשִׁיעַ – "a righteous God and Savior". The correspondence to the assertion in v. 15 is clear: in God's counter-argument the element of hiddenness is omitted and God's "resume" updated. Thus, "the work of being "savior" is defined by righteousness and justice, not hiddenness."[48] I argue at the end of

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[44] 1QIsa[a] reads לִי יֹאמַר which can be rendered "it should/will be said unto me"

[45] Balentine, "Isaiah 45", 112.

[46] "To the previous occurrences…in vv. 8, 13, and 19, a further four occurrences are now added in vv. 21-25." Balentine, "Isaiah 45", 112.

[47] Here Balentine follows the work of Gitay in underscoring the repetitive alliterations of sibilants in order to foreground the association of the roots ישע and צדק.

[48] Balentine, "Isaiah 45", 113.

this chapter that it is precisely God's "faithfulness and reliability," his צֶדֶק, evidenced (or not!) in his saving activity on behalf of Israel that the exilic community calls into question in vs. 15. Balentine, however, does not argue this overtly. This seems to be the logic of the divine reuse and redefinition of Israel's statement, with explicit focus on "righteousness," which continues into chapter 46.

Before continuing on to a shorter analysis of the second section of Balentine's article, a summary evaluation highlighting both the contributions of his exegesis as well as what is found lacking is provided below:

Contributions:	**Limitations**:
By situating Isaiah 45:15 in its literary-rhetorical context, Balentine is able to read this confession dialogically as Israel's "You are" response to Yahweh's "I am" statements, which are littered throughout chapters 44-45.	By not extending his discussion beyond Isaiah 44-45 to the whole of Isaiah 40-48, Balentine misses other crucial dialogical elements in the literary-rhetorical progression which could serve to better inform the decision to interpret Israel as the speaker in Isa. 45:15 and, thus, the meaning of Israel's confession regarding God's hiddenness.
	Balentine rejects as unconvincing the possibility that vs. 15 could be the reflection of the prophet or a later reader/glossator. However, neither is it in his interest to take pains to entertain this as a valid interpretive option. He also does not consider the possibility that vs. 15 could be a continuation of the gentile's address without textual emendation.
Balentine correctly introduces the near intractability of assigning with confidence an identity of speaker and addressee to vss. 15-17. He then poses the question of whether verses 16-17 pick up the speech from v. 14 and, if so, whether or not this should be read	Balentine decides tentatively to hear vs. 16 as "direct divine speech" but states that "for the purpose of this investigation a decision one way or the other is not crucial." I suspicion, however, that Balentine is able to make this statement only because he avoids any further discussion of vss. 16-17 in his exegetical

as the prophet's voice or rendered as direct divine speech.	work. However, as he is taking a decidedly literary-rhetorical approach, avoiding vss. 16-17 is not an option. Not only are important connections between 14-15 and 16-17 left unattended to, but further parallels between these verses and vss. 24-25 are obfuscated. Furthermore, attention to vs. 17 could have strengthened his dialogical argument for seeing Israel as speaker in vs. 15.
Taking the אכן as contrastive rather than asseverative, Balentine is able to ground his interpretive decision in seeing a break between the speaker in vs. 14 (nations) and vs. 15 (Israel).	Though basing this decision on the syntactical work of Waltke and O'Connor, Balentine does not proffer his own textual work. As this point is rather pivotal this decision should be grounded in a wider discussion with analogs from the text of Deutero-Isaiah or elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Isa. 49:4b; Ps. 82:6-7). See Excursus 1.
By setting up a contrast between the responses of creation/nations on the one hand and Israel on the other, Balentine heightens the dialogical disjunction of vs. 15.	There is an internal dissonance within Balentine's argument regarding creation and the nations making the "appropriate response" vis-à-vis God's superiority. However, these are managed responses, so it begs the question as to whether they are responses at all. Heaven and earth are called upon with the imperative in vs. 8 and the nations' confession is put upon their lips. For this reason he refers to the whole sweep as a "quasi-dialogue". Further, by stating that in essence "all is well" in the "I/Thou" relationship prior to vs. 15, Balentine ignores the broader sweep of interactions between YHWH and other dialogue partners in Isaiah

	40-44, which are not so peacefully aligned. Lastly, he takes the three nations mentioned (Egypt, Cush, and Sabeans) in Isaiah 45:14 as representative of "the nations" without discussion as to whether this is the intention or, at least, the logic of the literary development.
	Balentine initially presents the distinct divine speeches as addressed unambiguously to Cyrus, Israel, and the nations. However, when introducing the passage he states that 45:20-25 is an address to the nations, yet in the paragraphs that follow this trial speech is a divine summons to "both the nations and Israel to acknowledge the divine superiority" He similarly states that the rhetorical purpose of the "I am" statements is "to elicit from Israel (and the nations) the affirmative response, "You are." Yet, according to Balentine, it is Israel who states "you are" As Isaiah 44:24-45:13 are all discussed by Balentine as essentially a divine-Israel dialogue, he leaves unclear where and in what way God is seeking to elicit from the nations the "you are"
The discussion of parallelistic relationships of contrast which offer ambiguous interpretations that provide alternative views contributes to our understanding of the possibility for internal tension in vs.15's parataxis.	In his discussion of this internal tension between God's hiding and saving activity, Balentine often moves beyond the participial sense native to the confession itself. Though Balentine, quoting Berlin, recognizes that "the exact relationship between them is left unspecified," he seems content to understand

	the two statements comprising one assertion, as it were, equally balanced and in perfect tension on respective sides of a scale. Yet, the statement that God is "both hidden from Israel and saving Israel," leaves much undone in exploring the nature of these two participles. If Israel's statement about God hiding Himself somehow *conditions* the nature of their experience of God as "savior," then Balentine may go too far in reading Isaiah 45:15 as equal parts hopeful affirmation of God's superiority and lament regarding their experience.
	Balentine states, without detailed engagement with the text of Isaiah 40-48, that the meaning of *mistattēr* in vs. 15 cannot be very different than that which informs the collocation *hisstîr pānîm* elsewhere in Isaiah and the Old Testament.
By paying careful attention to the increased usage of righteousness (צֶדֶק) in the counter-assertions in vss. 18-19 and the trial-speech in vss. 20-25 Balentine discerns in the divine self-predication אֵל־צַדִּיק וּמוֹשִׁיעַ– (a righteous God and Savior) the crucial disputational link to Israel's confession in vs. 15 אֵל מִסְתַּתֵּר מוֹשִׁיעַ (a God who hides himself – Savior).	Balentine does not draw any inferences between the disputational use of צֶדֶק in the divine reply and what might have been intended in Israel's confession regarding God's hiding himself. Though he goes on in the following section to state that Isaiah 45:15 expresses Israel's anguish "about divine abandonment" in the face of "the prophetic exhortation to hope in the unparalleled capacities of God, even in exile,"[49] there is no overt discussion of a possible protest regarding God's faithfulness and reliability.

[49] Balentine, "Isaiah 45", 116.

In the second section of his article Balentine sets out to situate the use of the verb *sātar* in Isaiah 45:15 against its broad usage throughout the Old Testament. Unto this end he summarizes his work on the idiom "hide the face" (*histtîr panîm*) as "the heart of the language of divine hiddenness in the Hebrew Bible," and briefly overviews the biblical occurrences of the phrase.[50] His discussion is a distillation of his understanding of the diachronic development in the use of the phrase in the context of Israel's lament psalms, where there is "little mention, if any, of Israel's sin as the causal link to God's hiding," to a shift in the prophetic assimilation of the phrase to assert "that God's hiding is a direct response to Israel's sin."[51] However, Balentine notes a further shift even within the prophetic corpus from earliest usage (Micah 3:4) where there is no hint of restoration to later usage in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, where "references of God's hiding are typically offset by accompanying promises of deliverance and restoration." Balentine argues that it is within Deutero-Isaiah that this transition in the prophetic understanding initially begins, concluding that "Isaiah 45:15 represents *the pivotal juncture* in Israel's journey with *ʾēl mistattēr*, the God "who hides Himself." It is *the place* where lament and hope converge in Israel's confession."[52]

A further methodological issue arises in Balentine's establishment of an inner-prophetic development for the use of this idiom. He begins with the earliest prophetic use of *histtîr panîm* in Micah, moves on to Isaiah, and then on to the exilic prophets. He refers to DI's usage as the "transition," however, and this – if a diachronic movement is to be traced – is problematic. His discussion of God's hiding his face in Isaiah 8:17, Isaiah 54:7-8, and Isaiah 63:7-8 collapses all distinctions between the various literary-redactional layers that both the use of the term Deutero-Isaiah and the diachronic framing could imply. Though I entertain no prima facie objections to a final form investigation of divine hiddenness in Isaiah 1-66 which charts a thematic development, and Isaiah 45:15 plotted therein, this does not seem to be Balentine's frame of

[50] He states that of all biblical occurrences (26) the majority are in the psalter (12x) and the prophets (11x). Interestingly, all three omissions from consideration in his study are from Deuteronomy 31-32. I think references to Deut are omitted from more careful consideration because of the troublesome nature of dating the material therein. On diachronic grounds Balentine admits elsewhere that he cannot fully discount an earlier provenance of Deuteronomy's use of *histtîr panîm*. He submits that a final redaction of Deuteronomy 32 probably derives from, "somewhere between the years 900 and 600 BC" and admits that "it is quite possible" given this pre-exilic dating for the material in Deuteronomy that the use of the phrase with reference to manifestations of divine judgment "may also have a long tradition…from the pre-exilic stage of Israel's history." Balentine, *The Hidden God*, 74–76. In this light, Deut has the capacity to trouble the neatness of his proposed diachronic development.
Balentine's avoidance of Deut 31–32 might be related to a wider avoidance of aspects of the dialogue in Isa 40–48 that claim past judgment.

[51] Balentine, "Isaiah 45", 115.

[52] Balentine, "Isaiah 45", 116. Italics my own.

reference.[53] By employing terms like "transition" and "juncture" Balentine's question, if it were to be reconstructed, might be something like: how does Isaiah 45:15 as an instance of Israelite speech about God's hiddenness fit into the broad sweep of the idiom's usage and what does that reflect about the development of Israelite religious experience? Though this is an interesting question in its own right it raises yet another: Is there not a disjoint between the motives and approach of the first section of Balentine's article and the second?"

Balentine's stated aim was to reexamine Isaiah 45:15 within its biblical context as an antidote to the overwhelming tendency of appropriation and deployment within other theological systems in the history of interpretation. Yet, what happens when he moves from an "attempt to clarify the assertion that God hides himself within the context of this particular literary unit" (first section of the article) to an attempt to clarify the above in relation to "the larger context of the metaphor of divine hiddenness in the Book of Isaiah and elsewhere in the Hebrew bible" (second section)? There is an inevitable shift of focus when we move to a more panoramic sweep, part of which involves dealing with a more jumbled and hypothetical landscape diachronically. We move from an investigation relating text to immediate context to an investigation which relates the text to a broad historical development with questions focusing on the evolution of an idiom as reflective of Israelite religious experience through the centuries. As we make *this* transition with Balentine we must note that he himself applies the language of *ʾēl mistattēr* as universally characteristic of Israel's experience with its personal God.

Balentine may be able to claim, without entering into great diachronic analysis, that Isaiah 45:15 represents a sort of liminal zone between the language of God's hiddenness in lament Psalms and that which we find elsewhere in the prophets. The question remains, however, to what degree this provides us further insight into the meaning of hiddenness in the immediate context of Isaiah 45:15? Balentine argues persuasively that lament is "a defining context for the understanding of God's hiddenness in Isaiah,"[54] providing analogs in the Psalter for Isa. 8:17 (Ps. 69:6), Isa. 54:8 (Ps. 30:5), Isa. 59:2 (Pss. 88:3; 102:2-3; 143:1), and Isa. 64:6 (a community lament such as Ps. 45). However, an analog which posits language of God's hiddenness and salvation in one "contiguous but contrasting assertion," Balentine does not find in the psalter or elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.[55] In this absence Balentine once again hails

[53] If this had been the case he may have noted and discussed other uses of *sātar*, such as that found in the *hithpael* in Isaiah 29:14. Though to be fair, neither do I in this context.

[54] Balentine, "Isaiah 45," 116.

[55] See Balentine, "Isaiah 45", 113. Though note the multiple uses of סתר in Psalm 27. The psalm opens with the claim that Yahweh is "my salvation" ישעי. Then, in Ps 27:5 the root is used in the *hiphil* in an assurance of

Isaiah 45:15 as "the only place in the Hebrew bible that brings into one confession the daring assertion that God is both a hiding God and a saving God," which addresses God directly "as the acknowledged "savior" of Israel, and…insists that the assertion about God's hiddenness is appropriate in the litany of responses that the community of faith may offer to God." Yet there is something of the insistence here that is Balentine's own. The fusing and universal suspension of these two claims as a *faithful* response to God is not native to the logic of the literary-rhetorical progression of Deutero-Isaiah's prophecy. This decontextualizing momentum is born out in his conclusion:

> To reduce the response of faith to one of these confessions without the other is to offer less than the truth of Israel's experience. Although I do not think Pascal had this Hebraic truth in mind, his comment on Isa. 45:15, restored now to its proper biblical setting, is perhaps even more appropriate and compelling than he intended: Surely, God is *Deus absconditus*, and "any religion that does not affirm that God is hidden is not true. [56]

Yet, in one sense, we have drifted from the "the proper biblical setting," by moving away from the dialogical specificity between Israel and Yahweh inherent to the literary context of Isaiah 40-48. This trajectory continues in Balentine's subsequent work, *The Torah's Vision of Worship*. In the section that follows I will provide just enough overview to situate Balentine's interpretive context in which we find Isaiah 45:15 once again playing a decisive role.

The Torah's Vision of Worship

In *The Torah's Vision of Worship* Balentine advances three theses. In the first section of the book his main contention is to demonstrate in what significant ways the Torah is shaped by Persian imperial designs. In the second section he advances a related thesis in which, shaped as it is by political realities, the Torah casts a vision imprinted by creation itself, into which humanity is called to partner in the restoration of "God's cosmic design."[57] This commission is enacted at the frontier between present reality and the promise and expectation of "wider ones that correct and complete them."

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deliverance (יסתרני בסתר). However, at Ps 27:9 the standard idiom is used to entreat Yahweh not to "hide his face". Cf. also the proximity of מְסִתֶּתֶר to David's cry of הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי in Psalm 54:2-3.

[56] Balentine, "Isaiah 45", 117.

[57] Samuel E. Balentine, *The Torah's Vision of Worship*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 215.

Balentine's third thesis, builds on the prior two, yet is more exploratory: The Torah's vision contains the rhetorical potency to empower new, imaginative horizons of meaning into which humanity can press and thrive. Instead of the province of *Yehud*, Balentine here addresses "today's community of faith" with Persia clearly no longer the present hegemony. Yet, Balentine is at pains to take seriously the dominant, "contemporary forces that seek to define existence and proscribe faith." This includes the training of our sensibilities and expectations regarding how to read and not read "ancient religious texts like the Bible" – making us impervious to the Torah's vision. Balentine threads his conversation with quotes from T.S. Eliot's poem, "The Hollow Men," to both hurl the reader headlong into the reality of the contemporary existential dilemma in which we "without eyes" are already halted in "this hollow valley groping for lost kingdoms"[58]

This section becomes an appraisal of modernity in dialogue with two works, Richard Elliott Friedman's *The Disappearance of God: A Divine Mystery* (reissued as *The Hidden Face of God*) and John Updike's *In the Beauty of the Lilies*. We have already discussed Friedman's sequential/canonical presentation of divine disappearance in the Hebrew Bible alongside an accompanying positive proposal to see this as a purposeful shift "in the responsibility for life on earth from God to humans."[59] Tracing this thesis regarding the steady disappearance of God in the Hebrew Bible after the apex of divine manifestation at Mt. Sinai, Balentine turns to the question of why the creation is left to, "cope with diminishing evidence for the manifest presence of God?" While acknowledging sin as a central biblical component in understanding separation between God and creation, Balentine argues that this is not the full explanation for "God's disappearance":

> Rather, the hiddenness of God is part of *the very essence of God*. As the book of Isaiah so tellingly puts it, God is "a God who hides himself" (Isa. 45:15)…God…may choose to hide because to do so is consonant with God's own nature and purposes.[60]

In a footnote directly following the parenthetical proof text Balentine draws the reader's attention to his 1994 article "Isaiah 45," but states only that he deals there with the text's "critical assertions…concerning God's hiddenness." He does not mention that the central aim of his previous article was to restore Isaiah 45:15 to its biblical context, attempting to explicate it as embedded within a literary context with its own particularity. The statement, deployed in this far

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[58] Balentine, *The Torah's Vision*, 216, 218

[59] Balentine, *The Torah's Vision*, 218.

[60] Balentine, *The Torah's Vision of Worship*, 220. Italics are my own.

more creative, constructive theological context, is now de-personalized. It is "the book of Isaiah" and no longer the "voice of Israel" who we are to hear. Balentine treads into the well-worn path of textual isolation and relocation which he earlier criticizes, for here he has his own "system of thought" for which the magnetism of Isaiah 45:15 is, once again, too strong to withstand. It is appropriated within Balentine's theological vision for the 21st century.

Despite Balentine's exegetical work in the "Isaiah 45" article, there are several consistent and interrelated features in his approach to Isa 45:15. First is the desire to problematize the linkage between God's hiddenness and punishment. It is in this regard that Balentine discerns the lament-psalm background for Isaiah 45:15 as the voice of Israel. Secondly, and in a more direct return to his earlier monograph, God's hiddenness is understood as a timeless truth and Isaiah 45:15 becomes the *biblical witness* which best expresses this axiom. Such an articulation can be found in Balentine's *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine-Human Dialogue*:

> God's hiddenness does confirm the indissoluble linkage between sin and punishment. On this truth the entire biblical witness is unequivocal. But the pain and hurt that sunders the soul claims as its victims the just as well as the unjust. This too is the hard lesson of the Book of Job. The present God is the hidden God, and the hidden God is still God. This is the truth of Isaiah's announcement to the exiles in Babylon: "Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior" (Isa 45:15, NRSV). It is a truth tied inherently to the nature of God, not primarily to the obedient or disobedient of humanity. This is the truth claimed for the mysterious "I AM WHO I AM." When the church participates in questioning God, it is simply honoring the biblical portrait of the One whose mysterious ways summon forth with equal passion both the affirmation…, "Amen, may it be so"…and the anguished cry… "Why?"[61]

Here Balentine affirms the burden of the biblical evidence which connects sin and punishment only to mitigate it dialectically. He deftly weds Isaiah 45:15 to the revelation of God's personal name in Exodus 3, while arguing for Yahweh's hiddenness *not* being primarily in response to disobedient humanity. Additionally as he presents the axiomatic nature of the confession Balentine here introduces the speaker as Isaiah addressing the exiles in Babylon (and not the voice of the exiles themselves). His interest is clearly that the church should inherit the

[61] Samuel E. Balentine, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine-Human Dialogue*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 287.

Israelite tradition of biblical lament and faithful protest, by questioning the *immanuel*, who is also the hidden God.

In the whole of the above summary and analysis we can observe Balentine's stated commitment to return this locus classicus to its "proper biblical setting" in tension with a situation engendered by the force of the confession's own gravitas and that of Balentine's contemporary theological interests. There is a relationship here akin to two massive bodies pulling upon one another. A massive body, of course, can result in the bending of space-time. And bending space-time is exactly the kind of thing poetry facilitates. Balentine's own description of the generic realities of exilic poetry help illuminate how poetry fosters this, especially through what he refers to as poetry's unique conception of "durational time" over against the privileging of "chronological time" in prose:[62]

> Durational time is primarily the preoccupation of poets, whose figurations linger over the "now," loosening temporal connections that either explain the present or dispel the future. This resistance to closure is simultaneously an insistence that the import of the present not be minimized or erased when "history exercises its rights."[63]

This resistance to closure in exilic poetry is described by Balentine as "mourning that cannot be trapped in history."[64] We have seen how this very dynamic plays out in Balentine's oeuvre, as he returns to the confession of God's hiddenness in a variety of contexts. Closure is resisted and a "multiplicity of meaning" surfaces due to poetic features such as parataxis and what Balentine describes as "liturgical time." In this, poetry grapples to articulate the traumatic present (the "now" of then), which contemporary readers take up and, in near-unavoidability owing to generic features, inhabit.[65] This is the heart of Balentine's call for the contemporary faithful to question their "hidden God". These very features illuminate the participatory realities that underwrite Balentine's adaptation of the confession.

For this reason it would be, wooden, ponderous, even unfair to cast Balentine's use of Isa 45:15 in *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible* and *The Torah's Vision of Worship* as deracinating. These are

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[62] Here he is riffing on Walter Benjamin's concept of "empty time" (*Jetztzeit*) - "filled up by the presence of the now"

[63] Samuel E. Balentine, "The Prose and Poetry of Exile" in Frank Ritchel Ames, Brad E. Kelle, and Jacob L. Wright, *Interpreting Exile: Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts.* Ancient Israel and Its Literature (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 346.

[64] Balentine, "The Prose and Poetry of Exile," 351. The phrase is borrowed from O'Connor.

[65] Balentine notes the influence of Gabrielle M. Spiegel and Jeremy Cohen, 346–347,

constructive projects in biblical theology.[66] It is still worth asking, especially as Balentine sets his sights on the contemporary community of faith, if such an appropriation might be better served by drawing into even sharper relief the features of the specific divine-human dialogue which he traced in his earlier article. In the next section I will argue that the dialogical dynamic of poetry, the gravitas of the past's "present" as a time-space bending force into which the reader and hearer become inclined to speak their own confession, is not limited to contemporary interpreters.

4.3 Amplifying the Voice: Reading Isaiah 40–45 and the Song of Moses Intertextually

In what follows I propose a hearing of Isaiah 45:15 as the voice of exilic Israel that both builds upon and challenges aspects of Balentine's proposal. According to Balentine the rhetorical development of the divine discourse in Isa 44–45 sought after a specific confession or witness from Israel. In this reading I introduce the possibility that Balentine does not take adequate account of that seriatim development by pushing farther back into Isa 40–43 and, for this reason, other rhetorical possibilities were occluded. This reading presents v.15 as Israel's confession/witness in light of possible intertextual resonances with Deuteronomy 32 (the Song of Moses or *shirat ha'azinu* in Jewish tradition) within its final-form narrative framework. This reading recognizes broad generic, thematic, and lexical correspondence between these two poetic works. The main points of correspondence for our purposes are Yahweh's hiddenness and Israel being called upon to witness.

Two caveat lectors regarding intertextuality: the first as it relates to Second Isaiah and the second as it relates to my approach. First, the identification of material (esp. Exodus, the Psalter, Lamentations, and Jeremiah) and its function within Second Isaiah has already been discussed at length by Benjamin Sommer, Patricia K. Tull, and others.[67] I resonate with the approach employed by Tull, which pushes beyond the observation that Second Isaiah is something of a mosaic of repurposed texts and traditions to investigate with greater specificity the possible

[66] It should also be stated that *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible* was published a year before the article "Isaiah 45".

[67] Benjamin Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*; Patricia Tull Wiley, *Remember the Former Things: The Recollection of Previous Texts in Second Isaiah* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997). See also: Risto Nurmela, *The Mouth of the Lord Has Spoken: Inner-Biblical Allusions in Second and Third Isaiah* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006). For studies specific to interextuality between the Song of Moses and Isa 40–55: Hyun Chul Paul Kim. "The Song of Moses (Deut 32:1-43) in Isaiah 40-55." in J. Harold Ellens et al (eds.) *God's Word for Our World: In Honor of Simon John De Vries* vol. 1; JSOT Sup 388 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 149–74; Tina Dykesteen Nilsen, *The Origins of Deuteronomy 32: Intertextuality, Memory, Identity* (New York: Peter Lang Publishers, 2018).

relationship of such "presumably familiar words" to the exilic audience. To quote Tull, "intertextuality is a property not only of texts, but of the people who read those texts…" and thus much of Second Isaiah's message, spoken into a context of radical dislocation can be seen to reframe, "the audience's understanding in relation to older words, by reiterating, revising, re-collecting, and often reversing what had been said before."[68] Such statements raise issues of methodology and classification related to the identification and interpretation of allusions to other texts. The reality of slippage between an allusion that an author intended a reader to hear (author hermeneutic) and an allusion or echo that a reader actually does hear (text/reader hermeneutic) are a product of author and reader repertoires, similarity between authorial and readerly interpretive context, interpretive savvy, and historical distance.[69] For the concerns of the present study I prefer to merely prick at the edges of this gordian knot of author-text-reader hermeneutics to register that although I sometimes employ language reminiscent of an author hermeneutic (reconstructive), this is related to reading with imaginative seriousness.[70] What I am after here, and the logic of this study more generally, is a disciplined text-reader hermeneutic.

