Examine critically the role of the Suffering Servant within the book of Isaiah and New Testament Tradition

This essay will begin with a brief exegesis of Isaiah's 'Suffering Servant' (Isa. 52:13-53:12), before considering the role of this passage within the wider book of Isaiah. The understanding of the Suffering Servant by the followers of Jesus, and the consequent impact on New Testament texts will then be analysed, with reference to the First Letter of Peter and the Passion narratives contained in the Gospels.

The Suffering Servant: a brief exegesis

Isaiah 52:13-53:12, introduced with the sub-heading 'The Suffering Servant',[1] opens with a 'triple affirmation' of the status of the unidentified servant (lifted up, exalted, very high), which, as Jenni Williams observes, impresses upon the reader the 'superlative' nature of the servant in God's esteem.[2] This is significant, as God does not usually share the high regard others have for themselves, but holds this humble servant in great respect, enabling a dramatic revelation to take place in the sight of the great nations (52:15).[3]

The voice of God in 52:13-15 is replaced by the voice of the prophet, narrating the story of the servant from 53:1 onwards. Williams explains that this enables 'our' and 'we' to be used to invite the readers/listeners to be included.[4] This audience includes those who have believed and 'to whom the arm of the Lord has been revealed' (53:1); Richard Coggins posits three possible audiences: Isaiah's disciples, faithful Jews, or, his preferred option, the rulers of the nations (in 52:15).[5] Christopher Seitz agrees but observes that the text was written by Jewish scribes (followers of Isaiah) and not by other nations.[6]

Seitz identifies a framing structure (52:13-15 an introduction, 53:10-12 an ending) to highlight the significance of the details of the servant's suffering, contained within 53:1-9.[7] In these verses, the servant is described as: 'a root out of dry ground' (v.2); undesirable, despised and rejected (vv.2-3); stricken, afflicted, bruised, wounded and crushed (vv.4-6); oppressed and falsely accused (vv.7-9). The narrative details that the servant, who was 'acquainted with infirmity' (v.3), was 'led to the slaughter' without defending himself against a 'perversion of justice' (vv.7-8). This is explained in the central portion of this section, and indeed of the entire passage, suggesting an overall chiastic structure:[8] 'he was wounded for our transgressions… the Lord has

[1] It should be noted that this sub-heading is used in NRSV, but other translations use alternative titles (for example, 'Fourth Song of the Servant of Yahweh' in *The Jerusalem Bible*, and 'The Suffering and Glory of the Servant' in NIV).
[2] J. WILLIAMS *The Kingdom of our God: a theological commentary on Isaiah* (London: SCM Press, 2019), p.148.
[3] J. WILLIAMS *The Kingdom of our God*, p.148.
[4] J. WILLIAMS *The Kingdom of our God*, p.149.
[5] R. COGGINS 'Isaiah' in J. Barton and J. Muddiman (eds.) *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.477.
[6] C.R. SEITZ 'The Book of Isaiah 40-66: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections' in *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary.* Vol. IV (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), pp.492-493.
[7] C.R. SEITZ 'The Book of Isaiah 40-66', p.497.
[8] Seitz acknowledges but does not support a fully chiastic structure within this passage; for this student, however, the structure is evident in the overall composition of 52:13-53:12 and this is a logical extension of Seitz's argument for a 'framed' 53:1-9.

laid on him the iniquity of us all' (vv.5-6); the salient point is that God has chosen the servant to suffer vicariously as a punishment for the sins of the people.

Williams suggests that vv.6-7 use a metaphor of sheep as means of demonstrating a contrast between the wayward flock and the obedient servant; it is the obedient (and silent) servant who will die on behalf of the disobedient others.[9] The shearing of the sheep is a metaphor for humiliation, Williams posits, citing 2 Samuel 10:4.[10] Even though a sheep will not die as a result of shearing, the reference to a 'lamb led to the slaughter' remains highly powerful in v.7.

The fate of the servant is to