4.3.1 Recent Scholarship on Correspondences Between Isa 40–48 and Deut 32

Philological and thematic correspondences between the Song of Moses and Deutero-Isaiah have long been observed.[71] However, until very recently, as Thomas A. Keiser noted, "there has been little to no effort to develop the nature of those similarities."[72] Both H.G.M Williamson and Thomas A. Keiser have compiled abbreviated lists of lexical and thematic

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[68] Tull Willey, *Remember the Former Things*, 76; 103.

[69] Tull Wiley, *Remember the Former Things*, 78.

[70] For an example of a more clear delineation of author and text-reader hermeneutic see Benjamin Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 7. For an analysis of the differences in approach between Tull Wiley and Sommer see Nilsen, *The Origins of Deuteronomy 32*, 57–60.

[71] I would argue further for genre and structural parallels between the Song of Moses and Isa 40–48: each is sui generis, blending genres for rhetorical effect; both poems in their final-form arrangement blend forensic and hymnic elements and vacillate between tonalities of accusation and promises of vindication. Lastly, both the Song of Moses and Isa 40–48 include fragments of speech embedded in wider levels of discourse and grammatical shifts in person and places of uncertainty regarding where the speech of one ends and another begins. Thiessen uses these features, alongside hymnic imperatives and interrogatives, to argue for a multi-level liturgical reconstruction of the Song. See Matthew Thiessen, 2004, "The Form and Function of the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32:1–43)," *JBL*, 123, 3 (2004): 416; See also Daniel Isaac Block, *How I Love Your Torah, O Lord!: Studies in the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 170. Block also argues that the Song of Moses in its function as perpetual "witness" in Yahweh's defense is concurrently anthemic, quasi-legal, even constitutional in character. Block, 167.

[72] Keiser, Thomas A. "The Song of Moses a Basis for Isaiah's Prophecy" *Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. 55, Fasc. 4 (Oct., 2005), 486. Keiser reflects briefly on others' observations concerning similarity of "style and thought" (McConville, 452), "phraseology" pointing to an unmistakable relationship between the two (Sanders, 75, 421) and assertions of direct theological dependence (Knight, 45, 55, 85, 99, 119–20). See also: Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy -* דברים*: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 95.

parallels between Deuteronomy and Deutero-Isaiah, with Keiser focusing on parallels specific to the Song of Moses.[73] Williamson introduces the prominence of incomparability, election, and the call to remember as three themes of primary correspondence between Deuteronomy and Isaiah 40-66. While maintaining the existence of other influences on the latter, such as Isaiah 1-39 and Jeremiah, Williamson concludes:

> "…in a manner that is certainly quite unlike the situation in the first part of the book and that equally is not closely paralleled in the last parts, there is found within Isaiah 40-48 a use of themes and terminology that have their closest parallels in Deuteronomy and that seem to have been influenced by that book. The themes in question focus on issues relating in particular to the special relationship that exists between God and his chosen people, both in the past and in the present."[74]

Williamson, as many others before him, notes the fixed formula and self-declaration in Deut 32:39 and Isa 41:4, 43:10,11, 13; 45:5, 6, 18, 21; 46:4; 48:12; 52:6 in his discussion of incomparability.[75] Keiser also notes the "incomparability of Yahweh" as a primary theological parallel between Isaiah 40-48 and Deut. 32.[76] Hyun Chul Paul Kim and, even more so, Tina Dykesteen Nilsen, have also illuminated the wealth of lexical, thematic, and generic parallels between Deut 32 and Deutero-Isaiah.[77] Though Kim and Nilsen have offered detailed analyses of the two poetic texts neither of them interacts with what it might mean that Isaiah 43–44 specifically collocates the divine summons of Israel to witness to Yahweh's incomparable

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[73] Williamson is concerned with the wider influence of Deuteronomy on Isaiah 40-66. Keiser lists literary, theological, and thematic parallels but I find his use of literary rather than lexical unhelpful and his delineation between theological and thematic parallels unnecessary.

[74] H.G.M. Williamson, "Deuteronomy and Isaiah," in *For Our Good Always: Studies on the Message and Influence of Deuteronomy in Honor of Daniel I. Block*. eds. Jason S. DeRouchie, Jason Gile, and Kenneth J. Turner. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 251-268.

[75] See also Nathan MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of 'Monotheism'*, 85-89.

[76] Keiser, "The Song of Moses A Basis for Isaiah's Prophecy", 491.

[77] Nilsen provides a very detailed comparison of parallels (lexemes, metaphors, archaisms, and other correspondences) between Deut 32 and Isaianic texts. Though my approach is avowedly more canonical and reader-oriented, I find Nilsen's conclusions regarding directionality of influence between the two texts to equivocate, especially when it comes to Isa 40–48. She appears to bracket the overlap between Isa 40–55 and Deut 32, which she demonstrates in the body of her research, in order to more strongly state her conclusion that the Song of Moses and Isa 1, 34–35, and 56–66 share a Persian Jerusalemite provenance and that both draw on Isa 40–55. I have no prima facie objection to this theory. I simply call attention to the fact that Nilsen, in other places, provides evidence that significantly problematizes such a conclusion (e.g., Nilsen, *The Origins*, 163; 173–74).

divinity alongside the density of shared material with the Song of Moses in those same sections.[78] Nor has there been a consideration of Isa 45:15 as an exilic witness in light of such intertextual resonances.

4.3.2 "Can I Get a Witness?"

The salient features of this intertextual reading are as follows: first, from a canonical perspective the narrative framework of the Song of Moses (Deut 31) presents a future in which the Song of Moses (Deut 32) will function as a witness against Israel's apostasy.[79] It is my contention that Isa 40–45 can be read as a prophetic actualizing of this witness against Israel in order to rebut the exile's originating claim which was lodged against Yahweh (Isa 40:27).[80] In the excursus at the end of this chapter I provide a list of possible intertextual resonances that lead up to the actual witness passages in Isa 43–44. In conjunction with this reading these can be read as an incremental pricking up of the ears of the intended audience to the Song of Moses *as witness* via allusion and poetic paranomasia, before reaching the actual divine summons to "witness".[81] Secondly, the shared resonances of divine hiddenness between the two texts are brought into constructive dialogue. This stands in contrast to Balentine's reading, whose reading strategy does not seek to relate the two. I seek to show a way of fruitfully relating divine hiddenness as a

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[78] This is, in part, dictated by the focus and aims of their respective studies: Nilsen is interested in the provenance of the Song of Moses before it is redacted into its Deuteronomic narrative framework. Though attention is given to the place and function of the Song of Moses within Deuteronomy as a song to be remembered ("the Israelites themselves are to continue to teach the song to all their descendents in 31:21" - Nilsen, 233) she does not mention that the function is to witness *against* Israel. For Kim, on the other hand, the "textual arrangement and key phrases or motifs within the Song of Moses" – without reference to its narrative framework – provides the organizing principle for his cataloging of citations, allusions, and echoes between the two texts. Kim, "The Song of Moses", 150.

[79] The relationship between the Song of Moses and its narrative framework is diachronically complicated. Levenson cuts to a more succinct description of the final-form relationship between the two: "the exilic frame of Deuteronomy is the sermon for which the Song of Moses is the text." Quoted in Nilsen, *The Origins*, 13.

[80] On the lament at Isa 40:27 see Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66,* 49; 59. As mentioned elsewhere in this study DI presents the lament embedded in divine speech at v. 27 as that which precipitates this entire section (i.e. Isa 40–48 is the poetic and prophetic rejoinder. This discourse extends an alternative construal of Yahweh as deity-without-parallel as *manifested via a unique relationship to Israel.* Isaiah 40–48 is, thus, presented as discourse which posits God on trial in relation to Israel's complaint. Similar to David Clines' reading of Job, God is here compelled by the logic of the lawsuit imagery inherent in Israel's charge to "enter into conversation." David J.A. Clines, *Job* (Word Commentary), xlv.

[81] Such word play creatively modifies the spelling of texts, while retaining the sounds so as to be recognizable. In this way they allow the audience to either catch or miss the filling of well-known idioms from "Israel's greatest hits" with possibly jarring new meanings in the present deployment. See further analysis of the following examples in excursus 2: Isa 42:10–13 (sing to the LORD a new song with inferences to the old songs – esp. "he stirs up his fury"); Isa 42:16 ("these are the things I will do and I will not forsake them"); the possibility of double entendre at Isa 42:20, coalescing in Isa 42:23 (who will listen?...).

response to idolatry, which is already correlated to the Song of Moses as a witness in its narrative framework (Deut 31:17–22), to the analogous features of Isa 40–48.

Several interpreters have noted the strangeness in Israel's being called to witness not unto or for the sake of others but, "to the end that *you* (pl.) may know and believe *me*, and understand that *I am He*: Before me no god was formed, and after me none shall exist (Isa 43:10)."[82] The peculiarity of this witness' intended outcome harmonizes with the narrative framework of the Song of Moses (as a witness *against* Israel).[83] It should not surprise the reader, then, to find the greatest density of lexical similarities and allusions to the Song of Moses precisely at this call to witness in Isa 43–44, which I argue can be read as an actualizing of the witness in the prophetic present, harnessing it in defense against the claims of divine neglect and abandonment. In Isa 43 Israel is called to witness that Yahweh and "no strange deity," is God.[84] The phrase "when there was no strange god among you," in 43:12 which immediately precedes the declaration, "and you are my witnesses," has strong conceptual links to Deut 32:12's, "Yahweh alone guided him; no foreign god was with him."

It has long been noted that the use of Jeshurun as a title for Israel is limited to this passage and Deut 32-33.[85] However, I have seen no reading that takes account of the intertextual

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[82] For instance, Risto Nurmela: "One would expect those who shall understand to be the nations, whom v. 10b would address in the third person plural: "so that *they* may know and believe me and understand that I am he." However, as has been recognized, in the absence of textual critical evidence the second person forms should be retained and the text interpreted so that it is Israel who is to know and believe." Nurmela, *The Mouth of the Lord Has Spoken*, 30.

[83] The presentation of the Song as a witness against Israel is in response to Israel's foretold apostasy to foreign gods. The function of the song as presented by the narrative framework is something like preemptive theodicy. The close reader of Isa 40–48 will note thematic overlap in the progression of relational alienation (literal communication breakdown - a speaking past one another) in Deut 31:16–21:

(1) **Israel's idolatry (31:16)***:* …this people will begin to prostitute itself to the foreign gods in its midst (בְּקִרְבּוֹ) …he will forsake me **(**וְעֲזָבַנִי**)** breaking my covenant that I have made with him.

(2) **Yawheh's response – withdrawal and implications (31:17a)***:* My anger will be kindled against him in that day. I will forsake them and hide my face from them (וְעָזַבְתִּים וְהִסְתַּרְתִּי פָנַי מֵהֶם); he will become easy prey, and many terrible troubles רָעוֹת רַבּוֹת)) will come upon him.

(3) **Israel's response, a tragic monologue (31:17b)***:* In that day (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא) he will say, 'Have not these troubles come upon me because my god(s) is/are not in my midst?'

(הֲלֹא עַל כִּי־אֵין אֱלֹהַי בְּקִרְבִּי) **(4) Yahweh's rejoinder (31:18):** Then/So I will surely hide my face (הַסְתֵּר אַסְתִּיר פָּנַי) in that day (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא) because (עַל כָּל) of all the evil he has done in turning to other gods (פָּנָה אֶל־אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים).

[84] This fact is not sufficiently taken into consideration when translators reposition the MT's וַאֲנִי־אֵל from the end of 43:12 to the beginning of 43:13. This presentation is linked rhetorically to the use of trial language and imagery in the Song of Moses. As Tina Dykesteen Nilsen has pointed out, though both the Song of Moses and Isaiah 40–55 utilize the *rib* (lawsuit imagery), "which casts YHWH as prosecutor and judge, with idolatry as accusation…the real underlying issue [in both] is a defense of Yahwism in the face of rivalling religion." Nilsen, *The Origins of Deuteronomy 32*, 142.

[85] The Samaritan Pentateuch and LXX include the name Jacob in parallel with Jeshurun at Deut 32:15, which the NRSV follows: "Jacob ate his fill; Jeshurun grew fat…" See textual apparatus.

resonances that continue on in Isaiah here, becoming more explicit at the summons or reminder that Israel is Yahweh's witness. The use of אֱלֹהַ is rare and, outside of Deut 32, it is found collocated with צור only at Ps. 18. However, unlike Ps 18, both Isaiah and Deut 32 continue on with negative particles followed by perfect forms of ידע in contexts of dispute over allegiances to other dieties.[86] As Israelite claims regarding divine abandonment are at the heart of both Isaiah 40–48 and Song of Moses in its narrative framework (see Deut 31:17), the prophetic allusion plays upon the intertext of Jeshurun abandoning his deity (וַיִּטֹּשׁ אֱלוֹהַ עָשָׂהוּ), with biting irony (as if to say something like): "Are you aware of any other deities (that would justify your abandoning me)? Or any other rock (that you would so despise the 'Rock of your rescue')?"[87]

So, when in Isa 44:8 Jacob is again declared Yahweh's witness we see the following: A hearkening back to a former declaration which links Jacob-Israel as witness, and then a clear interrogative regarding the content of the witness: "Is there any god besides me? And Is there any rock? None have I known."[88]

Isaiah 44:8	Isaiah 44:2; 8	Deut 32:15; 17	Deut 32:15; 17
[2] This is what the LORD says-- he who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you: Do not be afraid, Jacob, my servant, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. [8] Do not fear, or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it?: You are my witnesses! Is there any god besides me? There is no other rock; I know not one.	[2]כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה עֹשֶׂךָ וְיֹצָרְךָ מִבֶּטֶן יַעְזְרֶךָּ אַל־תִּירָא עַבְדִּי יַעֲקֹב וישֻׁרוּן בָּחַרְתִּי בּוֹ:... [8] אַל־תִּפְחֲדוּ וְאַל־תִּרָהוּ הֲלֹא מֵאָז הִשְׁמַעְתִּיךָ וְהִגַּדְתִּי וְאַתֶּם עֵדָי מִבַּלְעָדַי הֲיֵשׁ אֱלוֹהַ בַּל־יָדָעְתִּי וְאֵין צוּר	[15]וַיִּשְׁמַן יְשֻׁרוּן וַיִּבְעָט וַיִּטֹּשׁ אֱלוֹהַ עָשָׂהוּ... וַיְנַבֵּל צוּר יְשׁוּעָתוֹ: [17] יִזְבְּחוּ לַשֵּׁדִים לֹא אֱלֹהַּ אֱלֹהִים לֹא יְדָעוּם …	[15] Jeshurun grew fat and kicked… He abandoned the God who made him and rejected the Rock of his Salvation. [17] They sacrificed to false gods, which are not God-- gods they had not known…

[86] I follow T. Muraoka in doubting CF. Whitley's taking of בַּל to have positive force, even here in Isa 44:8. Waltke and O'Connor note that, at least as concerns its use with the jussive, בַּל can be used as equivalent to לֹא. Waltke and O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 567, n. 6.

[87] The pithy rendering is from Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary, Vol. 2 Prophets: Nevi'im* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019), 768

[88] The syntax is ambiguous. A case can be made for the וְאֵין צוּר to be rendered as indicative or interrogative. For the interrogative rendering see Alter, *The Hebrew Bible*, 768.

Something akin to metalepsis may be at play in 43:13's alluding to sections of Deut. 32:39, while omitting others. In the following I juxtapose the two texts. The underlined portion of which is what I suggest is being omitted in Isaiah:

Isaiah 43:13	Deut 32:39
Also henceforth [גַּם־מִיּוֹם] **I am He** _____ **there is no one who can deliver from my hand**; I work and who can hinder it?	<u>See now that</u> [רְאוּ עַתָּה כִּי] **I, even I, am he**; <u>there is no god besides me.</u> <u>I kill and I make alive;</u> <u>I wound and I heal; and</u> [וְאֵין אֱלֹהִים עִמָּדִי אֲנִי אָמִית וַאֲחַיֶּה מָחַצְתִּי וַאֲנִי אֶרְפָּא] **no one can deliver from my hand**.

In this reading the altered and omitted is, "as critically salient and instructive as that which it includes via variant, imitation, and modulation," to quote G. Steiner.[89] In other words we can envision the overtly alluded material bookending the omitted as a kind of "hearing test," to draw Israel further on to the implications of the induced witnessing. That is, no other deity has the power to heal and revivify Israel from the condition portrayed in 42:19–24 (as blind and deaf, languishing in pits and hidden in prisons with "none to deliver," – the exact phrase is also used in Isa 42 alongside other language reminiscent of Deut 29–32).[90] Similarly, the "רְאוּ עַתָּה" from Deut 32:39 accentuates the irony of Israel posited as blind witness as it echoes into the Isaianic discourse.[91] Thus, in this reading of Isaiah's imaginative "present," exilic Israel is called upon to paradoxically and miraculously, in spite of its construal as deaf, hear these refrains from *Ha'azinu,* the Song of Moses, and respond by assenting to the song's theodicy.[92] The question

[89]George Steiner, *Real Presences: Is There Anything in What We Say?* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), 13.

[90] Again, in Isa 41-42 we find evocate echoes to texts in Duet 29-32 which may be presented as paradoxically pricking up the ears of an Israel construed as deaf.

[91] A similar ironic imperative is already found at 42:18: "Hear, you deaf! And you blind, look, that you may see."

[92] I find the presentation of Israel as deaf and blind and, yet called upon to hear and take up the witness of the song, especially provocative in light of research being done on the relationship between music and cognitive science/disability studies. It seems that in patients with advanced dementia, even when spoken language skills degenerate, musical memory is often still preserved in some form. For instance, some musical therapy sessions appear to cause what Dr. Oliver Sacks and others have referred to as 'awakenings'. In studies conducted on the correlation of music and memory in dementia patients Sacks describes the reaction of a patient, "normally mute and unable to answer the simplest yes or no questions" suddenly quite articulate and voluble upon hearing music known and loved in his youth, "…in some sense restored to himself…he has remembered who he is and has reacquired his identity for awhile." *Alive Inside: A Story of Music and Memory*, directed by Michael Rossato-Bennett and Alexandra

remains, of course, is there a *Tolle Cane* moment in the textual world of Isaiah 40–48, in which Jacob-Israel takes the tune upon its own lips?

Before this question can be clarified, however, we must answer another related question: How might the Song of Moses be brought to bear on issues related to Yahweh's justice in "doing right" by exilic Israel in this forensic context? In Isa 43:13 Yahweh declares, "I shall work" (אֶפְעַל), which echoes the hypothetical provocation of Israel's enemy voiced in Deut 32:27: "Our hand is triumphant, *it was not the LORD who did all this*" (וְלֹא יְהוָה פָּעַל כָּל־זֹאת). Similarly, the poetic parallel in 43:13 "and who will hinder it/*turn it back*?" (וּמִי יְשִׁיבֶנָּה) picks up and plays on the concluding promise of Deut 32:43 that "he will pay back vengeance to those who hate him" (וְנָקָם יָשִׁיב לְצָרָיו). It is not at all surprising, then, that the next unit of prophecy in Isa 43:14 moves to the first overt reference of Babylon's downfall. This retribution, which I suggest being read as prophetically portrayed in relation to the Song of Moses, builds on the shadowy figure of a warrior from the North–East who is presented as the embodiment of YHWH's צֶדֶק in the forensic context of chapters 40–42 (itself central to YHWH's extended defense against Israel's charge).[93] Thus, through an argument of increment and accretion replete with allusion and word plays to Deut 32 this figure will finally burst onto the stage (or page) at Isa 44:24–45:13 in the Persian Emperor, Cyrus. Many of these threads come together in Isaiah 45:13:

Isaiah 45:13	Deut 32:4
13 אָנֹכִי הֵעִירֹתִהוּ (Cyrus) בְצֶדֶק וְכָל־דְּרָכָיו אְיַשֵּׁר הוּא־יִבְנֶה עִירִי וְגָלוּתַי יְשַׁלַּח לֹא בִמְחִיר וְלֹא בְשֹׁחַד אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת:	4 הַצּוּר תָּמִים פָּעֳלוֹ כִּי כָל־דְּרָכָיו מִשְׁפָּט אֵל אֱמוּנָה וְאֵין עָוֶל צַדִּיק וְיָשָׁר הוּא:
13 I have aroused him (Cyrus) in *righteousness*, and I will make **all his ways** *straight*; he shall	The Rock, his work is perfect, and **all his ways** are just.

McDougald (MVD Entertainment Group, 2017). It is clear that Israel is being likened to one with both sensory disabilities. However, there is more: given the many systematic juxtapositions in Isa 40–48 of YHWH with idol-fabricators and, hence, Israel to the icons or idols – Israel would in this Mesopotamian context be likened to a damaged icon taken captive in war. Often in such cases of icons in captivity the enemies would vandalize the eyes and mouth of the divinely represented, rendering them ineffective or obsolete, at least until a ceremony such as the mīs-pî could cultically renovate them. Is the Song of Moses, in a sense, being prophetically "sung" to Israel to catalyze such an awakening and restoration of identity – over against divine representation as construed in the Babylonian cult? Many thanks to Faith Walkwell and Simon Wheeler at the Alzheimer's Society for their e-mails and conversation related to music and memory loss.

[93] Leclerc has shown how the words *ṣedeq* and *ṣĕdāqâ* are used in a salvific sense in Isaiah 40–55 to mean something closer to "deliverance" or "victory" over against the textbook definition of "righteousness." Thomas L. Leclerc, *Yahweh Is Exalted in Justice: Solidarity and Conflict in Isaiah.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 120.

build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward, says the LORD of hosts.	A faithful God, without deceit, *just* and *upright* is he

In the intertextual interplay we return here to the fundamental argument: the justice of God's ways over against Israel's claim in Isa 40:27 that Yahweh was neglecting "my justice" מִשְׁפָּטִי. Where as in 40:27 Israel claims that "my way is hidden from YHWH (נִסְתָּרָה דַרְכִּי מֵיְהוָה)," the defensive argument at Isa 43:13 responds, filling out the meaning of God's justice in Deut 32, retaining its terms yet extending its sense and applying it specifically to the deliverance of the exiles through Cyrus. It is to this argument, and its linkages back to Isaiah 43–44's call to witness, that we hear exilic Israel respond in Isaiah 45:15.

Does this case resolve in the lamenting exilic community dropping its charges against YHWH? Can YHWH "get a witness"? If Isaiah 45:15 constitutes the anticipated speech of the witness, what is the character and meaning of this confession? "Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior." This this "truly" is better rendered here by "yet" or, "but, in actual fact". The disjunctive character of אכן has been noted by Samuel Balentine in this context.[94] We may hear this response, thus, not only as perplexed response to the immediate context of prophetically presented deliverance via Cyrus and the following type scene of the Egypt, Cush, and Sabeans (nations also mentioned in Isa 43:3-4) bowing down in homage to the exiles. Rather, the אכן might be read as an eruption of "but, in fact" to the whole rhetoric of persuasion – in something like the "we interrupt this program" television trope. This is a plot twist. Yet, one in which Israel has not lost the plot. It has indeed heard and understood the subtext and serves up its witness accordingly. It takes up the Song of Moses precisely at the point where the prophetic allusion trails off in Isa 44:8. There the implication was that Israel had abandoned its deity, despising its "rock of salvation." So, here, the אָכֵן אַתָּה אֵל מִסְתַּתֵּר אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹשִׁיעַ can be read as Israel serving back up the divine words of Deut 32:20, "He said: I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end will be (וַיֹּאמֶר אַסְתִּירָה פָנַי מֵהֶם אֶרְאֶה מָּה אַחֲרִיתָם), for they are …children in whom there is no faithfulness."[95] Israel, in this reading, seems to maintain its originating charge of Isa 40:27.

[94] Though, the אכן can just as easily be interpreted with biting irony as "truly" against the announcement of divine hiddenness in Deut 31-32. See Excurses 1 on אכן.

[95] The charge in Deut 32:20b–21 significantly problematizes Richard E. Friedman employment of the phrase "I shall hide my face from them. I shall see what their end will be." He takes this verse in isolation from its immediate context and asks it to do rather heavy lifting to positively ground the deity's granting "these independence-seeking

The implication of the participle in this reading might be: "but in fact" you are a deity *not only* momentarily hidden, but who *goes on hiding*. In other words, the assertion is not that Yahweh is אֵל אֱמוּנָה וְצַדִּיק (Deut 32:4), a trustworthy and righteous God (see above), but contrastively, one who is now characterized by hiding אֵל מִסְתַּתֵּר. This answers ironically to the prophetic rhetorical questions that preempt Israel's originating charge: "To whom or what will you liken God?" Despite the argument thus far, that Yahweh is making Israel's rescue and deliverance abundantly clear, the addressee cannot *see it*. In this sense, the argument concerning Yahweh's justice as previously prophetically presented is rebuffed and further impugned. The participle מִסְתַּתֵּר is ironically paralleled with מוֹשִׁיעַ over against the self-presentation of YHWH in the call of Israel to witness in Isaiah 43:11:

Isa 43:11: אָנֹכִי אָנֹכִי יְהוָה וְאֵין מִבַּלְעָדַי מוֹשִׁיעַ

(I, I am **Yahweh**, and besides me there is no **savior**)

Isa 45:15: אָכֵן אַתָּה אֵל מִסְתַּתֵּר אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹשִׁיעַ

("But [in fact] you are **a deity who hides himself**, God of Israel, **savior**").

In other words, the witness is at best incredulous and ambivalent: if this is the form of your salvation, it merely constitutes a continuation of your self-concealment.

The converging points in the above reading are even more suggestive if we keep in mind the place of the nations in Isa 43:4, the nations' confession at Isa 45:14, and the centrality of the foreign potentate, Cyrus, in the entirety of the prophetic response to Israel's originating charge against their deity (see above). All of this is in play alongside the notes which sound from the very next verse in Deut 32:21:

הֵם קִנְאֻנִי בְלֹא־אֵל כִּעֲסֻנִי בְּהַבְלֵיהֶם

They made me jealous with a "no-god"

They provoked me to anger me with their ephemera

וַאֲנִי אַקְנִיאֵם בְּלֹא־עָם בְּגוֹי נָבָל אַכְעִיסֵם

So I shall make them jealous with a "non-nation"

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humans a chance to direct their own world, and that God will take an interest in seeing how they do." This stretches beyond what the context of the Song of Moses can sustain. That God's hiding his face is a response to Isarel's idolatry is clear from the immediately following verse (Deut 32:21). See Friedman, *The Hidden Face of God*, 266ff. Friedman also neglects the use of אחריתם at Deut 32:29: "If they were wise, they would understand this; they would discern what *their end* would be."

With a foolish people I will provoke them to anger

I have suggested that we imagine Israel discerning the elements of the Song of Moses which are intended to lead them to rescind their charge in light of the proposed theodicy. Their interjection specifically at this point, in the wake of the Cyrus oracle and nations' words in v.14, serves up a witness in which the most painful chord of the Song of Moses has been struck.

How does this reading connect with what immediately follows in Isa 45:16–17? I submit that we read 45:16–17 as the prophet's rejoinder to the unanticipated nature of Israel's witness. He is drawn into dispute. He circles back, correlating the fate of idol-fabricators in v. 16 to the type scene of v. 14. Similarly, vs. 17 corresponds directly to Israel's confession in vs. 15. In something like a grasping to get the last word (intertextually), the vs. 17 as rejoinder could allude to the last line of poetry from Deut 33:29.

Isaiah 45:17	Deut 33:29
יִשְׂרָאֵל֙ נוֹשַׁ֣ע בַּיהוָ֔ה תְּשׁוּעַ֖ת עוֹלָמִ֑ים	אַשְׁרֶ֙יךָ֙ יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל מִ֥י כָמ֖וֹךָ עַ֣ם נוֹשַׁ֣ע בַּיהוָ֑ה

In regards to the phrase נוֹשַׁע בַּיהוָה, which is found nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible, Benjamin Sommer has noted that both Isaiah 45:14-17 and Deut 33:29, "share the theme of foreigners who humble themselves before Israel." Sommer argues against the incredulous would-be reader, that, "Deutero-Isaiah does allude specifically to Deuteronomy." He continues, "Deutero-Isaiah composes a prophecy on the basis of a text that is not, strictly speaking, an oracle. The promise of Deuteronomy 33 does not refer to any particular situation, but the prediction in Isaiah 45 pertains to a specific historical moment." [96]

Lastly, Isaiah 45:15's glaring omission of the divine name or any witness to YHWH's justice or rightness in vindicating Israel is countered in Isa 45:18–25. This can be seen most forcefully in 45:21, keeping in mind the discourse as developed up until this point:

הֲלֹ֣וא אֲנִ֣י יְהוָ֔ה וְאֵ֥ין־עֹ֖וד אֱלֹהִ֣ים מִבַּלְעָדָ֑י אֵ֣ל־צַדִּ֔יק וּמוֹשִׁ֖יעַ אֵ֥ין זוּלָתִֽי׃

I am suggesting that this interrogative in the trial scene links back to Israel's witness in 45:15. Here I think Balentine is absolutely correct in underscoring the interplay and antiphony of "I AM" and "You are". The very real and present danger, that Israel sees itself as something of a free agent regarding the god-market, also becomes increasingly clear in this section. This, I argue, is the force of YHWH's rebuttal to Israel in 45:19. To begin with, that the address mentions "the

[96] Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 137.

seed of Jacob"[97] in the same context as "speaking in secret," partially strengthens the case for exilic Israel as the speaker of 45:15. Furthermore, all of these references: speaking in secret, in a place of darkened earth, "chaos - seek me" can be understood as references to cult practices in Babylon.[98]

At this point in the discourse I see no substantial reason for a shift in the imagery as other than courtroom. Though there are important scene shifts to idol fabricators immediately following the call to witness in 44:8 (which might be understood as analogous to the exhibiting of evidence), all of this can still be linked to the address to Jacob-Israel, with Isa 45:18–25 a natural bookend to it. In this the Cyrus oracle can be understood as the apex of Yahweh's defense. Thus, we can imagine Israel's witness at 45:15 as the primary exilic audience intervening at this point.

Whether or not Isa 45:15 read thus, as the exilic audience's interjection/witness, should be read in light of Isa 42–43's construal of a blind and deaf witness is a further, and admittedly thorny question.[99] Sustaining this overarching metaphor in one's reading strategy over against the iconographic and historical background on the impaired sensory organs of the images in times of war, which we reviewed in chapter two, would be provocative in multiple ways. In fact, it would be tragically ironic to imagine, even metaphorically, a blind and deaf witness bitterly addressing the "overwhelming speech" of the divine defendant with the claim, "but, in actual fact, you are a god who hides himself, God of Israel, 'savior'." Yet, as I argued in chapter two such an ad absurdum construal may be native to the wider context of biting sarcasm inherent in the

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[97] This may actually relate to an aspect of exilic Israel's charge being that these are now the children of the generation exiled, second-generation Israelites, perhaps not even properly called "exiles" at this juncture. This may also be read fruitfully in connection with the use of the participle מַסְתִּתֵר.

[98] See Lenzi, *Secrecy and the Gods*, 170–72 (for secrecy labels and their use in the Mīs pî); 264–266 (for Lenzi's understanding of 45:19 referring to polemicizing against Babylonian deities). I am persuaded along similar lines as Lenzi that 45:19 is "intentionally vague to address the multiple theological problems Second Isaiah perceived among his audience, though the last option (the dispute about the hidden god) is probably the most contextually (literarily speaking) relevant understanding." 264, fn. 192. We will return to this in chapter 6.

[99] From a "world of the text" viewpoint the construal is provocative in a way organic to the Deuteronomic and DI logic and imagery of the impaired sensorium that I have been alluding to here. From a "world in the wake of the text" viewpoint, however, the construal of a blind Israel, especially within a readerly hermeneutic, needs careful handling, not least when the reader is situated in a Protestant reading tradition, as I am. A motif such as "blind witness, Israel," taken out of this discrete literary and poetic context, could be misunderstood as being indebted or contributing to the wider Christian imaginative framework of objectifying the nation of Israel or the Jewish people in ways that can have, have had ,and do still have tragic consequences. One example of this would be the well-known medieval Christian architectural motif of "Ecclesia et Synagoga," in which the Jewish people is personified as a veiled female figure contrasted with the sighted, and triumphant, church. My intent, and readerly interests, move in a very different direction. Though themes of obduracy and the veiling of the covenant community are organic to both testaments of Christian scripture, and especially to the book called Isaiah, I am awake to the possibility of irresponsible reading.

overarching idol-parody of which this pericope is part and parcel. As has been shown in one of the courtroom exhibits, the idol fabricator himself sets in motion the process of blindness and increasing inability to discern (Isa 44:18). In other words, that which the covenant community knows it denies and the denial process results in blindness. This is actually suggested already in the progression at Isa 42:16–19. Reflecting on the reading from this angle, there may be something tragically ironic afoot. Rowan Williams illuminates the dialogical nature of tragedy in our "always already involved relational contexts," as having to do with the, "failure to acknowledge what we know and the consequences of that," or in Stanley Cavell's formulation, in one's not yielding to what they know.[100]

[100] Rowan Williams, *The Tragic Imagination*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 31.

Excursus 2: Further Resonances between Isa 40–48 and Deut 32

The intertextual reading of chapter four imagines the exilic addressees being called upon to serve up a specific witness in an ironic fashion (since the originating claim of divine negligence or hiddenness is their own). The following juxtaposition of passages from Isa 40–45 and Deut 32 serve to fill out this reading with further resonances.

The sonorous stanza that begins in Isa 40:1 can be read as a riff on the close of the Song of Moses:

Isaiah 40:1
נַחֲמוּ נַחֲמוּ עַמִּי יֹאמַר אֱלֹהֵיכֶם׃ Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.[2] Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD's hand (מִיַּד יְהוָה) double for all her sins. (Isa 40:1-2 NRS)
Deut. 32:36
וְעַל־עֲבָדָיו יִתְנֶחָם כִּי־יָדִין יְהוָה עַמּוֹ [36] כִּי יִרְאֶה כִי־אָזְלַת יָד וְאֶפֶס עָצוּר וְעָזוּב׃ [36] Indeed the LORD will vindicate his people, have compassion on his servants, when he sees that their power is gone, neither bond nor free remaining.[101]

In addition to highlighted lexical correspondences it is also noteworthy that the whole of Isa 40–48 argues that Yahweh is vindicating his people. That this vindication and compassion is, according to Deut 32:36, to be accomplished "when he sees that their power is gone" (אָזְלַת יָד) resonates with Yahweh offering strength to the weary in Isa 40:28–31 and their situation as reflected in the originating charge.[102] The fact that Deut 32:36 parallels "his people" with "his servants" is also meaningful in light of Isa 40–48's emphasis on Israel-Jacob as servant.

[101] This line, admittedly, also appears in Psalm 135:14.

[102] Note also the possibility that when the question is posed at Isa 40:28, just after Israel's charge: "do you not know? have you not heard? Yahweh is the everlasting God" (יְהוָה וֵאלֹהֵי עוֹלָם) the reader can imagine one possible response as: "well, yes, we know of Yahweh's oath in Deut 32:40: אָנֹכִי לְעֹלָם חָי וְאָמַרְתִּי.

In chapter one I presented Isa 40–48 as theophanic. In the proposed reading of this last chapter Isa 40:9's "behold your God" can be interpreted as answering Deut 32:37:

Isaiah 40:9
הִנֵּה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם׃
Deut. 32:37
וְאָמַר אַי אֱלֹהֵימוֹ צ֥וּר חָסָיוּ בּוֹ׃[37]

The interrogation that begins at Deut 32:37 suits the entire context of Isa 40–48's parody of the idols.[103]

I have compared Isa 45:13 with Deut 32:4 above and related them to Israel's originating charge. As it is central to the argument I include the parallel of Isa 40:27 and Deut 32:3–4:

Isaiah 40:27
[27] לָמָּה תֹאמַר יַעֲקֹב וּתְדַבֵּר יִשְׂרָאֵל נִסְתְּרָה דַרְכִּי מֵיְהוָה וּמֵאֱלֹהַי מִשְׁפָּטִי יַעֲבֽוֹר׃ [27] Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my justice is disregarded by my God"?
Deut. 32:3-4
[3] אִקְרָא הָבוּ גֹדֶל לֵאלֹהֵינוּ כִּי שֵׁם יְהוָה׃ [4] הַצּוּר תָּמִים פָּעֳלוֹ כִּי כָל־דְּרָכָיו מִשְׁפָּט אֵל אֱמוּנָה וְאֵין עָוֶל צַדִּיק וְיָשָׁר הוּא׃ [3]For I will proclaim the name of the LORD; ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock, his work is perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God, without deceit, *just* and *upright* is he

In Isa 42:13 which, following an imperative to "sing to the LORD *a new song*", we find the the striking phrase יָעִיר קִנְאָה "he shall arouse his zeal/jealousy" I suggest that this can be read as a reworking of the metaphor of an כְּנֶשֶׁר יָעִיר קִנּוֹ "like an eagle that stirs up its nest" from the

[103] 1QIsa[a] and the LXX specify יְהוָה as the speaker at Deut 32:27ff. Note also, that the lexeme סתר is found at Deut 32:38, in this context of heightened disputation: "let them be about you a cover/protection" יְהִי עֲלֵיכֶם סִתְרָה . This fits well with the possible notes of tragic irony in the above presented reading of Isa 45:15.

Song of Moses (Deut 32:11). The phrase as deployed in Isaiah is further fused to a refashioning of Exodus 15's singular "man of war" to "man of wars": כְּאִישׁ מִלְחָמוֹת יָעִיר קִנְאָה so the whole reads: "like a man of war(s) he shall arouse his zeal." Previous uses of this verb in the *hiphil* which appear at the launch of the legal drama (41:2; 41:25) referred to God's activity in stirring up a victor from the North-East. The combined rhetorical effect of all this is to suggest that this unknown agent is to be interpreted as the LORD's warring on behalf of his beleaguered children. Read sequentially with Isa 45:13 this works to inform the reading of v. 15 as well.

This possible play on the avian imagery mentioned above may relate back to the following lexical similarities, which are frequently cited in the literature:[104]

Isaiah 40:31
וְקוֵ֣י יְהוָ֔ה יַחֲלִ֖יפוּ כֹּ֑חַ יַעֲל֤וּ אֵ֙בֶר֙ כַּנְּשָׁרִ֔ים[31] יָרֻ֥וצוּ וְלֹ֖א יִיגָ֑עוּ יֵ֣לְכ֔וּ וְלֹ֖א יִיעָֽפוּ׃
Deut. 32:11
כְּנָ֤שֶׁר יָעִיר֙ קִנּ֔וֹ עַל־גּוֹזָלָ֖יו יְרַחֵ֑ף[11] יִפְרֹ֣שׂ כְּנָפָ֗יו יִקָּחֵ֙הוּ֙ יִשָּׂאֵ֣הוּ עַל־אֶבְרָתֽוֹ׃

Isa 42:16:

אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים עֲשִׂיתִם וְלֹא עֲזַבְתִּים

Though the purpose of this statement must be interpreted in connection to the preceding promises of Yahweh in the poetry, there are several factors that contribute to לֹא עֲזַבְתִּים hearkening back to Deut 31:17:

וְחָרָה אַפִּי בוֹ בַיּוֹם־הַהוּא וַעֲזַבְתִּים וְהַסְתַּרְתִּי פָנַי מֵהֶם וְהָיָה לֶאֱכֹל וּמְצָאֻהוּ רָעוֹת רַבּוֹת וְצָרוֹת[17]
וְאָמַר בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא הֲלֹא עַל כִּי־אֵין אֱלֹהַי בְּקִרְבִּי מְצָאוּנִי הָרָעוֹת הָאֵלֶּה[105]

[104] Tina Dykesteen Nilsen, *The Origins of Deuteronomy 32*, 75–76. Nilsen calls attention to the more immediate correspondence between Exod 19:4 and Deut 32:11. However, it is possible that, as Blenkinsopp has observed of redemption language specifically, other Exodus motifs appear in Isa 40–55 mediated through Deuteronomic usage. See Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 111.

[105] It is striking that we find purported speech of idol worshipers to their idols in the next verse of Isa 42:17. This is in contrast to those, in 42:16, who Yahweh promises to lead through darkness: "But those who trust in an idol, who say to a cast image, 'You are our gods,' will be turned back in utter shame" (Isa 42:17). The imperative outburst that follows at 42:18 ties perception/blindness to the preceding statement about those who relate to images as deity. "Who is blind but my servant," then, associates Israel and Jacob's inability to perceive the relation of idolatry to their present state.

In the passage above רָעוֹת רַבּוֹת is highlighted to call attention to a further correspondence with this section of Isa 42, this time at v. 20. I suggest the possibility of intertextual paranomasia for the *Qere* at the beginning of this verse:

20 רָאֹות רַבּוֹת וְלֹא תִשְׁמֹר פָּקוֹחַ אָזְנַיִם וְלֹא יִשְׁמָע׃

Thus, the "seeing many things" can be understood as a riffing on the "much evil" (many disasters) in Deut 31:17 (c.f. רָעוֹת at Deut 32:23), which Israel should have understood and responded to. That Isa 42:22–25 goes on to describe the captivity and plunder of the nation in language allusive to Deut 29–32 helps support this suggestion.

From the midst of a dizzying array of lexical and thematic correspondences between these two texts I have chosen this limited representative sampling to help furnish a bit of background and further inform the suggested reading of Isa 45:15 as the witness of exilic Israel. I am sober to the reality that this is *a reading*, aspects of which will, no doubt, be deemed more convincing than others. The imaginative upshot of this intertextual reading, however, is hermeneutically illuminating. For, it was my attempt to do justice to reading Isa 45:15 from the discrete perspective of the exiles which lead to the intertextual reading strategy (and not vice versa). In other words a readerly decision to "try on" or "attempt to try on" the confession from this perspective had the influence of shifting my perspective of the entire discourse.

5. The Voice of the Prophet or Glossator

This chapter evaluates the voicings of Isa 45:15 as prophetic apostrophe. In the introduction we established the confession as a turning to the deity, if following the MT without emendation. This chapter thus explores the interpretation of Isa 45:15 as a gloss or interpolation. After briefly considering the interpretation of v. 15 as the voice of the prophet in the history of interpretation, we will evaluate the interpretive moves of two representative modern Christian interpreters: Claus Westermann's "Amen Gloss" and Wim Beuken's "prophetic reflection".

Ironically, the prophet is more sublimated and anonymous than either the nations or the exilic community. We do not know with certainty from whence he speaks (Zion or Babylon). We do not know whether to read the text as if the prophet is one unified voice or perhaps a company of scribes working in the tradition of the prophet. Even putting aside conjectural issues of authorship and formation, the reader finds a tendency towards conflation of the prophetic voice into the overpowering address of Yahweh. There is only sporadic exclamation or interjections in the first person throughout Isa 40–48. Yet, the identity of the speaker at these junctures is, in no way, straightforward. As with Isa 45:15, one could argue for exilic Israel, or, indeed, the prophet, as speaker. However, in evaluating readings which voice v. 15 as apostrophic (whether prophetic or later reader/glossator), the anonymity of the prophet in illuminating the hiddenness of the speaker becomes a significant interpretive factor.[1]

5.1 Preliminary Textual and Contextual Factors

Jerome's *Commentary on Isaiah*, written between 408-410 CE, is witness to the antiquity of textual ambiguity and subsequent interpretive differences regarding the identity of the speaker in Isaiah 45:15. Often celebrated for his having learned from "the Hebrews,"[2] Jerome here evidences a more fundamental, and irascible, ambivalence towards Jewish interpretation of the scriptures:

> "By a foolish claim, the Hebrews endeavor to maintain that the words down to that passage where it is read, *Only in you is God, and there is no God besides you*, are

[1] For more on the theory of lyric, the privileging of the apostrophic, the orphaned voice in lyric, and the incantatory nature of lyric, see F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry*, 195.

[2] In a comment on Isaiah 5:7 Jerome states, "We want to introduce Latin ears to what we have learned from the Hebrews." Jerome. *Commentary on Isaiah: Including St. Jerome's translation of Origen's Homilies 1-9 on Isaiah*. Ancient Christian Writers, no. 68. (New York: The Newman Press) 2015, 23. Elsewhere, in his epistle to the young monk, Rusticus, Jerome recounted how, in order to overcome his persistently evil thoughts and the temptations that besought him went to, "a brother who before his conversion had been a Jew and asked him to teach me Hebrew." Philip Schaff (ed.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Series 2. Volume 6. Jerome: The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, Epistle 125:12, Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library.

spoken either to Jerusalem or to Cyrus. But all of the sudden what follows becomes an apostrophe to the almighty God: *Truly you are a hidden God, the God of Israel, the Savior*. Yet it is clear even to fools that the words have a single context; a meaning that is linked together by the very progression and reasoning of the narrative cannot be divided."[3]

Jerome identifies one speaker (Egypt, the Ethiopians, and the Sabean nation), "the Hebrews" identify another (who, precisely, Jerome does not make clear). We do, however, find a prophetic apostrophe to God in Jewish interpretation, in Song of Songs Rabbah 4.8.3:[4]

וּמָה הָיוּ אוֹמְרִין (ישעיה מה, יד): אַךְ בָּךְ אֵל וְאֵין עוֹד אֶפֶס אֱלֹהִים. אָמַר יְשַׁעְיָה לִפְנֵי הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא, רִבּוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם (ישעיה מה, טו): אָכֵן אַתָּה אֵל מִסְתַּתֵּר, מַהוּ אָכֵן, אֵיכָן אַתָּה אֵל מִסְתַּתֵּר, אָכֵן יֵשׁ בְּךָ דִּינָמוֹס וְאַתָּה מִסְתַּתֵּר. אָמַר לוֹ (ישעיה מה, טו): אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹשִׁיעַ, חוֹזֵר אֲנִי וּמִתְנַקֵּם.	And what did they say? "Only in you is God and there is no other." Isaiah said before the *Qadosh Baruch Hue*, Master of the Universe: "Truly [*Achen*] you are a God who conceals yourself" What is the meaning of *Achen* (truly)? "Where (*Aychan*)[5] are you, God who conceals himself?, Surely there is in you power, yet you conceal yourself. He said to him: "the God of Israel, Savior/Deliverer, I shall return and be avenged."

In the above midrash Isaiah is clearly conveyed as the speaker of v. 15a. The shift from the speech of gentile nations to the prophet is also clear. Even more fascinating is the voicing of Isa 45:15b (interwoven with חוֹזֵר אֲנִי וּמִתְנַקֵּם) as the answer of the *Qadosh Baruch Hue* to Isaiah. It is interesting that precisely in a passage with inherent ambiguity of speaker the rabbis posit Isaiah as the speaker of v. 15.[6] What was abundantly clear to Jerome (and a host of fools!), was far more opaque to the rabbis and a litany of other interpreters down the ages. Martin Luther, for instance, interprets the addressee to be Cyrus until 45:15 at which point he states: "These are the words of

[3] Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 594.

[4] I assume no direct link between this midrash and the tradition Jerome is alluding to. The possibility exists, of course, for cross-over, especially as Song of Songs Rabbah is indebted to the Jerusalem Talmud.

[5] This may be a return to אֵיכָן as a *leitwort* of sorts, as *Song of Songs Rabbah* 4.8.1 which opens with a discussion of the Israelites seeing God in Ex 24:10.

[6] This is especially so in a document which "identifies neither its voice nor its anticipated audience" and in which, despite the general dialogical structure between God and Israel, it has been argued that "the anonymity of the whole is not to be overcome," Jacob Neusner. *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash: Volume Three Song of Songs Rabbah*, Vol. 3, (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001), xix.

the prophet…Now he is snatched into a trance of the Word of God, as if to say, "Dear God, how strangely you deal with us!"[7] Luther's description of 45:15 as prophetic ecstasy certainly demonstrates an apostrophic understanding of the confession. This apostrophic understanding provides the rationale for reviewing in this chapter not only the voice of the prophet, but also the possibility of v. 15 as the interpolation of a later reader, or redactor (inscripturated reader-response). Thus, we will begin with an analysis of the "Amen gloss" of Claus Westermann, already encountered briefly in chapter three, before moving on to the interpretation of Wim Beuken.

5.2. Representative Interpreters

5.2.1 Claus Westermann: The Voice of a Glossator

In the following analysis and evaluation I will engage the work of Claus Westermann, whose interpretation of Isaiah has been influential.[8] Westermann sees in Isa 45:15 aspects of communal lament being reflected in a proclamation of salvation.[9] After briefly discussing the background to Westermann's detached units theory for 45:14–17 I will review his somewhat idiosyncratic voicing of v. 15. I then seek to elucidate Westermann's understanding and semantics for such a "gloss," before attempting to evaluate the likelihood for such on textual-critical grounds. This will be followed by my own reflections on v. 15 as interpolation.

Isa 45:9–13

Westermann considers the rationale for reading 45:9–13 as addressed to the nations, before concluding that it is addressed rather to Israel, "who (in doubt) questions Yahweh about his actions towards his sons…through the instrumentality of Cyrus, which greatly offend his chosen people."[10] Thus, with many interpreters, the unit is seen as the prophet in dispute with his hearers. Westermann favors Elliger's argument that since at vv.9f there is much stylistic divergence from the rest of DI, "a genuine utterance of Deutero-Isaiah had been reshaped by a later editor (in his own view, Trito-Isaiah) who made it into a disputation countering the objections to the Cyrus oracle."[11] Though Westermann's interpretation is self-avowedly tentative,

[7] Luther, *Luther's Works Vol. 17, Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, (Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 131-132. His reading of v. 14 is contra the Christological interpretation of Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, IV, 38.
[8] Though very few take up his proposal, a great host argue against it. That is not nothing.
[9] Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 176.
[10] Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 165.
[11] Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 165–166.

his response to "textual disturbances" from 45:9–17 takes the form of various formation-oriented proposals.

Along similar lines Westermann concludes that, "after repeated examination," there are no strong indications that suggest reading Isa 45:14–17 as one single unit. From both form and content he finds it impossible to connect the verses in any meaningful way. He posits them rather as "a combination of fragments" that should be interpreted independent of one another. To begin with Westermann sees v. 14 as a fragment which is out of context in Isa 40–48, and likely a Trito-Isaianic interpolation:

> …the description given here perfectly accords with that state of well-being in Isa. 60, where the nations and their treasures come to Zion to be Israel's servants in her new state of well-being, and to pay homage to her God…Even the words, 'in chains', which editors find difficult and which are deleted out of hand, have their counterpart in Isa 60:14…[12]

Isa 45:15

Westermann sees in previous emendations to the text at v. 15 an attempt to create a more direct link to v. 14. This, to his mind, only strengthens the case for v. 15 as an independent and disconnected unit. In contradistinction to the disputative response at 45:9–13, v. 15 is far more positive: "a reaction to the Cyrus oracle…of an entirely different kind. Here this unprecedented act of God is given a favourable reception: the writer bows down in astonishment at it."

Regarding the meaning of "hiddenness" in relation to the act of God via Cyrus to deliver Israel, Westermann goes even further than declaring it an awe-struck response. He traces out a longe-range theological trajectory concerning how the God of Israel will henceforth, from the time of Cyrus, relate to Israel and the world:

> The action of Israel's God on behalf of his people by means of a pagan monarch, as now announced by Deutero-Isaiah, represents a breakthrough, leading to a change in the mode of his action…The breakthrough meant the end of that era in the divine action during which God's activity in history had been discernable, when he was openly on his chosen people's side in their wars and smote their enemies. Deutero-Isaiah's Cyrus oracle terminated this for ever. Henceforward God's action in history is a hidden one. But one further thing needs to be said. There is one place at which the God who hides

[12] See chapter 3. W. Beuken also entertains the likelihood of this proposal.

> himself is revealed – the place where he becomes his chosen people's savior. This is here indicated in the predication with which the verse ends, 'God of Israel, a helper (or, a savior)'"[13]

Here we see a universalizing of God's hiddenness in human history. There appears to be no explanation or explication from the text of Deutero-Isaiah for this move. Neither does he develop or specify what he means by the hidden God being revealed "where he becomes his chosen people's savior." However, in arguing for an "end of an era" that begins with Cyrus and then opens up again in God becoming savior the reading appears to be something like a Christological wink.

The 'Amen Gloss' (or, 'אָבֵן gloss')

Westermann presents two possibilities for this fragment-as-inserted: it is either the prophet himself or it comes,

> from some reader of the Cyrus oracle who wanted to confront the disbelief challenged in vv. 9–13 with an utterance of faith. However it may be, it is a word after the prophet's own heart; it shows real understanding of Deutero-Isaiah's proclamation. If it is a later addition, it forms one of the many 'Amen' glosses running through the whole Bible. (By 'Amen' gloss is meant words added by a reader, or someone who heard the text read, saying an Amen to what he had heard.)[14]

Westermann's further reflections regarding the theological upshot of a gloss are of great interest. We will advance his discussion further below.

> If that is the case here, 45.15 would exemplify the truth that a gloss can often be of the utmost importance for the context in which it occurs, for the words here are a theological summary of Cyrus' oracle which Deutero-Isaiah made the central point of his proclamation.

There is a lack of clarity in Westermann's presentation regarding how v. 15 finds itself nestled between v. 14 and vv. 16–17. If v. 15 is read as a gloss, Westermann's posits a reconstruction of a reader responding to vv. 9–13. The **אכן** would, in this case, be over against the exiles and in support of the prophetic disputation, advancing it yet further. In this case, v. 14 is imaginatively isolated from its current position and read in relation to Isa 60. Though it seems possible that the origin of v. 14 is later than DI, this does nothing to address what seems to me a

[13] Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 170.
[14] Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 170–71.

far more interesting question: not so much how but *why* it came to be placed here. Westermann does not reflect on how reading v. 15 as such a gloss might relate to v. 19. This may be for the simple reason that he sees v. 19's "in secret" as referring to an entirely different theme than v. 15.[15] Regardless, it is worth clarifying how v. 15 as interpolated could be seen as an anticipatory rebuttal or inversion of v. 19. We will return to this possibility below.

A "Gloss" by any other name…?

Though Westermann does not argue along text-critical grounds, it is nonetheless important to review any available manuscript evidence. Is there any such evidence that helps support such a reading? As Immanuel Tov has argued, the available manuscript evidence for glosses, scholia, and interpolations is rather scant. There is no extant textual witness for Isa 45:15 that points to such an insertion. According to Tov's taxonomy of scribal additions, Westermann's suggested interpretation would more precisely be referred to as an interpolation or exegetical insertion. According to Tov, however, in light of the absence of direct evidence, such a claim is "little more than a scholarly exercise in ingenuity."[16] I seek to show, however, that this reconstructive ingenuity is far more meaningful than just "an exercise".

Isa 40:7b as Foundational to Westermann's Reading

To begin with, Westermann tacitly admits that his preferred reading of v. 15 as gloss (a later reader in response) is conjectural. He states "if" at least twice, in addition to allowing for the possibility of the prophet as speaker. Additionally, he does not argue the case for a gloss at 45:15 along textual critical lines. However, there is a link between the appearance of אכן at Isa 40:7 and then again at Isa 45:15, which he draws on. To understand the logic of this parallel we need to examine Westermann's reflections at 40:6–8.

At Isa 40:6–7a Westermann identifies the prophet's objection to the imperative "cry!" at 40:6a. He argues that the resistance of the prophet to the command, "perfectly gathers up all the vanquished nation's lamentation and sheer despair…" Indeed, the prophet declares "his solidarity with his fellow-countrymen in their suffering and despair" to the degree that he, "felt the plight of the remnant to be so hopeless as to make proclamation vain."[17]

In this reading, not only does the prophet participate in the people's despair and resignation, but also, after the *athnach*, we find the words of "a reader…deeply moved," and in full agreement with the prophet:

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[15] Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 173.
[16] Emmanuel Tov, *The Greek and Hebrew Bible* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2014), 62. Tov classification is found in this essay: "Glosses, Interpolations, and Other Types of Scribal Additions in the Text of the Hebrew Bible," 53–74.
[17] Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 43. See also 40, 42.

> Here, between the prophet's objection and its answer, the text as we have it contains an addition : 'Surely the people is grass.' It is not someone's attempt to elucidate, but the comment of a reader who was deeply moved. He took the prophet to mean what we ourselves also read into him, namely, that the lament gathered up in this lament at the evanescence of all things is Israel's. And by means of this marginal note, he expressed this in such a way that even today we can still mark how Deutero-Isaiah's words came home to the mind and experience of one of his readers; he said 'Amen' to them and understood them. This is one of the numerous examples of additions or glosses which constitute valuable witnesses as to what happened to the biblical text as it was read by or to the congregation of the faithful.[18]

We observe in these verses, similarly to Isa 45:14–17, an abundance and ambiguity of voices and the concomitant potential for multiple and contrasting interpretive *voicings*. Westermann hears Israel's lament as expressed by the prophet in response to the divine summon. After this he hears a later reader responding.[19]

It is rather common for interpreters to discern in the אכן חציר העם of Isa 40:7c a clear later addition.[20] Indeed, one might argue that the supralinear position of these words in 1QIsa[a] strengthens such a view.[21] Though not in specific relation to what I refer to as Westermann's "אכן glosses" Immanuel Tov argues to the contrary, on the grounds that since we have such little detailed knowledge of how the biblical texts developed, "most assumed additions to the original texts are only hypothetical." He goes on to comment on the proclivity of scholars who, as Westermann, see "numerous examples of…glosses" in the Hebrew Bible:

> Unfortunately, scholars are rather quick in assuming that words in the body of the text derived from such interlinear elements incorrectly [!] integrated into the text. As a matter of fact, Reynolds and Wilson (see n. 1), 206 assume that only infrequently were glosses incorporated in the body of Greek and Latin

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[18] Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 42.

[19] He marks this as the *only* place we clearly hear the voice of the prophet himself, as elsewhere he is "so completely in the shadow of his message…" Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 43. This dynamic of the prophet being overshadowed by the divine address: a) relates importantly to the trope of hiddenness; b) owes to generic features of lyric poetry, which include apostrophe. As Culler argues the power of apostrophe "is to constitute the addressee as another subject…seek(ing) to establish relations between self and other…plac[ing] us in the continuing present of apostrophic address, the 'now' in which, for readers, a poetic event can repeatedly occur." Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 225. This will be revisited in chapter 6.

[20] In addition to critical apparatus in BHS (which cites no manuscript evidence), See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 178; Goldingay/Payne, *Isaiah 40–55*, 84 (who, after introducing the trend, argue against it).

[21] Though, if this is the case, one would also need to consider the possibility for the entirety of v. 8 as interpolated as it too creeps down the margin of the scroll.

> texts. In our view, a similar understanding pertains to the transmission of the Hebrew Bible. There are no clear statements on this phenomenon in the scholarly literature, but often the impression is created that glosses and interpolations were frequently inserted into the text.[22]

I have no prima facie objection to the inclusion of glosses and interpolations as a fact of textual transmission, nor to scholarly theorizing about such. Rather, I am trying to show the significance of Westermann arguing *not* on a text-critical basis, but rather what I understand to be contemporary and theological interests. In the very least Westermann's reflections countermand Tov's judgment that such a gloss or interpolation was "incorrectly" integrated into the text. Rather, Westermann sees a gloss as an *enhancement*.

Westermann's language is important here. He doesn't merely detect a marginal note, but he *hears a reader's response at 40:7*, and suspects one at 45:15 as well. In the glossator, then, Westermann is able to project upon an ancient reader his own response: "what we ourselves also read into him."[23] In this way, a precedent is hallowed and space is made which gathers up the lament-filled "amen" of the contemporary community of faith into this enscripturated ancient Israelite reader-response. The emphasis, Westermann says plainly enough is not to "elucidate" but expresses one who was "deeply moved". My argument is simply that Westermann constitutes the glossator, creating much needed space for the affective dimension of readers, like himself, who long to respond to the prophecy.[24] If this is so at Isa 40:7c I would argue the same *a fortiori* for Isa 45:15, where there is even less scholarly consensus or evidence.

Analysis and Evaluation: Interpolation as Reader-Response in Prophetic Process

We will now briefly consider the interpretive ramifications of v.15 as interpolation. Similar to the discussion at the conclusion of the last chapter, here we will extend and problematize Westermann's ingenious voicing. We have already seen the evidence pointing towards the conjectural nature of this proposal. Be that as it may, if we explore this option we must do so attentive to the ways in which "the possible formation of the text may have bearing upon its interpretation."[25] If the whole of Isa 45:14–17, or even just vv. 14–15 were added at a

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[22] Tov, *The Greek and Hebrew Bible*, 56. Van Winkle, argues more specifically against 40:7c as "as clear a case of a gloss as one could find" (pace Snaith) on stylistic and hypothetical textual critical grounds. D.W. Van Winkle, "The Relationship of the Nations to Yahweh and to Israel in Isaiah XL-LVI," *VT*: Jan, 1985, 455.

[23] That what is "read into him" at Isa 40:6–7 should be a stress on the resonance with the psalms of lament (Westermann, 41–42), specifically the prophet gathering up the lament of the people, is especially revealing given Westermann's powerful personal encounter with the psalms of lament while in a Russian POW camp: "the war made me encounter the Psalms in a totally unacademic and unscientific way…" Quoted from Westermann (1992) in Donald K. McKim (ed.), *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, 535–540.

[24] See fn. 19. See also chapter. 6 (specifically 6.3.2).

[25] Kevin Walton's *Thou Traveller Unknown: The Presence and Absence of God in the Jacob Narrative* (Paternoster 2003); quote is from the foreword by Walter Moberly.

later, perhaps even last stage, in the formation of the scroll of Isaiah, how might this impact our interpretation?

First, it would mean that 45:15 could stand in an *inverse* relationship to the coordinate of 45:19. It is often understood that 45:19 is divine correction to 45:15. From the above proposal of interpolation, however, we would see a flipping of the script. There is, in fact, a clear continuity between vv. 12–13 and 18–19 such that if vv. 14–17 were temporarily excised (for the sake of imaginative reconstruction) the flow here would not only *not* be arrested - but, might be significantly enhanced. We observe this seamless flow below:

[12]I made the earth and the humans upon it I created. It is I, My hands stretched out the heavens, and all their array I commanded.[13]It is I who roused him in justice and all his ways I made straight. He it is shall rebuild My city and release My exiles, not for a price and not for a payment, said the LORD of Armies.

…

[18]For thus said the LORD,

Creator of the heavens, He is God, Fashioner of earth and its Maker, He founded it. Not for nothing did He create it, to dwell there He fashioned it. I am the LORD and there is no other.

[19]Not in secret have I spoken in the place of a land of darkness. I did not say to Jacob's seed, "In vain have you sought Me." I am the LORD speaking justice,

telling uprightness.[26]

If the entirety of our pericope is interpolated, it might make best sense to see v. 14 as responding (anticipatorially from the standpoint of the final form of the text) to vv. 20–25. Thus, the movement and words of the nations in v. 14 can be read as a response to the imperatives "gather together and come; assemble, you fugitives from the nations…" who "pray to a god that will not save" (v. 20). Regardless of whether v. 21 is understood as a rhetorical imperative to the idols or a continuation of address to the "fugitives of the nations," v. 15 can be read as retrojected response to the question posed: "Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past?" (v. 21a) Though the answer comes clearly enough in v. 21b as well, v. 15 may also support this: "Truly, *you*, Hidden God, God of Israel, Savior!" This works as well for v. 22's "Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God and there is no other." If v. 14 is a later addition it may incline some readers towards seeing v. 15 as also the voice of the nations, rather than the prophet/glossator.

[26] From Rober Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, 774–75.

Regardless of what one concludes in relation to such conjectural reconstructions, the more interesting theological point, and that which Westermann seems to be after, is the inscripturating into the process of prophecy something like an early reader-response. This groping after participation in the unfolding drama of the Cyrus event is also seen in Wim Beuken's commentary on Isa 40–48, to which we now turn.

5.2.2 Wim Beuken: The Voice of the Prophet

The following section surveys the approach of W.M. Beuken, seeking to situate his specific exegetical treatment of Isaiah 45:14-17 within his broader reading strategy for Isaiah 40-48. First, I provide an account of Beuken's overarching interpretive approach, with an eye to how the parts relate to the whole. Secondly, I will evaluate how this hermeneutic influences his specific interpretation of Isaiah 45:14-17, again with particular interest in how this specific pericope is contextually coordinated. Lastly, the scope will be narrowed to questions regarding the identification of speakers, addressees, and how the assertion regarding God's hiddenness in Isaiah 45:15 is understood.

Setting up the Context: Entering the Drama of Faith by Reading Seriatim

Beuken regards Isaiah's complicated textual pre-history as essentially inaccessible to the contemporary reader. His preference is to see the respective genre/form-critical literary units as deployed in a wider literary development, reading the whole of Isaiah 40–48 as essentially one sequential movement in which the reader becomes, in some way, a participant in the unfolding faith and salvation drama.[27] As for the nature of that participation, Beuken understands his task as commentator to be one of facilitating the reader's discovery of that which Israel was called to painstakingly to realize: that despite past failures, there is a new future from God. From the very beginning of his commentary Beuken situates the reader, "somewhere between the fact of Cyrus and the expectation of redemption." He understands DI's ultimate goal as to move the hearer on "from what Cyrus unmistakably proves as a sign, namely God's power over history, to what this sign promises: God once again enters Zion with his people."[28] However, both sign and what it

[27] For Beuken's specific application of genre and form criticism and how it shapes the commentary see Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 11. There he discusses how the use of literary genres are always "determined by the dramatic progress of the book." Beukens ability to see the forest through the trees should be appreciated. For Beuken, composition stands as the "final structure of the book." For further explanation of how Beuken understands the various literary units taking shape and meaning from within their deployment in a literary progression of the whole, depending on context in the drama - "the point to which the history of YHWH with his people has developed in the book." Beueken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 12. There is genuine convergence between Beuken's approach and my own: first, the stress on reading sequentially, in order to understand the poetry's organic dramatic progression; next, there is an understanding of how the horizons of originating and contemporary contexts blend.

[28] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 10, 13.

promises are marshalled forth together in a drama which has its genesis in Israel's bitter complaint of disillusionment. Beuken understands, correctly to my mind, that Isaiah 40-48 is an extended response to Israel's complaint as produced in Isaiah 40:27.[29] This response is an interpretation of history ("salvation is history and therefore drama") through the mediation of the prophet, seeking confirmation by the believing community of Israel expressed through nuanced "dramatic relationships": "God and Israel, God and Jerusalem, the Prophet and Israel, Israel and the nations, even God and the nations, for all flesh will see the glory of YHWH."[30]

Isaiah 40:27: Thematic and Structural Importance

In what follows attention is given to Beuken's specific exegesis of Isa 40:27. This is due to the centrality of Israel's complaint in his understanding of the whole dramatic structure of Isa 40–48, alongside the importance of this initial appearance of the root סתר. Beuken traces the complaint (especially with the use of סתר 'hide' and משפט 'right') to laments in Israel's cultic context, in which Israel brought a formal accusation against God if it felt there was some sort of injustice to the covenant. Here Beuken states that in Deutero-Isaiah these terms retain a similar meaning, stating that, "God hid himself from Israel (45:15; 48:16; 54:8)."[31]

Beuken interprets משפט as "the word for God's plan, apparently with the world in general." This is "a key word for the composition" which, given his earlier use and explanation of composition, I take to refer to the whole of Isa 40-48. Though left largely undeveloped Beuken signals a possible relationship between the collocation of משפט and דרך in both Isa 40:27 and 40:14, where the prophet – already "combatting Israel's unbelieving defeatism" – rhetorically preempts the exilic community's complaint: Just as "no one can measure God's creation, even less his policy with regard to the world."[32] Thus, Beuken interprets Israel's complaint in 40:27 as the making of a formal lawsuit regarding God's *mishpat* (judgment/decision) of the world.[33]

Isa 40:27 thus forms the core of a dispute speech in which "the prophet clears ground for YHWH"[34], who then opens a lawsuit against the nations in Isa 41:1 as part of his developed refutation of Israel's complaint. Beuken notes that this is not simply a straightforward dispute

[29] „*Zijn klacht verraadt gebrek aan geloof in Gods trouw (vs. 27). Dit gebrek te bestrijden is het alles beheersende doel van Jes. 40-48. Daarom weerspiegelt het citaat van Israëls klacht programmatisch de opbouw van het eerste deel.*" Beuken, Isaiah Deel IIA, 56.
[30] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 29.
[31] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 53.
[32] Beuken, Isaiah Deel IIA, 56. In his explanation of 40:27 as the core of Isa 40:12-31: "Het vormt evenzeer een gevolgtrekking bij de verzen 12-26 als een uitgangspunt voor het in hymnische stijl gehouden heilsperspectief in de verzen 28-31."Beuken, Isaiah, 51.
[33] See Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 53.
[34] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 56.

speech. He draws on Westermann's conclusion that "the hymn here is the heart of the argumentation," the purpose of the prophet being to lead Israel from complaint to praise. Beuken also interprets the consistent parallel use of "Jacob-Israel," here in Isa 40:27 and throughout,[35] with the story of Jacob's struggle in Genesis as intertextual background, embodying "the tension between historical fact and calling, between promise and fulfillment." This is one demonstration, among many, of Beuken's admirable desire to interpret even *leitworts* in light of the literary universe of Isaiah 40–48. In fact, in the aftermath of Jerusalem's fall and Israel's "impression that God continued to reject," he even argues that "these titles together embody Israel's complaint and his dispute with God."[36] This interpretation is also significant to Beuken's understanding of the larger theological development which, from the forensic standpoint, culminates at Isa 45:20–25.

Beuken reads the development of Isaiah 40-48 in three sections which follow a prologue (40:1-11). Beuken, as Melugin, understands the "twofold nature of the prologue" to reflect, "the two cycles of the entire book: verses 1-8 correspond more to chapters 41-48, verses 9-11 to chapters 49-55."[37] Like Melugin, Beuken understands the presence of hymns or variously themed "songs of praise" (*een loflied*) to constitute structural markers, regularly concluding larger sections of text, which guide his delimiting the three respective sections.[38] Beuken's first two sections relate to Israel's complaint against Yahweh in Isa 40:27. The first he terms "the Lawsuit" (40:12-42:13), which relates to Israel's claim that Yahweh has ignored the communal complaint regarding *mishpat*. The second section, "the Road/Way" (42:14-44:23), relates to Israel's complaint that its *way* is "hidden from YHWH." These sections are delimited from what comes after them by a hymn of invitation (42:10-13 and 44:23 respectively). The third section, "the mission/dispatch (*zending*) of Cyrus and the downfall (*ondergang*) of Babylon" (44:24-48:22), also concludes with an exodus-themed "song of praise" (48:20-22).

Beuken refers to the major hymnic transition at Isa 44:23 according to the genre of "inviting hymn" (*uitnodigende hymne*), reminiscent of Exodus 15, by which the prophet, "refers his audience to Israel's cult chants, to the repertoire of the psalms, from which his prophecies also derive a lot of material."[39] At this dramatic juncture Beuken comments that Israel's voice, which is noticeably absent in this choir,

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[35] According to Beuken the collocation "Jacob/Israel" is used fifty times in the OT, sixteen of which are within Isa 40–49:5ff (40:27, 41:14, 42:24, 43: 1, 22, 28; 44: 1, 5, 21, 23, 45: 4, 46: 3, 48: 1, 12, 49: 5ff; for the converse see 41:8).
[36] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 53.
[37] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 29. See above chp. 1.3.
[38] See his introductory remarks about these hymns: Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 222.
[39] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 222.

> …may have meaning for the compositional coherence of Isa 40-48, because in this first cycle only 42:10-13, 44:23; 48:20 belong to the genre of the 'inviting hymn'. The people must still fulfill the return to their God (44:22) as well as the exodus from Babylon (48:20a). Only then can it agree with the chorus of heaven and earth (48: 20b-21).[40]

Thus, Israel's "return to God" and "exodus from Babylon" are indivisibly yoked to the Cyrus event, itself significantly bracketed by summons to heaven and earth at 44:23 and 45:8. However, these two addresses are not identical, and the differences are instructive in Beuken's reading: whereas in 44:23 heaven and earth are called to exult "to testify to Israel's salvation," in 45:8 they are commanded to actually "bring about the salvation."[41] This movement demonstrates for Beuken, "that God with the Cyrus oracle makes the decisive step towards the fulfillment of promises."[42] Thus, he reads God's address to Cyrus (vv. 2-7) as transpiring in Israel's presence (v. 1) and concluding, "with a call to heaven and earth that they might inaugurate the order of salvation and righteousness sought by Him (v. 8)."[43]

Isaiah 45:9–13

At this epoch-shifting juncture, where an answer of some sort could be expected from Israel, Beuken significantly parts company with majority opinion that discerns (at least the embedding of Israel's voice within a dispute speech of Yahweh in Isa 45:9-13. According to the more traditional view here Yahweh, "defends his right to put an end to exile through the agency of a foreign king,"[44] which Israel has presumably taken issue with. Beuken, however, argues that 45:9-13 is addressed to the nations, though again with Israel as the "ultimate addressee" throughout.

More important to this study than the novelty of Beuken's interpretation here is the very ambiguity that makes it possible. The addressee of Isaiah 45:9-13, as is often the case for speaker and addressee in 45:14-25, is not stated plainly. Beuken does not engage with questions such as whether and how this ambiguity might be theologically constructive, either as part of a sequential-dramatic reading, or otherwise. He argues for his reading of the prophetic and divine address as directed to the nations on the following grounds: first, Beuken connects the language of **ריב** with Yahweh's interaction with the nations, and more specifically with their gods (cf. 41:1, 21). He also

[40] This underscores the reconciliatory purposes oft he poetry as will be articulated in the next chapter.
[41] In my review of the history of interpretation I have not encountered a reading of 45:15 as apostrophe spoken *by* the heaven and earth back o Yahweh; Apostrophe meeting apostrophe.
[42] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 240
[43] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 232
[44] Beuken, *Isaiah*, 241.

notes that Israel is referred to in the third person consistently in this address.[45] Beuken notes that translations rendering the Hebrew of לְאָב and לְאִשָּׁה in 45:10 with "to his father" or "to his mother," are neither necessary or precise and are based on a misunderstanding of 45:9. Beuken argues rather that in v. 9 the clay is not criticizing its own being processed into pottery but stems rather from a fundamental lack of confidence in the potter's skill or ability (*werkwijze*; translating פעל), which questions the authority of the potter to execute at all. Similarly, the nature of the argument in vs. 10 is not a quarreling about one's own conception but a more foundational dispute concerning a parent's right to conceive children at all.[46] Beuken reads these verses, then, as a response by Yahweh to the nations who have called him to account for how He presently, "gives shape to Israel's existence."[47] He sees confirmation of Yahweh's quarreling with the nations in the paralleling of בָּנַי (i.e., the exiles; cf. Isa 43:6) and פֹּעַל יָדַי which refers to Cyrus' conquest.[48]

Reading this passage divorced from the whole composition, in Beuken's estimation, may lead to perceiving a document which reflects an Israelite nationalism whose assurance of election warps "the actual political relations." Rather, we must be careful to remember that Cyrus' conquests were not only for the benefit of "my servant, Jacob," but had universal ramifications.

> Ultimately, God envisions that East and West recognize Him as the only Creator (45: 6). In doing so, the prophet keeps his audience in suspense whether this knowledge of the true God will be beneficial or pernicious. It is the knowledge of Him who brings peace and evil (45: 7).[49]

Beuken's treatment here helpfully subordinates Isa 45:7 to 45:6. In this sense, destinies hang in the balance. This ambiguity is quickly given direction, however, by the imperatives to heaven and earth to produce righteousness and salvation. Beuken argues that the implicit argument to which the dispute speech is addressed, has to do with those who doubt whether Yahweh actually has interests beyond himself and Israel as well as, "whether He does indeed work towards a

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[45] For instance, the contrast with the direct address to Israel-Jacob in 43:3 is instructive, where *Qal* participle of יצר appears with the 2ms pronominal suffix, as well as the collocation of קְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל with *Hiphil* participle of ישע+2ms pronominal suffix. On the other hand in 45:9-11 *Qal* participle of יצר appears with the 3ms suffix and is also thus collocated with קְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל.

[46] Beuken, Isaiah, 243. Een verkeerd begrip van vs. 9 leidt tot deze uitleg. Evenmin als daar het leem op zijn eigen verwerking tot aardewerk kritiek levert, stelt de spreker van vs. 10 afkeurende vragen omtrent zijn eigen verwekking. De pointe ligt anders: wie betwist ouders het recht kinderen te verwekken?

[47] Beuken, *Isaiah*, 243.

[48] Beuken has already directed the readers attention to the shared collocation of the roots עשה and פעל in Isa 45:9b and Isa 41:4, both of which have to do with Cyrus. Similarly, Beuken's argument seems to assume that the term בָּנַי, which elsewhere refers to exiles and nowhere refers to non-Israelites, would only awkwardly be addressed to the exiles themselves and is more suitable as addressed to gentiles.

[49] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 245.

heavenly and earthly righteousness."[50] Though difficult to follow it seems that Beuken already *looks ahead* to the end of Isaiah 45 in these reflections:

> The still concealed allusion that the peoples will also benefit from the new system, immediately meets with doubt. God responds to this in this dispute speech. In the composition we find the same connection as between 42:14-17 and 42:l8-25, where God's decision to help the blind people on the road is immediately the subject of a dispute with Israel. In 45:9-13 God does not meet the objections of the nations by revealing more about their share in the new righteousness. They are again referred to his absolute freedom to form his people and to produce sons (vv. 9-11).[51]

Isaiah 45:14-17

Beuken's treatment of Isaiah 45:14-17 is nuanced, mirroring the complexity of the passage itself. He raises form-critical and redaction-critical considerations while moving toward his preferred reading of the passage "on the level of the final composition." Contra Begrich, Westermann, Melugin and Spykerboer, he finds it hard to imagine, "that this passage ever functioned independently of the total composition of the book," since, "none of the usual literary genres for DJ are recognisable therein."[52] Rather, Beuken argues that this passage functions to unite the Cyrus oracle (Isa 44:24-28; Isa 45:1-7) and the preceding dispute speech (Isa 45:9-13; which he reads as directed at the nations) to that which follows (Isa 45:18-25).

> Not Israel or Zion but the exiles are addressed (the feminine suffix in vs. 14 hearkens back to *galuti* in vs. 13). Thematically vs. 14 works out the preceding 'without purchase and without gift' against the background of 43:3. In many ways this position stands in contrast to the perspective that YHWH unlocks before them in 45:18-25 (Bonnard, p. 176 v.). The striking formal agreement between 14b"–17 and the verses 24ff underlines this contrasting relationship.[53]

Though Beuken grants the possibility of interpreting 45:14-17 as an "anticipatory correction of 45:18-25" from the "perspective of literary criticism," he understands the purpose of this "striking formal agreement between 14b"–17 and 24ff," in the final form as throwing into

[50] In short, this is a rebuttal to an argument regarding the Cyrus oracle.
[51] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 245.
[52] Beuken agrees with Westermann, however, that 45:14 is more thematically linked to the description of salvation in Isaiah 60:3-14, in which subjected "ambassadors of the nations come with their treasures and appear all together, as in a procession, to pay homage." Westermann, *Isaiah*, 169.
[53] Beuken also considers the possibility of 45:14 harmonizing 43:3 and 45:13: „Literair-historisch gezien wekt het vers de indruk te harmoniseren, overigens met verwaarlozing van 45:3a." Beuken, 247-248.

sharp relief, "how the fate of the gentiles in the new order will be according to traditional expectations"[54] (as presented in vs. 14) with the contrasting and thoroughly unique "invitation to the nations" which follows (in vss. 18–25).

Beuken understands the whole of 45:14–17 to be "a speech by the prophet himself, prior to the voice of God in verses 18–25." Despite the messenger formula in v. 14a' Beuken notes that this is both "unusually not expanded with epithets" and that the first person of Yahweh is "nowhere tangible" in the verses. This oscillating of address from prophet to Yahweh, at times with no introductory formula to signal the transition, constitutes an essential component of the dramatic presentation in Beuken's reading.[55] Whereas in Isaiah 40 the prophet "cleared the way" for Yahweh's address, in this proposal the address of the prophet would stand in some tension to the address of Yahweh which follows thereafter. Beuken's summarizes the prophet's '3-point turn' in verses 14-17 as "commentary of the prophet on the Cyrus oracle."[56] This 3-point turn, of prophetic reflection, takes the following shape: a) first, an address to the exiles: promising them the subjugation of the nations (v. 14); b) then, a confession [*belijdenis*] to God, which flows from the outcome of Cyrus' conquest (vs.15) and c) a concluding contrast between the fate of the image makers (vs. 16) and that of Israel (vs. 17) given "in a didactic manner" [*op onderrichtende wijze*]. In what follows I give the MT for each verse under discussion, followed by selected portions of Beuken's exegesis, and then my own analysis of the moves he makes.

Verse 14

כֹּה׀ אָמַר יְהוָה יְגִיעַ מִצְרַיִם וְסֹחַר־כּוּשׁ וּסְבָאִים אַנְשֵׁי מִדָּה [14]

עָלַיִךְ יַעֲבֹרוּ וְלָךְ יִהְיוּ אַחֲרַיִךְ יֵלֵכוּ בַּזִּקִים יַעֲבֹרוּ

וְאֵלַיִךְ יִשְׁתַּחֲווּ אֵלַיִךְ יִתְפַּלָּלוּ

אַךְ בָּךְ אֵל וְאֵין עוֹד אֶפֶס אֱלֹהִים׃

Cyrus not only frees the exiles 'without price and without gift', but also the treasures of the servile lands of Egypt, Ethiopia (the present-day Sudan) and Seba fall not to him, the victor, but "passes over into the possession" of

[54] Beuken also notes: „*Wel is vs. 14 verwant aan de zogenaamde heilsbeschrijving van de derde Jesaja (vgl. vooral Jesaja 60; Westermann, p. 138)* Beuken*, Isaiah Deel IIA, 246*. However, it is possible that in referring to *traditionele verwachtingen* Beuken has in mind the presentation and fate of the nations in Psalms that depict the Davidic monarch, YHWH's anointed, such as Psalm 2, 18, 20.

[55] *De profeet neemt het woord van YHWH over zonder dat de overgang door een kaderformule wordt aangegeven.* Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 134. This transition from prophet to Yahweh is also observed by Beuken in the immediately preceding section, in which the prophet speaks from 45:9-11a and Yahweh from 45:11b-13.

[56] *De verzen 14-17 vormen de commentaar van de profeet op het Kores-orakel.* Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 249-250.

> the galut (vs. 14a"': *alayik ya'boru*; NBG 'come over unto you'). Also these peoples themselves belong from now on to the exiles and follow them until their return, while they, shackled in chains, beg for a favorable decision about their fate (*yitpallalu*; NBG: 'beg') with the recognition that God can only be found among the exiles. Throughout the verse there is a sense of surprise that everything should happen precisely to the exiles (the six preposition determiners stand inverted) and not to the new world-leader Cyrus.[57]

Verse 14 is read in direct relationship to the promised activity of Cyrus vis-à-vis the exiles in 45:13. The address of the nations is thus directed not to God, nor to Jerusalem/Zion, but to the exiles *still in Babylon*. This can be seen in Beuken's statement that the peoples "follow them until their return." In his sequential reading as dramatic unfolding, such an assumption makes good sense. Beuken's interpretation also takes seriously the subjugated state of the nations, as he himself argues over against, "the assumption of a pilgrimage to Zion by peoples who are voluntary subjects."[58] His expansion of יִתְפַּלָּלוּ as, "beg for a favorable decision about their fate" (following the NBG), goes beyond the content of the actual address, though it may be reasonable on contextual grounds. The central interpretive issue is more that התפלל with אל everywhere else means to pray, and *nowhere else* refers to human-human address.[59] This does not, of course, rule out address to the exilic community; but, it invites more careful consideration.

> The reaction of the peoples ('Only with you is God') is not yet one of believers' confession, nor a request to be incorporated into the cultural community of the exiles (Duhm), but an observation-based insight [*waarneming berustend inzicht*]. If at this tectonic shift in the power relationship not the victor but a small group of exiles, one of many at that, be laden (*strijken*) with treasure, a true God is to be found there and there alone. This conclusion

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[57] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 247.

[58] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 247.

[59] Not only is יִתְפַּלָּלוּ collocated with יִשָּׁתַּחֲווּ here but both take the preposition אֶל. The use of אל with התפלל can function in three ways (following HALOT's entry 7607 for פלל) a) to demarcate the one which is prayed *to*; a simple dative. This is exclusively to אלהים/יהוה outside of the important outliers in Isaiah 44:17 and 45:20, both of which are to a פסל. The collocation of the same verbs with preposition in 44:17 with the idol fabricator being made to fall down and entreat his newly-created graven image in direct address: "deliver me, for you are my god" seems important background to the use in 45:14, given Beuken's sequential and dramatic reading which attempts to trace the development of dramatic relationship. For instance, what is the nature of the interaction between the idol-fabricator/idol in 44:17 and that between nations/addressee in 45:14? b) to specify the direction of prayer, in reference to the temple (1 Kings 8; 2 Chr 6). The hypothetical foreigner who, having heard of YHWH's greatness, comes from a "distant land" and "prays toward this house" (1 Kings 8:42), seems to stand behind interpretations of Isa 45:14 which take the אֶל as directional and the 2fs suffixed pronoun to refer to the temple/Jerusalem. HALOT makes such an interpretive judgement, for instance, in listing Isa 45:14 in this directional category. c) "for" or "in regard to" (e.g., 1 Sam 1:27; Isa 37:21 respectively).

> constitutes a first step towards the point of the next prophecy: the confession of the escapees from the nations (vs. 24).[60]

Beuken interprets the rapid-fire anastrophic succession of preposition+verb in v. 14 as fostering a sense of surprise which mirrors the inversion of customary expectation. Rather than the captives falling to the sovereign victor they fall to a band of exiles, who are themselves of politically inferior status to the likes of Egypt and Ethiopia. The words of the nations are posited as surprised commentary on this upset; a conclusion the subjugated peoples draw, and not a conversion scene. Beuken notes that the prophet's initial understanding of the historical moment foresees a political-economic relationship between Israel and the nations, "according to the traditional expectation of salvation." Beuken's reading appreciates dramatic progression from 45:14–17 as the prophet's initial, 'looking through a glass dimly,' which is subsequently augmented at 45:18–25, where he comes to foresee a very different outcome. This is argued by noting a "combination of strong formal agreement" alongside "substantive variegation" between the two sections. Thus, the meaning of 45:14–17 is only fully realized and qualified, "by means of all the lines after it."[61] Beuken argues that Yahweh's salvation as revealed in 45:18–25 determines a new universal order, whereby, "the traditional demarcation between Israel and the nations will be different."[62]

b) Verse 15:

אָכֵן אַתָּה אֵל מִסְתַּתֵּר אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹשִׁיעַ׃

> The function of this God-directed confession differs depending on whether it is still in the mouth of the peoples (Ibn Ezra, Duhn, Bonnard, Melugin) or whether another speaker is adopted here, either the prophet (North, Westermann), or the author (Schoors), or a glossator (Spykerboer), or Israel (Delitzsch). A confession from the peoples, we can see, would come too early here; they can only follow on God's invitation (vs. 22) and would then also miss the direct form of address (vs. 24a). Furthermore the titles "God of Israel" and certainly "Saviour" (NGB: "Redeemer"; *mosia*: cf. vs. 22!) better suit a speaker who himself meets God as savior in this hour of history (cf. vs. 17). Because the prophet conveys the word in the next verse, one can also reasonably accept him as the speaker in vs. 15.[63]

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[60] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 248.
[61] Cf. the beautiful reflection in C.S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* (New York, NY: Macmillan Pub. Co, 1943), 73.
[62] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA,* 256.
[63] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 248. Beuken's language here appreciates interpretive openness.

The relationship between the function of this confession and the construal of speaker is this study's precipitative observation, of course. Beuken gives one reason *against* reading v. 15 as the confession of the nations and one *for* his understanding of the speaker as prophet, with one reason overlapping (both for and against). Since continuity of speaker constitutes a positive argument *for* the prophet as speaker (i.e., the prophet speaks in v. 16, so it is most natural to accept the voice of prophet in v. 15 as well), Beuken must also engage the possibility that in v. 15 the nations speak (since, from the same logic, there is plausible continuity of speaker between v. 14 and v. 15). However, this possibility is dismissed, as it is felt to be out of joint with the dramatic unfolding of God's later invitation in 45:22 [פְּנוּ־אֵלַי וְהִוָּשְׁעוּ כָּל־אַפְסֵי־אָרֶץ]. Further the nature of 45:24a's imagined direct address renders such a confession more imaginable only later. Beuken also argues that the titles "God of Israel" and "savior" better suit an Israelite speaker, who follows on to proclaim salvation for Israel in 45:17.[64] The reason for this becomes more clear in the following section.

> The confession of God's hiddenness is of course no dogmatic statement about the unchanging nature of his actions, but entirely related to the outcome of Cyrus' conquests being portrayed in precisely such terms. Now that YHWH frees Israel, not to secure victory by himself, but rather by the benevolence of another, gentile world-conqueror, an end of an era has come in which He chose the side of his people in plain language. That is also why the question of whether God keeps himself hidden in this history for Israel (Ibn Ezra) or for the nations (Duhm, Bonnard), is out of place, because both are involved therein. In the manner in which He saves Israel from exile, neither Israel nor the peoples can follow his tracks. The wonder of the nations at this kind of display of power (vs. 14b") is simply laid out by the prophet in the words: 'You are a God who keeps himself hidden'. From this also stems Israel's irritation about the fact that God Himself would not bring their fate to rest (cf. 40:27: 'My way is hidden from YHWH').[65]

Beuken interprets divine concealment as arising from the disjoint between exilic expectations of what liberation might have achieved (Israel honored by the nations and bestowed with new power) and that which has been proclaimed (God granting victory over Israel's oppressor to a gentile conqueror, resulting in the nations honoring not the exiles, but

[64] Though the connection is only implied Beuken's argument seems partially based on the use of the niphal 3ms perfect (נוֹשַׁע) in 45:17 as concerns the character of "everlasting salvation" as being experienced by Israel contrasted with the niphal masculine imperative (הִוָּשְׁעוּ) as concerns the not-yet-experienced salvation of the nations in 45:22.
[65] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 248.

"the God who lives in the midst of the exile…")[66] The confession of God's hiddenness as a prophetic reflection on Cyrus' victory gathers up both the shock of the nations as well as the despair of Israel, the charge that seems to have prompted the prophetic activity that culminates in Isaiah 40-48.[67] In other words, this declaration of God's hiddenness is a descriptive response to "the manner in which He saves Israel from exile" – leaving both nations and Israel aghast and groping for ways to make sense of it.[68]

Beuken's interpretation of 45:14-17 as prophetic commentary is influenced by his wider understanding of 45:18-25 as, "the actual culmination of the first cycle (Isa 40-48)," in which, the nature of the relationship between Israel and the nations – and even how these groups are constituted categorically – is fundamentally redefined.[69] In this reading, only the prophet's voice can embody the polyphonic resonances of both Israel's doubting despair and the nations' bewilderment. But how does this hiddenness relate to the sea change of divinely re-ordered identities, just mentioned? Here, Beuken goes beyond most interpreters to connect 45:14-15 with 45:16-17 as well as reading the entire unit as part of the dramatic sweep of Isa 45 in toto.

c) Verses 16-17:

16 בּוֹשׁוּ וְגַם־נִכְלְמוּ כֻּלָּם יַחְדָּו הָלְכוּ בַכְּלִמָּה חָרְשֵׁי צִירִים׃

17 יִשְׂרָאֵל נוֹשַׁע בַּיהוָה תְּשׁוּעַת עוֹלָמִים לֹא־תֵבֹשׁוּ וְלֹא־תִכָּלְמוּ עַד־עוֹלְמֵי עַד׃

> The final verses have a psalmic character, insofar as they set the fate of the makers of idols and that of Israel against one another in an instructional manner. The gratitude of those who are saved, the *todah*, often goes out in the manner of a lesson, a torah, the gift of their experiences to the community (cf. Ps. 31:24; 32:8 ff.; 34:12-23; 51:51). The anticipatory experience of the prophet teaches the exiles how they should expect the outworking of God's saving intervention (vs. 15) to be. In the expression about the makers of idols

[66] See Beuken's summary: „*Deze verborgenheid vloeit voort uit de ervaring dat de bevrijding strijdig is met de eigen politieke positie. Doordat God aan een vreemde veroveraar de overwinning op Israëls verdrukker gunt, is het niet Israël dat voor de ogen van de wereld met de eer daarvan en met nieuwe macht gaat strijken. Als de volken en hun schatten dan toch de ballingen toevallen, geeftde belij denis die hun onderwerping vergezelt, weer wie zij in dit gebaar eigenlijk eren: de God die te midden van de galoet woont (vs. 14).*" Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 249.

[67] Though Beuken cites 45:14b" his understanding of 45:9-11 as an address to the nations factors here.

[68] Given Beuken's reading of Isaiah 45:18-25, one wonders if the Pauline crescendo of Romans 11:33 is discernable behind his, "In the manner in which He saves Israel from exile, *neither Israel nor the peoples can follow his tracks*."

[69] This is, itself, indebted to his insistence on Isa 40–48's dramatic progression, in which there is no stasis but constant movement. In fact, Beuken asserts that commentators who neglect such dramatic progression in the poetry will be unable to discern the nuance of movement from Isa 45:16 to 45:24b–25. Even within 45:20–25 Beuken sees a widening of scope, soteriologically speaking, from "ethnic groups that, together with Israel, now have the opportunity to take advantage of the upheaval of power relations…" to "an invitation to all inhabitants of the earth…" Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 254.

> (harase sirim) the word Egypt sounds throughout (vs. 14: misrayim; Bonnard), yet it is striking that it is not an ethnic group that is set against Israel, but a religious one. The identity of nation and religion is not self-evident. With this the next address of God is also prepared.[70]

With this psalm-like, didactic juxtaposition the prophet is seen to correctly interpret and herald a new fault line along which traditional political-ethnic identities will be shaken into new shape by the coming seismic activity of divine speech in Isaiah 45:18-25. In something roughly analogous to the idea of progressive revelation, the prophet is here understood to have insight which is subsequently given further definition by Yahweh. Beuken states in his summary of this section, "Thus in the hidden order of Yahweh a new separation of spirits is triggered: shaming for the makers of idols, redemption for Israel (vs. 16 ff.). Given that the former is also found in Israel, the usual delineation of both concepts begins to shift."[71] In Beuken's exegesis a redefinition of Israel and the nations will only fully follow from Yahweh's universal offer of salvation in 45:22.[72] It is the respective responses within each traditional grouping which creates, "in both parties…new groups". The aftermath of the Cyrus oracle, the redefining juxtaposition of the two groups in the prophetic address of 45:17, is further modified in the conclusion to this strange trial scene (45:24b-25). This interpretation draws on Beuken's understanding of the use of Jacob and Israel – seen already above regarding Isa 40:27 – to evoke "a functional tension." It is thereby assumed that in 45:25,

> "…'the seed of Israel" is not equal to 'the seed of Jacob' (v. 19, cf. Delitzsch, Westermann, Bonnard). It is not the historical, nationally determined Israel, but the Israel to which even outsiders join under the working of God's spirit (cf. 44:3)...Now those who purposefully oppose YHWH stand over against those who join Him in righteousness (v. 25: yitsdqu)…Those who turn away from useless wood, unite with Israel to become a new race that boasts in the Lord (yithalelû, see at 41:16). Thus YHWH forms the people who proclaim his praise (cf. 43:21)…"[73]

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[70] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 249.

[71] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 249. The previous idol-polemics (40:19ff, 41:6ff, and 44:9-20) are taken to be addressed to Israel. Thus, Beuken deduces that any idol fabricator – even of Israelite origin (חָרָשֵׁי צִירִים itself prophetically fabricated to echo Israel's traditional enemy, Egypt) – is now excluded from participation in the salvation promised to Israel, which is בַּיהוָה.

[72] "After this general offer of salvation, those who turn against Him come into direct opposition with those who, in the confession of God's saving uniqueness together form the posterity of Israel - whether from Jacob or from beyond (vs. 24ff)." Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 257.

[73] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 255-256.

Not to mention the heavy lifting required of Isaiah 44:3 above, how else does Beuken argue for this interpretation? Here, the presence or absence of the root צדק figures prominently. Beuken sees the divine imperative to heaven and earth in 45:8, which must produce צדקה (linked as it is to the Cyrus oracle), as "apparently not realized in the salvation of Israel, as foreseen by the prophet in verses 14-17," since the root צדק appears nowhere in 45:14-17. Conversely, as this root appears in abundance in 45:18-25 (in vss. 19, 21, 23), Beuken concludes that it is only here, "when 'the ends of the earth' may enter into salvation that the true from of God's power as justice before YHWH and Israel comes to light." However, what does it mean to join Yahweh in righteousness, as Beuken paraphrases 45:25? Is it primarily the turning away from idol worship? Given the linking of צדק to the activity of Cyrus in Isa 40-48, it seems that בַּיהוָה יִצְדְּקוּ וְיִתְהַלְלוּ might entail acceptance of Cyrus as deliverance from Yahweh and the subsequent praise expected to arise from this. Given that such an acceptance logically precedes a return from Babylon this returns us to Beuken's discussion of when Israel might most appropriately be expected to "agree with the chorus of heaven and earth." Yet, *when* Israel agrees with the chorus is actually a subordinate issue according to the logic of Beuken's interpretation. Rather, Israel is actually constituted *by those who agree*, and there is an appeal from the transcendent one to all the ends of the earth, that "all the seed of Israel" might also come to transcend national Israel.

Analysis and Evaluation: Are all Israels are Created Equal?

In tracing the texture of Isa 45:9–25 Beuken perceives a distinction between the "historical, nationally determined Israel," and "the Israel to which even outsiders join under the working of God's spirit."[74] This seems to parallel the familiar reading of Romans 9–11, in which "Israel" undergoes a process of redefinition. For instance, Romans 9:6 states that οὐ γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ οὗτοι Ἰσραήλ (Lit: "for not all are Israel who are from Israel"), followed by a collation of examples from sacred history (Isaac, not Ishmael; Jacob, not Esau; a remnant of Israel according to Isaiah, not an innumerable starry host "of the children of Israel"). In this vein Paul's definition of Israel is ultimately redefined not only by the inclusion of believing Gentiles, but also by the hoped-for full inclusion of that "part of Israel" (Rom 11:25), whose denial of the Messiah allowed for Gentile inclusion in the first place. Beuken's describing what he perceives as newly forming inner-categorical distinctions in Isaiah 45:14–25 in a way analogous to Romans 9–11 makes good sense for several reasons.

[74] Beuken, *Isaiah*, 255.

First, there is already innate thematic resonance between Isaiah 40–48 and the whole of Romans, and Romans 9–11 specifically. Paul is rebutting notions that God may be unjust, that His word may have failed, or that He has rejected His people, Israel. Isaiah 40–48 rebuts similar claims in its own discrete context of origin. Paul, arguing for an understanding of election rooted in divine and radical freedom, ultimately appeals to the logic of the potter-clay imagery (Rom 9:20) as it appears overtly in Isaiah 29:16 and more muted, in Isa 45:9. Secondly, the resonances between Isaiah 45:18-25, particularly in כָּל־זֶרַע יִשְׂרָאֵל (Isa 45:25), with a reading that sees in Paul's use of "all Israel" a redefinition which includes those not of the seed or ethnic lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, may help explain Beuken's efforts to tease out inner-group distinctions, especially as an interpreter of Isaiah as Christian scripture.

Prophetic Anonymity

There are several easily overlooked features of Beuken's interpretation that serve as an important segue to the next chapter. The first is his matter-of-fact articulation of the anonymity of the prophet. Responding to an earlier generation's proclivity to conjectural reconstructions of the prophetic personality he states, "we do well to consider this prophet from Babylon as one who is anonymous as a matter of principle."[75] Beuken further describes the concentrating force of anonymity in Isa 40:1–7 as follows:

> In the first part, four people speak. How they alternate is hardly marked, nor is who the speakers are. This obscurity may be confusing to readers like us, who must familiarize themselves with the characteristics of biblical forms of language through practice. If this familiarity is innate, anonymity has a concentrating effect. The focus is entirely on the message that is quickly transmitted from heaven to earth: God is coming.[76]

Though he doesn't expound on a similar dynamics of "hardly marked" voices within Isa 45:9–17 I contend that anonymity as prerequisite fact of interpretation, also foregrounds Beuken's polyphonic voicing of Isa 45:15 from the prophet. In the next chapter we will investigate further the function of the anonymity of speaker at v. 15. In the prophet's confession respective resonances of both the nations and exiles perspective of divine hiddenness are able to mingle. Both are reflecting on "the manner in which he saves Israel from exile": from the

[75] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 9.
[76] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 15

perspective of the nations, wonder at the alien power of Yahweh, a deity in exile. For the exiles, irritation that continues on from their opening charge of despair in Isa 40:27 regarding Yahweh's governance of the world. It might appear, then, that we see nothing new in Beuken's exegesis. Yet, he is clear that the prophet is painting a portrait in vv. 14–17 from "traditional expectations" (i.e. the nations coming to serve Israel) which is qualified by vv.18–25. So, in this interpretation of vv. 14–17, not even the prophet is able to follow Yahweh's tracks to fully understand what deliverance from exile will mean. The import of the prophet's confession of God's hiddenness and salvation is, from this standpoint, still rich with dramatic irony. This is especially so in light of Beuken's insistence that Israel must grasp hold of "an entirely new orientation," and see how Yahweh is "behind the scenes of current events," lest they become an enemy.[77] What the prophet is unable to see, undoubtedly, is the *scope* of Yahweh's salvation.

[77] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA*, 298–299 and 70 respectively.

6. Hidden Speaker, Hidden God

In each of the last three chapters I have reviewed, in tandem, the moves of two interpreters for whom the Old Testament functions as Christian Scripture.[1] I have endeavored to charitably evaluate considerations of pre-understanding that help draw the scholars toward their respective voicings and contribute to their making of meaning. Only in chapter three, however, did I gesture to the influence a Jewish canonical frame of reference might have on one's interpretation of Isa 45 in chapter three. At the outset of this chapter I will discuss the insights of Eliezer Berkovits on Isa 45. While an evaluation of Berkovits' work redresses the glaring lacuna of a significant post-Holocaust Jewish interpreter (important in its own right), it also sharpens and further informs the Christian readings already on offer.[2] As Richard S. Briggs has observed, the interpretive differences (especially regarding the prophet Isaiah) reflect even more than just theological variance but,

> the embodiment in two different traditions of different ways of reading that produce different questions and answers in the approach to the same texts. Christian and Jewish readings may be sharpened, improved, and challenged by exposure to each other...[3]

It is my hope that by nesting Berkovits between the three voicings from paired Christian interpreters (chapters 3–5) and my own suggested reading of Isa 45:15 later in this chapter light will be cast to creatively and concomitantly augment and chasten each of these other readings.

6.2 Berkovits and Beyond

In the previous chapter I referred to Wim Beuken's role as facilitator in helping the reader of Isaiah 40–48 "participate in the drama of faith in this book." Beuken underscores this participation as "dynamic event" and more related to the question of "which situation the book

[1] See introduction, fn. 31 and 32.

[2] The choice of Berkovits may seem an odd one, perhaps even unfair. Arguably a Jewish biblical scholar such as Benjamin Sommer would have been a better genre-fit to the Christian interpreters analyzed here (his influence throughout says as much: 1.3.2; 2.3; 3.3.3; 4.3). However, as this chapter moves into a far more overtly existential engagement with and by means of the textual world of Isa 40-48, Berkovits' attention to the relationship between theodicy and the covenant community –as rooted in a specifically Jewish reading tradition – is more compelling for my purposes.

[3] Richard S. Briggs, "Biblical Criticism" in John Frow (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Literary Theory* (Oxford and NY: OUP, 2022), 11. I wish to register my thanks to Dr. Briggs for granting me access this article, pre-publication.

moves us to," than "what historical point in time [the prophet spoke]."[4] This inflection on readerly participation in Isaiah 40–48's theological vision certainly contributes to Beuken's seeing the widening of the prophetic lens at Isa 45:14–25 in a dramatic progression that culminates in an appeal that is universal in scope to turn to Yahweh, as the only deity who can save. Beuken is circumspect to note that "universal" does not obscure or obliterate a boundary or border between Israel and the nations, since those who recognize Yahweh as savior and "allow themselves to be saved, thereby enter the seed of Israel."[5] I will juxtapose this reading with the philosophy of Eliezer Berkovits in the following section.[6] It will become more evident how that "drama of faith" bears upon interpretation in an altogether different existential key for a Jewish theologian and philosopher such as Berkovits than it does for Beuken, or any of the Christian interpreters previously discussed.

We must first situate Berkovits' reflections on Isa 45:15 within his wider project. In his *Faith After the Holocaust* Berkovits presents a Jewish philosophy of history that countenances the problem of faith in glaring contemporary articulation: how does one reconcile the European holocaust with Judaism's faith in a personal God? His answer, in addition to setting the holocaust in the larger context of Jewish experience, constructively weds together implications of Isa 45:7 and 45:15. First he relates Isa 45:7 to the necessary deduction that God is ultimately responsible for the evil of the Holocaust (in the sense of creating evil "by creating the possibility for evil"). This in turn raises the age-old question of theodicy. In this Berkovits (as we have seen in Balentine and others already) disambiguates one form of God's "hiding his face" from another: the first, judgment; the second – largely prevalent in the Psalter – "apparent divine indifference toward the plight of man."[7] In explicating divine hiddenness as an axiological principle and a necessity, Berkovits employs Isa 45:15. However, his interest is to explicate why God's presence in history *must* remain unconvincing; why, essentially, does the Jewish nation go on adorning God with attributes the likes of which are "contradicted by the facts of history," fully aware that "we contradict our experiences with our affirmations."[8] His answer, which he refers to as "the divine dilemma," is indebted to rabbinic reflection on the plural form of God's

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[4] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA,* 13; 9 respectively.

[5] Beuken, *Isaiah Deel IIA,* 257. For a different take on the relationship of particularity to universality in dialogue with scholarship on Isaiah 40–48, a stimulating discussion of election, and one which clarifies in what ways *where* we speak from informs *how* we speak, see Joel S. Kaminsky, "The Concept of Election and Second Isaiah: Recent Literature", *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 31, no. 4 (2001): 135–44.

[6] See C. Pilkington for an extended discussion on Berkovits' interaction with Isa 45:15 in relation to the Holocaust as thematically and theologically apposite and illuminating to the wider Isaianic context. Christine Pilkington, "The Hidden God in Isaiah 45:15–A Reflection from Holocaust Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 1995: 48(3), 285–300.

[7] Eliezer Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1973), 101.

[8] Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust*, 100–101.

long-suffering, *Erek Apayim*: God's patience to some (the wicked) is "of necessity, identical with his *Hester Panim*, his hiding of the countenance, to others." Human freedom and the inevitability of human evil is accounted for alongside the reality of human suffering in the seeming absence of God:

> That man may be, God must absent himself; that man may not perish in the tragic absurdity of his own making, God must remain present. The God of history must be absent and present concurrently. He hides his presence. He is present without being indubitably manifest; he is absent without being hopelessly inaccessible. Thus, many find him even in his "absence"; many miss him even in his presence. Because of the necessity of his absence, there is the "Hiding of the Face" and suffering of the innocent; because of the necessity of his presence, evil will not ultimately triumph; because of it, there is hope for man.[9]

It is, however, in Berkovits' raising and answering the next related question that the participatory and experiential dimensions of his interpretation of Isaiah become most illuminating. The question is: "how can one prove an unconvincing presence convincingly?"[10] His answer, taken from a Talmudic discussion, is also Isaianic at heart: "The awesomeness of God is revealed in the survival of Israel." The character of this disclosure is power through weakness:

> …he is present in history. He reveals his presence in the survival of his people Israel. Therein lies his awesomeness. God renders himself powerless, as it were, through forebearance and long-suffering, yet he guides. How else could his powerless people have survived!...Because of that, Israel could endure God's long silences without denying him.[11]

Though one may argue that the projects and genres of Beuken and Berkovits make for an ill-fitted comparison, it seems to me that their respective projects and genre reveal important features *for* comparison. The "drama of faith" (to use Beuken's phrase), the means by which each of them enters into and participates in the Isaianic discourse, is markedly different. Beuken,

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[9] Berkovits, *Faith*, 107.

[10] Berkovits, *Faith*, 107. This is the very struggle of Isaiah 40–48 as prophecy.

[11] Berkovits, 108–109. Despite his understandable antipathy to a certain Christian philosophy of history heavy with triumphalism (e.g., 114; 118–19), I find, nonetheless, a particularly poignant analogue to Berkovits' theological reconciliation of God's *Hester Panim* with his *Erech Apayim* in the Christian gospel, in which the might of God is displayed by means of bewildering restraint.

begins his interpretation of Isa 45:15 in direct correspondence to DI's historical and theological frame of reference. This is as to be expected. He is, after all, writing a commentary. However, though muted, a broader Christian canonical influence shapes Beuken's framing up of Isa 45:14–17 in an anticipatory relation to the climactic and unexpected inclusion of the nations in the "seed of Israel" at Isa 45:18–25. In contradistinction, Berkovits' exploration of Isaiah 45 is in attending overtly to contemporary issues of theodicy, the bruised reed of belief in God in a post-Holocaust reality. In referring to the Jewish people he employs the Isaianic idiom: "the children of the *am olam*, the eternal people." His participation in the prophets, though contemporary and in a philosophical idiom, is also deeply indebted to Talmudic sources. Berkovits is not so much "moved to" a certain situation by Isaiah 40–48 as he already exists in its tensive ambiguity, which is related to the blunt and revelatory fact of his own existence as a Jew.

In Beuken's reading the prophet is able to gather together both the nations' and Israel's "voicing," because of the soon-to-follow proclamation of an Israel composed of both parties in response to the divine invitation. Berkovits, on the other hand, understands the prophet to speak axiomatically in relation to a particularly Jewish predicament. Unlike many Christian interpreters who stand in a relation to the nations by means of historical reconstruction or perhaps even an eschatological vision with which there is some existential connection, Berkovits' philosophy of history is informed by immense fracture between the Jewish people and nations, particularly later Christian nations.

With this comparison I wish to suggest a dramatic irony: Beuken's freedom to conceive of an Israel inclusive of the nations is underwritten by his not actually being ethnically "of Israel."[12] His participation is, by nature of this fact, a very different drama and one that affords distancing, even while it seeks to enter the sweep of Isaiah's drama.[13] It is a drama which lacks the contemporary urgency, the painful contingencies of the present, the inescapable continuity between the exilic-Isaianic-past and the present theodicy-tinged question, "what faith will *be* in our future?" that we find in Berkovits.[14] In this sense, it may also be a reading that does not adequately countenance and reflect on a particularly Christian crisis of faith, post-Holocaust. This is not, of course, to urge the reader to see Berkovits' participation in the drama of Isaiah as superior to that of Beuken. It is, however, to admit to its fundamental difference; predicated on

[12] In the very least, entering into "the seed of Israel" means (or *can* mean) something completely different for a non-Jewish Christian than it does for a non-Christian Jew.

[13] I fully realize Beuken's work is more existentially informed and participatory in nature than a great many Protestant commentaries of the last hundred years. This seems to strengthen the point.

[14] An important question for a Christian interpreter, Berkovits might argue, in light of his declaration that the holocaust is a Christian catastrophe, from the point of view of the spirit, "much more than a Jewish one." Berkovits, *Faith*, 18.

past and present participation in very different traditioning communities and canonical worlds of association.

To push the point one step further, Berkovits opens *Faith After the Holocaust* with a sobering challenge to both himself and his readers to take stock of exactly where they stand, what they have or have not experienced, and how it relates to the authority of their faith-affirmations or radical negations in the wake of the Holocaust. As Berkovits forcefully confesses, he has no right to the confession of a survivor, since he was not there:

> Who is the one who truly relates to this awesome issue? Is it not the person who actually experienced it himself, in his own body and soul?...Or is it someone who read about it, heard about it, may have, perhaps, even experienced it in his identifying imagination?

In relation to the *Shoa* Berkovits answers: "The Response of these two cannot–dare not–be the same." Yet, how do these important considerations of "where we stand," of our experiences in relation to events, and our "identifying imagination" relate to our reading and interpretating divine hiddenness in the exilic poetry of Isaiah? I am, I think, more optimistic than Berkovits, as relates to the prospects of the identifying imagination, the process of participatory exegesis.[15] What funds such involvement certainly demands time and introspection. I do not, of course, wish to imply that only one who has experienced the earthly hell of the holocaust can interpret exilic literature with authority. Rather, I think Berkovits' reflections in relation to the Holocaust serve to underscore that which is often marginalized as a constructive contribution to biblical interpretation: the actual experiences, analogous or otherwise, of the interpreter in relation to the subject matter. It is worth circumspection how and to what degree "genuine contact with the world,"[16] under study is made possible.

Though the juxtaposition of Berkovits and Beuken is enlightening, we do well not to conflate one's ability to interpret the experience of the *Shoa* with one's ability to interpret the prophet Isaiah. There are undoubtedly analogues between the ancient Israelite experience of the Babylonian exile and the modern Jewish experience of the *Shoa*. Berkovits' reflections keep us sober to the reality of where we stand and the way our identities and experiences contribute (both to forge and delimit) our interpretive undertakings. However, to bring the question back to

[15] My use of the term here stems from Beuken's gesturing towards a readerly participation and not (at least directly) from the more overtly metaphysical argument of Matthew Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis: A Theology of Biblical Interpretation* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2008).

[16] Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust*, 4. Berkovits is contrasting the actual experiences of those "who were there" with the remove of both radical theologians or pious submission of the holocaust as act of faith who cannot succeed in "establishing genuine contact with the world of the *Shoa*."

bear on Isa 40–48: how might one succeed in establishing "genuine contact" with the world *of the text*? Is this at all possible?

6.3. Imagination and Refiguration: Establishing Contact with the World of the Text

To help us understand better what Beuken referred to as the "situation the book moves us to;" the way in which the reader participates "in the drama of faith in this book," we will now consider the relationship between readerly imagination and establishing contact with the world of the text. Rowan Williams has described the function of imaginative writing as the creation of space to test identities, a process of, at times, "disturbing re–visioning," a space "for seeing the self and its world afresh. So that's what I'm like (or am I?)."[17] Richard Briggs refers to this "large-scale truth-imagining path of readerly enchantment" in Barthian terms as a bid for construing the world in a very specific way, one that is most true to the nature and construction of human identities and purposes. In this process we are addressed: *behold the text, behold the world it imagines, behold the difference such imagination makes to the reader.*[18] Briggs describes this process from the work of Ricoeur as the textual refiguration of the reader "by way of recasting the self in a world made new by the text in question".[19] This is also true of the 'parallel world' style fantasy of C.S. Lewis that Rowan Williams describes. Yet, what of poetry?

The poet Malcolm Guite has argued a similar "truth-bearing" quality for poetry and the poetic imagination as offering a "redress of an imbalance in our vision of the world and ourselves."[20] As Jonathan Culler states, "narrative poems recount an event; lyrics…strive to be an event."[21] Edward Hirsch has written about how poetry creates a participatory relationship in the negotiation of meaning between poet, poem, and reader, ultimately inviting the reader to

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[17] Rowan Williams, *Lost Icons: Reflections on Cultural Bereavement.* (London: Continuum, 2003), 18–20.

[18] Richard S. Briggs, "Biblical Criticism," 5. See also the helpful riff on Tolkien's subcreation en-route to envisioning Scripture's "secondary world" in Richard S. Briggs, "'These are the Days of Elijah': The Hermeneutical Move from 'Applying the Text' to 'Living in It's World,'" *JTI*, 8:2 (Penn State Uni Press: Fall, 2014), 170–71.

[19] Briggs, "Biblical Criticism," 9. See the work of William Schweiker on Riceour's theory of imagination and how interpretation follows an arch from "pre-understanding through the configuration of the world in the poetic text to the appropriation of the world displayed by it." William Schweiker, *Mimetic Reflections: A Study in Hermeneutics, Theology, and Ethics,* 99.

[20] Malcolm Guite, *Faith, Hope and Poetry: Theology and the Poetic Imagination* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012) 1. Lewis famously refers to imagination as "the organ of meaning," and declares poets chief among meaning-makers, boldly stating that, "all our truth...is won by metaphors." See "Blusphels and Flalanferes: A Semantic Nightmare" in C.S. Lewis, *Selected Literary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 251–265 (265). The power of an image from poetry or painting to inspire, challenge, or shape one's way of seeing is well-attested. For one moving and unexpected illustration of this reality, the actor Bill Murray recollects how an unplanned encounter with the painting, "The Song of the Lark" refigured his vision and renewing him: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eOIcWB7jSA

[21] In Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry*, 185.

change.[22] In this vein, Francis Landy describes the transformative nature of Isaiah's prophecy as "metaphorical, transporting us somewhere beyond, or to a different place, unsettling and destroying, the familiar...not just the transfer of X to Y, but the movement through both terms to a different conception...what is ultimately transported is the human (or divine) audience, reader, seer, poet."[23] Landy is certainly attentive to the way in which the form of the poetry, its dissociative nature and inability to be domesticated, are characteristics which mirror the relational rupture between God and people.[24] In this way the poetry's form is itself "metaphor that measures ... incommensurability.. one looks and is blinded at the same time."[25] In reading the poetry of this relational tension one is beckoned to lose one vision and gain another. This is, I think, deeply related to the overarching themes of idolatry and the relationship of blindness to the worship of images therein. So, in what way are we transported by Isa 40–48? How might *we* be refigured? How is our vision transformed as we participate in this poetry?

The text of Isa 40–48 proffers an alternative world, an alternative *vision*, or way of perceiving. In this vision Jacob/Israel, Yahweh, idol-fabricators, idols, and the nations are all re-described for the primary addressee, exilic Israel. The process of rediscription is inexorably bound to perceptive possibility. Perception, the ability to both hear and see what God is saying,[26] is at the heart of both the book as a whole,[27] and more particularly Isaiah 40–48. Though I do not follow those who understand Isaiah 40–55 as liturgical drama, I sympathize with many of their reasons for taking it as such.[28] The dramatic legal imagery and liturgical-hymnic aspects of the poetry work together to construe the exilic Israelites as addressees beckoned into a world-as-redescribed and given the opportunity to partake in the redescription. Here we are immersed in what Rowan Williams refers to as "the interaction of personal agents and speakers...persons in

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[22] Edward Hirsch, *How to Read a Poem: And Fall in Love with Poetry* (San Diego: Harvest Books/Harcourt, 2000), 60.

[23] Francis Landy, "Vision and Voice in Isaiah," *JSOT* 88 (2000), 27.

[24] Though I learn much from Landy I do not go as far as his deconstructionist reading to say that the intractability of Isaiah's language and poetry is the fashioning of a poetic world which decomposes.

[25] Landy, "Vision and Voice," 31.

[26] The aphorism is lifted from Richard Briggs' title "On 'Seeing' What God is Saying" in Roger Kojecký and Andrew Tate (eds.), *Visions and Revisions*: *The Word and Text* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 29–42.

[27] Here we might recall that Isaiah is given to us a חזון, a vision which Isaiah חזה, or envisioned. As Marvin Sweeney has noted the emphasis is on overall perception, "insofar as *ḥazâ* includes both visual and audial perception in its full meaning." Marvin Sweeney, *Isaiah 40–66*, 24. The centrality of the sensorium and the interpretive challenges of divine culpability in the people's obduracy are prominent and paradoxical features in Isaiah 6 and elsewhere (e.g., Isa 35).

[28] van der Woude observes that "the fact that Isa 40–55 is a text that stimulates the reader to hear different voices while reading it" has led many to read it *as* a drama. But *is* it a drama? This is van der Woude's question. His conclusion is that, although this text stimulates readerly imagination and participation, it lacks plurimedial presentation and should therefore be understood as a *reading drama*. Annemarieke van der Woude, ""Hearing Voices While Reading": Isaiah 40–55 as a Drama," 149.

dialogue," who are "formed by the exchange of words," shaping one another with their speech.[29] In this discourse the divine speaker repeatedly states: *this is who I am / this is who you are; this is what I am / this is what you are*. To this, as we alluded and answered (in one reading from chapter four), Israel is invited to respond, "is *that* really what I am? / who you *really* are?" I want to argue that Isaiah 45:15 is the moment in which both the original and later audiences reply, "this is who *you* are," to the unflagging divine address.

6.3.1 Blind Speaker, Hidden God: An Imaginative Proposal

I will argue for a reading of Isa 45:14–17 that stresses the importance of reading this passage in the entire sequential flow of Isa 40–45 (seriatim). In this reading the significance of figurative language with a specific focus on what I understand to be the text's rhetoric of blindness and sight will also figure prominently. This will be related to the relational fracture between Yahweh and his people which is being refracted throughout the poetry of Isa 40–48.

This reading posits exilic Israel, the overarching direct addressee of Isa 40–48, as the most compelling voicing of Isa 45:15. The imaginative demands made upon exilic Israel as original audience are significant. Israel's embedded complaint at Isa 40:27 voices anguish that its way is "hidden from Yahweh". This precipitates the extended prophetic address which boldly invites the refiguration of the *claimant*. One of the central metaphors the intended audience of Jacob-Israel is asked to identify with is that of "blind witness" (Isa 42–43).[30] I agree with Katie Heffelfinger's observation that the privileging of divine speech in response to Israel's fears of abandonment is likely an explicit and structural answer to the complaint itself. I argue that this all-pervasive "presence" of the divine voice also takes the construal of intended audience as

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[29] Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky*, 113. In fact, the portrayals of the exilic addressee which follow (whether it be a worm transmogrified into threshing sledge with razor sharp teeth, a people "trapped in holes and hidden in prisons," or as blind and deaf witness) are something analogous to Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov. The reader of *Crime and Punishment* is told that Raskolnikov has put forth his views in a monologic essay, yet the only access the reader is granted to these views is, "as they are discussed by characters." Barbara Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship* (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2000), 149. The Jacob-Israel which we are given to see (and here even the name 'Jacob-Israel' as addressee is meaningful) exists in dialogical interaction between divine-prophetic portrayal and the hearer's imaginative construal. My point here is not to deny the historical referent of exilic Israel. Quite to the contrary, as an Israelite exilic community the original audience, the dynamic of prophetic portrayal and hearer response (here better referred to as re-construal with the exiles in mind), are central to understanding what transpires within Isaiah 40-48. That is, the readerly question, "how is Israel construed in this text?" is not detached from the pressing existential issues within the work itself. Rather, questions of construal here – regarding both YHWH and Israel – might be clarified by pushing back to the Latin *construere*, with its graphic building or fabrication imagery. Explicit to the argument of Isa 40-48 is that YHWH is unfashionably un-construable (Isa 40:18-20; 40:25; 46:5-7). As we have seen in chp. 2 the implicit corollary to the argument is that YHWH's unfashionable construal of Israel is his chosen means of self-disclosure over against the idol-fabrication of the nations, unto which Israel's turning is literally un-becoming.

[30] Though I agree with Melugin (pace Hessler) that reading the whole of DI as a literary *replica* of a trial might be forced, I am less suspicious of the possibility that salvation oracles and other lyrical poems are being worked into a more overarching structure permeated by forensic imagery.

blind with utmost imaginative seriousness. As Heffelfinger argues, the form and content of Second Isaiah produces disorientation in the reader, making them 'lost in Second Isaiah' in which they must encounter the "overwhelming presence of the speaking deity."[31] The rhetorical goal of Isa 40–48 is to lead to a very focused disorientation and lostness; one in which the intended audience is confronted with their "blindness" and refigured. The ultimate aim of the address is that Israel would witness even blindly to the seemingly rhetorical question: "to whom will you compare me?" (Isa 40:25; 46:5) I suggest reading the confession of Isa 45:15 as integral to this sought-after witness.

As I have sought to illustrate in chapter two, through the many "you are" statements in juxtaposition with the images/idols in Isa 40–48, Israel is also ironically construed as the functional equivalent of the *tsalmu*; that which displays the splendor and glory of Yahweh. If Yahweh's "eternal people" confess v.15 what does it mean? I affirm Balentine's reading of the "I am" / "You are" interchange between Yahweh and exilic Israel. However, I posit that he did not take his detailed reading far enough back in the discourse, to connect with Yahweh's "you are" language to Israel in Isa 42–44. Doing so enriches Isa 45:15 by underscoring its native connection to the wider concern in Isa 40–48 regarding images/idols and the overarching question with playful or ironic inclusio אֶל-מִי תְדַמְּיוּן אֵל (Isa 40:18). As part of our attempt to take seriously this construal of Israel speaking "blindly" at 45:15, as well as a desire to better understand possible positive resonances of the statement, the next section heuristically employs the account of John M. Hull, who has written extensively on his experiences of going blind. We will begin by reviewing several aspects of Hull's life and work which highlight his fit as a conversation partner.

On Sight and Insight

John Hull developed cataracts in both eyes at the age of thirteen. This led to several months of blindness after which his sight was restored. However, he subsequently experienced a series of retinal detachments and operations which lead to him eventually going blind. Hull spent much of his life in theological and religious studies.[32] He interprets blindness in several publications edited from his personal journals. These offer a discrete philosophy, theology, and sociology of blindness; one provided in fragments, which seeks creatively to turn the "stigma of

[31] Heffelfinger, *I am Large*, 148.

[32] He studied theology at Cambridge (1959–62) and went on to receive a Ph.D. in Theology from the University of Birmingham (1969), where he served as Senior Lecturer and, later, was awarded a personal chair as Professor of Religious Education (1989). Biographical details taken from: http://www.johnmhull.biz/about_jmh.html (accessed 12.20.21).

blindness into a calling, from stigma to stigmata," in its ability to creatively resource human beings in confronting the processes by which human existence are despiritualized.[33] In other words, Hull understands his task as theological and prophetic.[34]

I will foreground my reading (Isa 45:15 in relation to the characterization of Israel as blind witness in Isa 42–43) in light of John M. Hull's writings on blindness. By doing so particular insight into the following will be garnered: first, a better understanding of how blindness relates to fracture and alienation between the sighted and the blind; second, a better correlation between blindness and the importance of voice (related to the centrality in Isa 40–48 of the divine speaking subject to Israel as primary addressee); lastly, we will consider the constructive dimensions of relating an experience of blindness in fragmentary form and how this fruitfully relates to the poetic form of Isa 40–48.

Blindness, Relational Intimacy, and the Speaking Voice

Hull describes his degree of *felt*-blindness, a consciousness of darkness within his internal 'field of vision', as being intimately related to the degree of relational intimacy with a loved one or contact within "an environment which is richly stored with many tactile memories."[35] The situation of blindness, according to Hull, must both "interpret and be interpreted."[36] Hull's poignant narrative details the strange and strained relationality between sightlessness and presence.

What can this confession mean if spoken by one blind? It most certainly does not mean that God is absent. Though it may seem ridiculously obvious, when someone hides it does not mean that this same one actually disappears. This accentuates the relational component all the more. I contend that, if in Isa 40–48 it feels as if God is shouting, this can be related to the construal of his primary addressee, Israel, as blind and deaf. Though this may seem humorous, it is anything but. The relational deterioration between Yahweh and His people Jacob-Israel is not *only* owing to their transgressions - especially idolatry. Rather, it is the loss of mutuality between the sighted and the blind in which the "immediacy of unselfconscious participation in an event" is lost:

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[33] This is taken from Hull's postscript, "The Meaning of Blindness" in John M. Hull, *On Sight and Insight: A Journey into the World of Blindness*, (London: SPCK, 1997), 232–34.

[34] John M. Hull, *Towards the Prophetic Church: A Study of Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press, 2014), 10. Hull also served as Chair of the Committee for Prophetic Ministry at the Queen's Foundation Centre for Ministerial Formation from 2008 till his passing in 2015.

[35] John M. Hull, *On Sight and Insight*, 21. He describes intimacy and tactile clusters of cognition as having the emotional value of light and having quality of interior luminosity.

[36] Hull, *On Sight and Insight*, 49. I am genuinely indebted to his interpreting blindness, which has provided me insights of Isa 40–48 I could not, from within my own sighted experience, come upon, even if I intuited something of their dimension.

> A common deterioration of mutuality takes place when a blind and a sighted person believe, or one of them believes, that they are in a face-to-face situation but in fact you, the sighted one, are looking out of the window. I lean forward expectantly waiting for your next remark but you are reading a letter. *You are no longer paying attention to me, but I do not know that* … We seem to share the same space and time but the fact that I cannot read your emotions and experiences in your face and in the movement of your body means that the sharing is no longer so intimate. The data of togetherness have become meagre.[37]

Hull's descriptions of the relational fracturing illustrates the impact of blindness on his ability to experience the presence of another. The grief of losing the immediate presence of loved ones in their remembered form is helpful, even if just heuristically.[38] If we take this disparity, or distancing, between the all-seing (Yahweh) and the recently become blind (exilic Israel) with utter seriousness (even just on literary terms as a way to figure cleavage), the contours of Isa 40–48 which Katie Heffelfinger has well traced become even clearer:

> Yhwh's overwhelming speaking presence in Second Isaiah is one way in which the poetry attempts to overcome the audience's voiced despair and mistrust.[39]

Heffelfinger's description of the divine speaking voice as dominant presence in Isa 40–55 is sharpened in light of Hull's descriptions of blindness. Not only does he underscore the immense importance of speech to the blind, but he goes so far as to state it thus, "For a blind person, people are not there *unless they speak*."[40] Conversely, the alienating effects of blindness are described in this way: "the world before which we stand in a sort of mutuality of presence…is so fragmented by blindness."[41] How then to account for the tension between this divine "shouting" and the claim of blind Israel in this reading of Isa 45:15? If Isa 45:15 be the interjection of a blind speaker (even metaphorically posited as such), its meaning may be probed by a better

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[37] Hull, *On Sight and Insight*, 107.

[38] This is especially of interest when taken together with his descriptions of the piqued bodily awareness that comes with the growing experience of blindness, of literally "being surrounded by a presence" (85) Here he does not mean so much an abstract numinous, but rather the hum and vibrations as experienced while moving through time-space. See also his reflections on how relationships are presented to the blind and the uniqueness of 'presence' to them because of this; Hull, *On Sight and Insight*, 140.

[39] Heffelfinger, *I am Large*, 98.

[40] Hull, *On Sight and Insight*, 87. Italics mine.

[41] Hull, *On Sight and Insight*, 118.

understanding of the immense effort the blind must exert all the time to know who or what is present to them; just in order to know *if someone is there*.[42]

Prescencing Blindsight through Fragmentary Forms

The last aspect of Hull's account I want to explore for heuristic purposes relates to the fragmentary nature of his chosen form for relating the experience of blindness and how this may fruitfully inform our reading of Isa 40–48. This leading of the sighted into darkness by way of fragmented journal entries is, according to Hull, in purposeful contradistinction to other books he had read by or about the blind (which, however inspiring they might have been, he found to be, like novels and thus not at all like his own experience of blindness). His account in going "round and round," and "all over the place," seeks to mimetically probe the excruciating problematics of consciousness and perception he was experiencing.[43] That is, the genre or formal elements seek to purposefully portray the painful and bewildering ontological shift into blindness. I intend these form-related comments as instructive when compared with Isa 40–48's circuitous form and, as Heffelfinger has noted, "lack of plot."[44] I think there is much to be gained in hearing this section of Isaiah *as if* from the perspective of a bewildered addressee/hearer who has become blind. In this reading, then, form and content metaphorically co-conspire to transport the reader into blindness. The poetic medium (in which, as Heffelfinger has noted, relational rupture is voiced through vacillations in tonality or modalities) constructs an auditory and imaginative world to be experienced *as* blind.[45] Not only is the intended audience (historically, exilic Israel) addressed metaphorically as blind - but the message is being heard, reported, or constructed as if to foster or inculcate the experience of blindness. I submit that this is all rhetorically related: the veritable swarming of voices at Isa 40:1–11, the well-rehearsed ambiguities inherent in identifying the "servant" who will open the eyes of the blind (Isa 42:7),[46] the poetic paratactic movement from idol-polemic to blindness (Isa 42:16–22; 44:17–18). Hull's

[42] Hull, *On Sight and Insight*, 107. See also reflections on his own uncertainty after becoming blind to distinguish whether or not he "had been in the presence" of a colleague; 151.

[43] See preface to John M. Hull, *Notes on Blindness: A Journey through the Dark* (London: Profile Books). Published previously as *Touching the Rock: An Experience of Blindness* (London: SPCK, 1990; 2013).

[44] Though lyric poetry does, in this sense, fashion a world even if entirely distinctive and non-narrative. Heffelfinger describes this as the "offering of an encounter," in *I am Large*, 275.

[45] See the summary of her argument, Heffelfinger, *I am Large*, 276.

[46] What reader has not, after reading Isa 42:1–9 or 49:1–7, gone back to re-read Isa 41:8, taking comfort in its seeming clarity? There Israel and Jacob are named "servant" and "chosen." Or, we push forward to 44:1 to see, once again, Israel/Jacob explicitly relayed as "servant/chosen". The identity and the identification of the servant and the relationship of servant to Israel is one of the poem's near aporias. It is not accidental that in each of the "servant songs" we find either the language of hiddenness or the talk of opening of eyes or both.

project of prophetic redescription focuses us on an all-too-easily missed existential dimension of how Isa 40–48 is refiguring us. We are meant to be overwhelmed, to become lost, to experience the bewilderment of not being able to easily identify or identify with, to struggle to know what "side we are on," and how this all relates to the correlation of Yahweh's promise of presence with his chosen means of salvation.[47] We are, in one sense, beckoned into blindness.

Hull describes the process by which we are relieved of "false consciousness" and moved into what I am refer to as the paradox of blindsight.[48] Here he uses language from Isaiah 6:

> You then realize that you have looked and looked but never seen, seen but never perceived, perceived but never understood, understood but never repented, repented but never acted. Why is it that the path from one consciousness to another is by way of this inversion? There is no direct path. There is a long detour, a stripping off, a laying bare, a circuitous track by means of which we discover that in losing everything, not everything is lost, that in abandonment, not everything is abandoned, that in losing we find...[49]

The remarks above help create in us a disposition more attentive to the relationship of form and content, to what I argue the text of Isaiah is trying to accomplish.[50]

6.3.2 Blindsight: Refiguring our Interpretive Lens

I know of no reading that construes the speaker of Isa 45:15 speaking blindly (even as a heuristic thought experiment). As an interpretive option the reasons for eschewing such a reading become apparent rather early on in one's endeavors. To begin with, an interpretive journey in this trajectory cannot insist on certainty. It accentuates the experiential, the subjective. Questions of whether the statement is ironic, or not, also arise. Is the God of Israel being revealed as deliverer "right under the nose" of the speaker, and they cannot see it, because they

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[47] This difficulty to see or identify could be correlated with Hull's descriptions of memories, the facial features of loved ones, beginning to blur. This could also make more comprehensible the vacillation of imperatives to alternatively "remember" and "forget" in Isa 40–48.

[48] Here I adopt Robert P. Carroll's term "blindsight," though I use it somewhat differently. The scientific term for this is *agnosopsia*, which describes a perceptual phenomenon in which a patient, owing to damage to the striate cortext, is able to describe where an object is located despite their inability to see it. Though incredibly intriguing, this phenomenon is not the background to my reading and use of the term in this present context.

[49] Hull, *On Sight and Insight*, 233.

[50] As elsewhere the language reminiscent of an author-hermeneutic, even in ironically positing agency to the text, owes more to readerly convictions reached through years of inhabiting the "strange world of the text" (a la Barth). this chapter is *a reading*. In using the language above I riff on Jan Assmann in Yvonne Sherwood, *Biblical Blaspheming: Trials of the Sacred for a Secular Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 254.

are sightless?[51] The imaginative entailments cause interpretive insecurity. For the sighted to imagine themselves sightless is, at best audacious, and at worst, insulting. How does one imagine oneself as blind? Yet, that is precisely what this reading insinuates: that one must feel their way towards blindness in order to confess v. 15 aright, participating in the particularity of this drama of faith.

I do not propose that interpretive certainty regarding the speaker is arrived at in any descriptive sense. It is not so much that with the addition of "blindsight" we see from the text clearly now that the speaker *must* be exilic Israel. One could make a case that the three nations, or even the prophet, be posited as sightless. Despite my interpretive proclivity to see Israel as addressee in the painful and ironic blind/witness texts of Isa 42–43, one *could* understand the nations as being referred to, especially in the interplay between Isa 43:8–10. At v. 8 the object of the imperative "to bring out" is a "blind people" and this is masculine singular (עַם־עִוֵּר).[52] An attempt to drain the text of ambiguity would be to miss the *kind* of rhetorical encounter it offers.[53] The African nations of Isa 45:14 *could* be implicitly understood as sightless if associated with the metaphorical blindness that comes about through idol-fabrication (Isa 44:18; 45:20b). If the prophet's voice is heard at 48:16 and 49:2, then the prophet is also drawn deeply into the world of hiddenness. The textual world has furnished the reader with copious options to imagine sightlessness as informing this speech act.[54] Drawing on the above section on imagination and refiguration I want to gesture in what follows towards how the ubiquitous textual uncertainty acts upon the hearer, how it is theologically constructive.

The hearer/reader is invited to inhabit a position or relation within the text-world discourse in order to arrive at something of the appropriate existential *un*certainty to make the simplest of observations: what is manifestly hidden here is *the identity of the speaker*. I argue that the upshot of concealing the identity of the speaker precisely at this point of confession is to, on the

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[51] Indeed, as 45:9–11, alongside 46–48 seem to suggest Jacob-Israel's inability to see what is breaking out right under their nose, in the salvific event of Cyrus, is inexorably linked to the turning up of their nose at it. Thus such a reading risks suggesting that the locus classicus for God's hiddenness *could* (I do not say should) be read as suspect within the world of the text in the light of the possibility of construing the confessor as blind.

[52] However, v. 9 moves to the masculine plural subject (כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם). Though most references to עַם in Isa 40–48 seem to refer to the people of Israel (Isa 42:22; 43:21; 44:7), the ambiguity necessitates readerly participation.

[53] Katie Heffelfinger has argued similarly: "Ambiguity is a way in which the poem means. It invokes and creates the experience of divine hiddenness." Katie Heffelfinger, "Truth and Hidden Things," in Richard Briggs et al. (eds.) *A New Song: Biblical Hebrew Poetry as Jewish and Christian Scripture* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2023), 133. In what follows more descriptively to illustrate *how* the confession works to create this experience both with the heuristic account of blindness as well as from within my account of the reader's experience in the textual world's progression.

[54] I once had a wonderful interaction with a lay preacher and regional director with InterVarsity, who showed interest in this project. She reflected on once reading the whole book of Isaiah sequentially in a day: "Oh, I read Isaiah once, *terribly confusing*! I couldn't figure out *who I was*…or *where I was*. Was I one of the good guys, the bad guys, *who was I?*" I hope the present study illustrates what a *genuinely good* reading of the text this is. The present study seeks to show, as Culler argues, that the point of lyric poetry is not so much for the reader to work out *who is speaking*, but rather the lyric itself generates "lyric subjects," Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 2 and 169.

one hand, fully free the reader to 'take it up' and make it her own.[55] On the other hand, this is a sifting of the reader: who *are* you? This is congruent with the constructive, jarring, rhetorical affect it likely had upon its initial audience. Isa 45:15, by its very nature as poetic apostrophe and direct address invites the reader into a a participatory response, into active engagement with the overwhelming speaking subject of the text, Yahweh. As Briggs and Adams have helped demonstrate, the language of confession is self-involving in nature.[56] I seek to illustrate how this self-involvement is unavoidably *one of imaginative identification*.

This process of imaginative identification should not be thought of as something that only a later reader does with an original intended audience (via the process of historical reconstruction alone). Rather, the process of participation and dialogue is extended both to the original audience as well as all later readers. As Jim Adams has noted, reflecting on David Clines' *I, He, We, and They: A Literary Approach to Isaiah 53*, the textual world of Second Isaiah cannot "be viewed objectively, from the outside, as a spectator."[57] One must "enter the world of the poem…by identification with the personae of the poem, that is, by an assumption of the roles presented in the poem."[58] The paradox is, of course, that which drives this study: how does one identify with an unidentifiable personae, or personae difficult to identify? Though voices and identities can be addressed at times, they are just as often "unidentifiable and elusive, suggesting intentional ambiguity," all of which invites readerly self-involvement. I agree with Adams that the text "dramatically invites and leads its addressees/readers to *involve* them*selves* with itself and thereby become the people of God."[59] However, I want to stress that the difficulty in identification is also *the way* in which the poetry significantly problematizes this process of self-involvement. This is the constructive work in which the addressees/readers "become the people of God".

I maintain that the entirety of the rhetorical development that precedes Isa 45:15 is meant to draw the reader deeply into relational dislocation in order to accomplish this. By our pericope the addressee/reader is stripped of interpretive certainty regarding the identity of the speaker at Isa 45:15 within the discourse. Thus, whether one identifies with the primary addressee of exilic Israel (the audience "in the house") or the secondary addressees of the nations (the audience "on the stage") one *must* read Isa 45:15 as a personal confession. As the

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[55] As Culler writes, "What we 'hear' is our own ventriloquizing of ambiguously directed address, though we may, and in some cases certainly do, construe this as overhearing a distinctive poetic voice." Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 187.
[56] Jim W. Adams, *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40–55* , 57. (cf., Briggs' *Words in Action*, 240).
[57] Adams, *The Performative Nature*, 89.
[58] Adams (quoting Clines), *The Performative Nature*, 89.
[59] Adams, *The Performative Nature*, 90.

speaker is "hidden," in one sense, the reader while speaking the statement is also unable to see. They are reading blindly.

This helps affirm the confession of Isa 45:15 as deeply embedded in the particularity of *this* dialogue between Yahweh and Israel, the relational tension between the two parties revealed dialogically and sequentially through Isa 40–45 (and beyond).[60] As such we must recognize that the hiddenness of the speaker and the hiddenness of God are interrelated, and connected thematically to blindness and vision. This is an observation signaled by Robert P. Carroll (though not in relation to isa 45:15 explicitly):

> The hiding people and the hidden god are further tropes in the book of Isaiah which bear on the twin topics of blindness and insight....The figures of people and YHWH are bound together in their hiddenness because in a time when YHWH hides from the community (8:16), the people are plunged into darkness without light (8:21–9:2; cf. 64:7). The book of Isaiah interweaves images of the hidden god with figures of the community lost in darkness, blinded and unable to see – yet also hiding and boasting of invisibility (29:15). ...The multiplicity and density of these images in Isaiah point to a strong focus in the book on whatever the metaphysical metaphors connote about the community. [61]

Blindsighted Confession with the Exiles

What are the implications of "trying on" this literature, re-uttering it from inside its own discourse world?[62] To confess Isaiah 45:15 *as* the long-awaited and blindsighted witness of exilic Israel is illuminating for the following reasons: to begin with, it places the reader as the overarching "primary addressee" within the discourse. In this way it is attentive to the contours of both the sequential dialogue between exilic Israel and Yahweh and the participatory dimensions of the poetry. It takes with imaginative seriousness the courtroom drama that is furnished by the text (there is a resuimption to the forensic context in the immediately following pericope of Isa 45:18–25). It fruitfully relates witness and blindness to the previous two

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[60] As we have seen, two of the three speakers having been previously construed as blind.

[61] Carroll, "Blindsight and the Vision Thing," 85–86. Carroll takes the entirety of Isaiah as his interpretive canvas for his essay. I have largely delimited (put blinders on) the scope of this work to include Isa 40–48. Carroll relates the hiddenness of Yahweh and the deity's involvement in blinding and giving sight with the simple fact of Yahweh being "the focus of the community's central problem in the book of Isaiah." (83) I would nuance this to state that it is the tension toward reconciliation, to overcoming relational fracture between Yahweh and his people,which is the open-ended "intractable problem" into which the hearer is summoned. Especially in Isa 40–48 this is directly related to the fabrication of and prayer to images which obstructs the addressee from seeing itself as the equivalent.

[62] Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry*, 195. We saw this above in J. Adams and D. Clines as well.

components of dialogue and the forensic context (see chp. 4). Lastly, this reading draws Isa 45:15 into constructive contact with the nuanced juxtaposition of Israel and the image(s) and Yahweh with idol fabricators, which is very much at the heart of Isa 40–48's resounding question "to what will you liken me?" It is this reality which the intended audience needs to see and embrace but is unable to because of relational fracture. In the originating context this is due to the conditions of the exile, and, according to the prophet, because of its entanglement with idols.

In chapter two I presented Isa 40–48's participation through poetic parody in Mesopotamian symbolic discourse. This poetic parody sought to radically reconfigure the meaning of the divine image in Israel's imaginative landscape. There I argued for a reading of Isa 45:9–13 as parody of the witness of the image-craftsmen in the *mīs pî/pīt pî* ritual texts. Through the biting satire the addressees are called to envisage themselves as, like the divine images they were seemingly attracted to, in the process of fabrication and birth (via deliverance through Cyrus' agency). The purpose of this was to ironically "open the eye" of the addressee, for Israel to come to its senses, having been metaphorically cast as "blind witness" (Isa 43:8–13; 44:7–8). In the context of chapter two, however, I did not delve into the text's productive ambiguity as a rhetorical strategy. As Heffelfinger notes, the ambiguity in not overtly stating the addressee at 45:9–10 is intentional:

> Whoever the addressees are, they are invoked by a voice that characterizes them as disputing with the one who brought them into being. There are hints that Jacob/Israel is the addressee, particularly in the use of the verb 'fashioner' (*yōṣĕrô*) and in the use of offspring imagery (45:10 cf. 43:1), but the poetry avoids naming them as the addressee. Instead, associations create an increasingly likely tie between the audience themselves and the indictee. By forcing the audience to come to this recognition themselves, the poetry increases the audience's emotional involvement. It implicates them in the act of assigning indictment to themselves through recognition.[63]

In addition to this rhetorical strategy's implicating the audience in the act of assigning indictment, it would concurrently insinuate that the audience must recognize *their own correspondence to the divine image*, as that which is being wrought and brought to birth by the divine. The ambiguity of referential features here further encourages our carrying over the metaphor of both blindness and witness from the addresses of Isa 42–44. Is, then, the confession of Isa 45:15

[63] Heffelfinger and I argue along similar lines for the productive properties of the poetry's ambiguity, for the rhetorical force in what is produced in the space between form and content, and for the "re-envisioning" or re-describing of the participating audience. Katie Heffelfinger, "Truth and Hidden Things," 132.

a positive confession, one grasped through "blindsight"? Or, is this the text's way of undermining the confession itself? Is the witness discounted? If blind, can Israel with clarity make the claim?

6.3.3 A Hiddenness that Reveals

I do not think the reader is meant to be relieved of the uncomfortable ambiguities at this moment in the dramatic progression of the poetry.[64] In fact, an arrival at interpretive perspicuity at this point in the discourse is to read against the grain of the text. We must question the cost of coherence. I have become convinced that the confusion is rhetorically purposeful.[65] There is a tension full of meaning in all readerly attempts to identify the speaker, and one which implicates the reader in unavoidable self-involvement.

I am arguing that the impossibility of knowing exactly what is meant at v. 15 is directly owing to the rhetorical features of this poetry. Rather, the overabundance of meanings is a formal feature and outcome of the poetry that expresses the difficulty of divine speaker and intended audience to see what the other is saying. Isa 45:15 *could* be spoken by the addressee as its "aha moment": "you are not at all like the idols...rather, if anything, I am! For, you are the Only Creator, the fabricator of all things, even my own ends, through this strange deliverance!" On the other hand, it could be spoken as a sustaining of lament, bitter and bewildered (similar to the reading presented in chp. 4, though the intertextual element need not be determinative).

In the first of these options we might imagine Israel's metaphorical "blindsight" in stating "Indeed, you are a god who hides himself," as relating to the positive effects of the superfluity of divine mixed metaphors. Strawn and de Hulster have argued this to be a literary (if ironic) enactment of the image ban elsewhere. So also, in the extended addresses which precede the confession. The flooding of Israel's sensory organs with what Strawn and de Hulster refer to as *mischmetaphors* could lead to a state of metaphoric blindsight. This is a productive and purposeful "category jamming,"[66] which allows the audience to state positively, even if paradoxically, in light of all that has been stated: "you are a god who hides himself!"

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[64] With Beuken and van der Woude I affirm that the function and meaning of a motif as experienced by the reader is derived from the context in which it occurs in the dramatic progression of the discourse.

[65] Here I riff on Iris Murdoch: "Coherence is not necessarily good, and one must question its cost. Better sometimes to remain confused" (*Metaphysics*, 147), as quoted in Alan Jacobs, *A Theology of Reading: The Hermeneutics of Love* (Oxford: Westview Press, 2001), 78. Or, as Roger Scruton quips, no doubt about monographs such as this, "There is nothing wrong with referring at this point to the ineffable. The mistake is to describe it." Roger Scruton, *Confessions of a Heretic* (Kendal: Notting Hill Editions, 2021), 90.

[66] Strawn and de Hulster's discussion employs metaphor theory and insights on conceptual blending in a creative reading of Deut 32 in Ryan Bonfiglio, Brent A. Strawn, and Izaak De Hulster, eds. *Iconographic Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible: An Introduction to Its Method and Practice.* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 132.

In this sense v. 15 can be spoken as mystified encomium by Israel in light of the nations' direct address at 45:14. The nations' confession can be understood as its own "aha moment" (rhetorically placed by the prophet), in which they confess Israel as the locus of divine activity. This pericope is a confluence of confessions, then: that of the nations in v. 14 ("God is with you alone, and there is no other...no god besides"), from which the exiles turn in apostrophe to their deity in v. 15 ("*Truly*, you *are* a god who hides himself, God of Israel, Savior"). This all plays out as a response to the Cyrus oracle, which from the formal hymnic-elements of the text at 44:23 and 45:8 which bracket it, is understood as denouement in the divine defense (contra the claim at Isa 40:27). As Robert Alter notes, the phrasing in v. 14 may sound shocking from a monotheistic point of view, since it appears as if, "these peoples...prostrate themselves before [the Israelites] and worship them as though they were gods."[67] Alter, like many others, breaks the speech at v. 14 (noting that scholars take v. 15 as an interpolation!). His reflections here are insightful:

> If there is a connection [between v. 14 and v. 15] it might be this: it is hard to detect the presence or earthly manifestation of God, but He dwells (or perhaps hides) within the people of Israel, where foreigners now discern Him through His conquering power.[68]

Read as positive affirmation and mystified encomium, therefore, we can interpret v. 15 as inchoate dawning on the exilic audience of its *own* meaning: that over against the images of Babylon, and against all odds and evidence to the contrary, it is the nation of exiles who are (re)fabricated by the creator of the cosmos to display His glory. He will not give his glory to another, *besides* Israel (Isa 48:10–11). The process by which this deliverance occurs is rife with paradox and incongruity. In this understanding, it is possible that already in v. 15 Israel is seeing what God is saying.

However, as we will see in the explanation that follows, especially in the prophetic/divine response at Isa 45:16–17, 19–25 the relational estrangement between God and Israel is far from over. In fact, especially at Isa 46 and 48 the increased tone of confrontation and dispute, in which the paralleling of Israel and images, Yahweh and idol fabrication, figures centrally, signals continued relational estrangement. This raises the possibility that, contrary to the above presentation, at Isa 45:15 Israel is sustaining the tone of lament from Isa 40:27 (in

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[67] Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible*, 774, n. 14. For a clear example of a later interpreter's discomfort leading to semantic decontamination, see Shalom Paul's support of Luzzatto's circular reasoning: "clearly the prophet meant to say…that they will pray to your God." Thus, Paul proposes emending the MT to read **ואל אלהיך יתפללו.** Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, 266.

[68] Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible*, 774, n. 15.

something similar to, but not requiring, the intertextual reading of chapter four). It is my proposal that the ambiguity – the openness of being taken either way – *mirrors the ongoing relational fracture between Yahweh and His people*, which is both embedded in the literature, and also extended out to readers. This factor contributes to the rationale for reading v. 15 *as* exilic Israel. It is a blind witness in more ways than one. For, it is my contention that the poetry allows for a construal of even Yahweh requiring further clarification from Israel regarding what it means to say in this confession. It is possible that the Israel of the textual world understands the implication of Yahweh's hiddenness as coterminous with its own ontology, the means by which he paradoxically reveals his glory. However, if such an "aha" moment has been reached in the world of the text, judging by all that follows in the prophetic/divine reply, its significance and reception remain unclear. Yet, such a connection between Yahweh's hiddenness and Israel's ontology makes the need for clarity all the more paramount.

Jon Levenson reminds us of the importance of the very midrash that Berkovits discusses in connection with Isa 43:10:

> "So you are my witnesses – declares the LORD –
> And I am God." That is, if you are my witnesses, I am God, and if you are not My witnesses, I am, as it were, not God."[69]

Levenson goes on to interpret Israel's witness to Yahweh's divinity with the fragility of his reality in the world. That is, "the actualization of the full potential of God requires the testimony of his special people…In the covenantal idiom…Israel is the functional equivalent of the pantheon…" As I have already alluded to, the omission of the name of Yahweh from Israel's confession is likely too dangerous to leave unchallenged in this high-stakes forensic context in which speakers and addressees seek to "shape one another." Yahweh, it appears, will not suffer being misconstrued.[70]

I propose, therefore, that at vv. 16–17 we hear a sharp turn back to the prophetic voice, to clarify to the exilic audience the difference between their fate and that of image fabricators. In the very least the prophetic rejoinder here implies: "you appear not to have understood what I was saying with the three nations (v. 14); let me clarify (vv. 16–17)." What then of 45:19? Does it address the same issue as v. 15? I suggest that the textual features which produce *this* question

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[69] *Sifre Deuteronomy* 346 (Finkelstein ed.) as quoted in Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 139.

[70] Though, from the point of view of literary enactment, the absence of the divine name in the confession of v. 15 may be a profound merging of form and content to conceal Yahweh.

also disclose that Yahweh's response at v.19 to Israel's words in v. 15 is *itself* open to misunderstanding.

I do not think what we have here is merely an issue of "lost in translation" or meaning made irretrievable by historical distance between the text in originating context and our world. Rather, the overabundance of meanings is a formal feature and outcome of the poetry that expresses the difficulty of divine speaker and intended audience to see what the other is saying. There is a talking past one another. As any party who has struggled to overcome deep-seated relational fracture knows, the distance between the estranged parties is often closed only through an extended process of painful communicative acts in which misunderstandings, and attendant need for ongoing clarification, abound. I believe the poetry is mapping these misunderstandings into the dialogue so that relational disorientation can be powerfully experienced in the reader's affective dimension.

6.3.4 How Israel Becomes Us: From Estrangement to Reconciliation

At the outset of this study I mentioned that, despite my use of the scholarly shorthand "Isa 40–48", there are good reasons to see the first poetic unit of DI as Isa 40–49:13. Fundamental to this understanding is a reading of Isa 49:2–4 as the statement of long-awaited resolution from the primary addressee of this poem; a statement which rescinds the originating charge of bitter lament, embedded in the divine speech at Isa 40:27. I will now articulate this movement from relational estrangement (hiddenness) to reconciliation (presence and glory) by attending to features of dialogue at key moments in the discourse from Isa 40 to 49:13.

I contend that Isa 40–49:13 is a reconciliatory poem that invites the addressee/reader into a direct confrontation with the divine speaking subject. In this I affirm Heffelfinger's thesis that "Second Isaiah explores tensions, emotions, and conflicts that are bound up in the notion of reconciliation between Yhwh and Israel." The poetic features of DI and the overwhelming speaking presence of the deity wears down audience resistance which was rooted in initial concerns over divine absence or neglect.[71] I submit the complementary proposal that the exploration of reconciliation between the two parties is not embedded entirely in the divine speaking voice. Rather, the addressee/reader is positioned to speak *from within the textual world's space of relational estrangement as it progresses towards reconciliation*. In what follows I map this movement from relational alienation through to reconciliation in three discrete speech acts to

[71] And though Heffelfinger has observed that tonalities are produced, "through compositional techniques that locate the implied speaker and implied audience in relationship and illustrate the speaker's attitude," and provides a detailed account of speaking voices in an appendix, the focus of her overarching project centers on the divine speaking voice. Heffelfinger, *I am Large*, 80.

which the reader is invited to participate: from Isaiah 40:27 to Isaiah 45:14–19 and on again to Isaiah 49:1–5. This contributes to my reading each of these three statements as voiced by the same speaker in the dramatic progression of the textual world.[72] In each of these speech acts it is important to note that hiddenness figures prominently. There is still a need in these passages to explicate the relationship between form and function as it pertains to the hiddenness of *both* speaking subjects: deity *and* demos.

In Isa 40:27 we find the bitter originating claim of the exiles. This statement is embedded within the divine voice. The compositional technique of embedding this statement reveals that the addressees have not directly registered their lament with Yahweh. This is often read as straightforwardly quoting the exiles, or at least providing an adequate window into their ruminations. However, I suggest we see a revelation of the relational fracture or alienation in *the way the statement is presented*. "Why do *you* say, Jacob, and speak thus, Israel: 'My way is hidden from Yahweh, and from my God my justice is passed over.'" This is an indictment, represented as monologic speech *about* the divine being which intends to draw the speaker *into* confrontational dialogue.[73] I understand this as a "calling out," of the original speaker, to redirect their words.[74]

At Isa 45:15 the addressee is finally drawn into a direct, and possibly confrontational, "you are" response. A voicing by the poetry's primary addressee makes very good sense here. For one, this confession can be understood as a long awaited *turning to* the deity in language reminiscent of the originating charge. The interpretive problems are purposefully intractable. Is the tone of lament sustained? Or is this a modulation from the originating tone of lament to one of mystified encomium? The ambiguity continues to mirror the relational fracture between Yahweh and His people, a breakdown in which the prophet as mediator between the estranged parties is necessarily implicated. This reading makes good sense of the polyvalence in 45:16–17: as either a rebuffing of the lament (a doubling back to clarify v. 14) or as an affirmation of Israel's ultimate destiny (yes, Israel, you finally see it: your deity has chosen not to be manifested through a cult icon).[75]

This ambiguity in 45:15 leads to a further divine rejoinder in v.18–19, again fronted by the messenger formula. The reference to תֹּהוּ in v. 19 is related in the associative and poetic

[72] I am only too aware of the profusion of proposals for the identity of the speaker of Isa 49. To pluck one from the host, see Leclerc's reading (indebted to Seitz) which sees the use of משפטי both at Isa 49:4 and 40:27 to set up a purposeful contrast "between doubtful Israel and the faithful servant." Leclerc, *Yahweh Is Exalted in Justice*, 114.
[73] This is true whether one construes the speaker at 40:27 as the divine or prophetic mediator.
[74] An analogue might be seen in an interpretation of the divine rebuke to Job's friends who did not speak rightly *to* Yahweh (contra the translation "about Yahweh"). See Brent Strawn, *A Concise Introduction to the Old Testament*, 137.
[75] See, on this point further Jan L. Koole, *Isaiah III*, 471–72.

world of the text to those who fabricate idols via the ref. at Isa 44:9: יְצָרֵי־פֶסֶל כֻּלָּם תֹּהוּ. I would maintain a similar euphemistic reference to the Babylonian cult in the vexed לֹא בַסֵּתֶר דִּבַּרְתִּי.[76] It should not surprise us that these references to idols are veiled in relation to "the seed of Jacob". The logic is the same as that in connection to the ambiguous referential features throughout: the audience must get involved. They are being implicated in the process of indictment. There must be some recognition. If v. 15 be seen as a positive affirmation, then 45:19 must either be read as addressing the nations (to the exclusion of Israel, which is to my mind, unlikely); or else it discloses that Yahweh has found need of further clarification in light of possible misunderstandings regarding Israel's witness. What *is* certain: We do not yet have the poem's sought after relational reconciliation. This fact is only further underscored by the continued tones of disputation and exacerbation in Isa 46 and 48.

When the reader reaches Isaiah 49:1–4, however, we find the very inverse of compositional technique found at Isa 40:27. In this pericope we arrive at relational reconciliation through the confession, even reporting speech, of the intended audience. It is now the divine speech being *reported by the one formerly addressed as Israel*. At Isa 49:3–4 we find a tight summary of the dialogical progression thus far, which I read as the "witness" in the sight of the nations (with links back to Isa 43–45):

1) Summary of divine speech/prophetic message (v.3):

וַיֹּאמֶר לִי עַבְדִּי־אָתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר־בְּךָ אֶתְפָּאָר׃[77]

2a) Admission of prior speech or musings (v.4a):

וַאֲנִי אָמַרְתִּי לָרִיק יָגַעְתִּי לְתֹהוּ וְהֶבֶל כֹּחִי כִלֵּיתִי

It is important to note the lexical parallel here back to Isa 45:19 in לְתֹהוּ. Though I would argue, again, for a veiled, perhaps even ironic, reference to idol fabrication and worship, the admission is purposefully polysemous. What is clear here is that this former despairing testimony (toiling for *tohu* and spending of strength) is related to the hearers' initial inability to accept the divine (re)description; the refiguration into the functional equivalent of the divine image (יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר־בְּךָ אֶתְפָּאָר).

2b) A renunciation of originating claim regarding divine neglect (4b):

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[76] See Deut. 13:7; also especially the aspects of divine image materiality in parallel with the use of בַּסָּתֶר in Deut 27:15: פֶּסֶל וּמַסֵּכָה ... מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי חָרָשׁ וְשָׂם בַּסָּתֶר Alan Lenzi, *Secrecy and the Gods: Secret Knowledge in Ancient Mesopotamia and Biblical Israel*, 188–192. See especially regarding Ea, Nabu, Marduk, and the *Geheimwissen*, also in relation to the Mīs pî.

[77] See Isa 41:8–9; 42:1–19; 43:10; 44:1–2, 21; 45:4 as well as 44:23 and 46:13 (cf. 48:10–11).

אָכֵן מִשְׁפָּטִי אֵת־יְהוָה וּפְעֻלָּתִי אֶת־אֱלֹהָי׃

In this one statement we have a parallel structure to and reversal of the heart of the precipitative claim at Isa 40:27. This is clearly articulated with the formulaic idiom אָמַרְתִּי… (I had reckoned X) / אָכֵן… (but, in fact Y), with אָכֵן in the medial position marking the transition from the faulty supposition to the "more accurate realization." That there is a lack of ambiguity on formal grounds signals a long-awaited shift from all the attendant ambiguities of the *last* אָכֵן confession at Isa 45:15 (with manifold opportunities for misunderstanding).

3) Pivot to audience/reader acceptance of divine (re)figuration (v. 5):

וְעַתָּה אָמַר יְהוָה יֹצְרִי מִבֶּטֶן לְעֶבֶד לוֹ

The pivot is completed or confirmed by the use of וְעַתָּה ("but now," seen at other important shifts in divine tone at 43:1 and 44:1). This is followed by continuation of reported speech (fulfilling the role of witness) which uses the fecund hybridized imagery of fabrication/birth discussed at 45:9–10 (2.5.1; 6.3.2). Here the poetry progresses, moving over the relational rift. Now the implied audience/reader has been transposed and refigured within the world of the text: from a place of original estrangement to a speaking subject reconciled to the divine summons to witness. This is DI's equivalent of the process for renovating the divine image.

We find a significant development in the application of hiddenness language at Isa 49:2 as well. Isa 40:27 revealed audience assumptions of divine negligence or abandonment refracted through embedded speech mirroring relational alienation. I have argued that at 45:15 the audience is pressurized by the poetry to become self-involved. However, that involvement entails dislocation which mirrors the painful paradox of continued relational fracture between "a God who hides himself" and a hidden addressee. This very reality is admitted and recast in the confession of Isa 49:1–2, where the earlier gestational imagery in Isa 40–48 is internalized by the speaker at 49:1 before giving way to this remarkable turn:

וַיָּשֶׂם פִּי כְּחֶרֶב חַדָּה בְּצֵל יָדוֹ הֶחְבִּיאָנִי
וַיְשִׂימֵנִי לְחֵץ בָּרוּר בְּאַשְׁפָּתוֹ הִסְתִּירָנִי׃

The speaker, according to this confession, may well have been metaphorically hidden all along. While using *hiphil* perfect verbs to express the sovereign agency of Yahweh, the effects of this hiddenness were not abandonment (as the speaker purportedly thought), but are intimately related to the speaker being Yahweh's "secret weapon." If there is truth to the claim that the intended audience was blind to its nature, function, or place in God's economy, here then is a

conjoined phenomenological claim to being "concealed," hidden in his hand and by metaphoric extension, unable to see what God was saying.[78] Now the overarching themes of theophany are taken up at Isa 49:5 (with the implication of God being glorified *in* or *by means of* Israel; c.f. 48:10–11 and 40:5). After this turning-point confession we find a resumption to more traditional prophetic messenger formula and the first theme at Isa 49:6-7 bears some thematic similarity to Isa 45:14. The poetic discourse closes with a hymn (not unlike that at 45:8), immediately followed by the resolution of this discourse with the bookending of the opening imperatives at Isa 40:1 with the *piel* perfect at 49:13: כִּי־נִחַם יְהוָה עַמּוֹ.[79]

[78] We should certainly not push for a flat-footed or wooden clarifying of all aspects. The point here is a suggestive one - that just as in the speech acts at Isa 40:27, and 45:15, so at 49:1–5 hiddenness is a fundamental part of how this process of relational reconciliation is textually mediated and experienced.

[79] Cf. also Isa 49:11–12 with 40:3–5. From a readerly perspective, I tried to keep this study from spilling over into the "servant song" of Isa 49. However, in the final estimation the progression of the poetry presses for it. That there is a clear shift at Isa 49, no reader doubts. Yet how to account for this in this reading strategy? The implied reader who has taken this journey from estrangement to reconciliation, confessing "blindly" at Isa 45:15 now speaks a transformed word regarding the nature of hiddenness. According to the nature of the poetic address those who make the confession their own "become Israel" to use Jim Adams' conceptuality. I do not think this reading is antithetical to the originating context nor the world of the text. Though analogous to Wim Beuken's reading in some ways, and though this study may enrich a Christian account of what it might mean to be "grafted in to Israel," it would be antithetical to the logic of this study to assume theological movement towards a form of Christian supercessionism.

7. Conclusion

In this study I have evaluated representative readings that seek to relate the hidden God passage of Isa 45:15 to its immediate literary-rhetorical and theological context in Isa 40–48. The analysis of these representative readings became a revealing text-reader hermeneutical backdrop which I integrated into the argument and reading strategy of chapter six. Thus, chapters 3–5 illustrate that readers are pressurized towards an unavoidable self-involvement through the ambiguous formal and referential features of the poetry particularly at Isa 45:15. This is owing in part to the nature of confession as self-involving. Aspects of this self-involvement were highlighted in interpreters' already-under-way reading strategies, methodological proclivities, theological commitments, and canonical considerations. The study looked at how, in some instances, such considerations worked to invite or prohibit intertextual resonances with other sections of poetry from Isaiah, from the OT or Hebrew Bible, or from the wider ancient Near Eastern textual and iconographic landscape.

I have, with the great majority of theologically-interested Christian interpreters surveyed here, attempted to engage seriously with the world of the text, that is the imaginative world fashioned in the text-reader experience as read seriatim.[80] The sui-generis nature of this lyric poetry facilitates an encounter from within the proffered textual world that assumes reutterance. It is an *invitation to transformation through participation*. We are encouraged, even if painstakingly, to enter into the poetry's relational dislocation which problematizes even the "given" identities (Israel, the nations) furnished by the world of the text. This encounter itself is an experience of purging; a confrontation related to a calling, a being called or summoned. For, within the prophetic imagination, all *are* being divinely summoned. This is not only a matter of historical reconstruction, trying to discern how the original audience of exiles, might have voiced this confession (though we would be remiss to bypass this). Rather, as I have tried to illustrate in the last chapter, from a text-reader hermeneutic, one inevitably *will* engage in the process of imaginative identification (1.4; 6.3.1).

The self-involvement of the reader is not only allowed for but *necessitated* by textual features and rhetorical factors. First, there is a narrowness of provision for speech focalized into very few confessions in Isa 40–48. We reviewed the features of dialogue in 6.3.4. Secondly, the theme of hiddenness is central to the orientation of the implied audience become speaker. This is

[80] Sequential reading is, of course, an ideal. The actual reading of this poem has been akin to a labyrinthine dreamscape. This, along with the actual contingencies of embodied human existence, results in readings that are circuitous.

inexorably bound up with the formal elements and rhetorical strategy of "hidden addressee" at Isa 45:9–10 and "hidden speaker" at Isa 45:15(-17). Lastly, in light of chapter two, I have argued that the overarching rhetorical aim of DI is to "open the eye" of the audience (construed as blind at Isa 42–43) to their election as conceptually equivalent to the function of the divine image (to use the mīs pî's symbolic language). This involves a persuasive process in which the audience undergoes refiguration (to blend the metaphoric use of **יצר** in Isaiah with my own inherited Ricœurian sensibilities or conceptual framework). I believe the best, or most positive from the point of view of a credible theological affirmation to be made consistent to the world of the text, is the reading of v. 15 as mystified encomium informed by the context of idol parody and as immediate response to the statement of the nations at v. 14. This does justice to the paradox of the parataxis of "hiddenness" and "savior," as well as a response to the wider overarching argument made in DI against the backdrop of a plausible world behind the text. However, I do not think this statement can be genuinely understood until the fulness of reconciliation between divine speaker and intended audience is accomplished at Isaiah 49. Though the poetry pressurized the word to be taken upon our lips, we do not comprehend the confession until Isa 49.

This is all related to "where and how the poem seeks to take us," and that is related to *how* the reader is placed into a relational displacement. The estrangement as embedded in the voicings of this lyrical poetry finds resolution, finally, through the confession at Isa 49:1–5 (which includes many of the same lexical features as 40:27 and 45:14–15). In this reading we are not only meant to try on "voicings," but also to allow the poetry to facilitate a specific dialogical *experience of hiddenness*. To respond from within the text is to allow this experience of hiddenness to transpire and affect us, as readers, particularly against the backdrop of the overwhelming speaking presence of Yahweh. This allows for irony, but also the real risks of near-tragedy. By the close of Isa 48 (c.f. 48:1) it seems increasingly unlikely that even a subset of the audience will be able to *see* what God is saying: that his people, far from being abandoned, are his chosen means of manifesting splendor; the locus of divine activity and thus, paradoxically, the functional equivalent of the image/ *ṣalmu* of Babylon. It is this to which the addressee has been blind. Yet, for the persuaded Yahweh will be glimpsed and glorified. Perhaps even a reader will be refigured in the process.

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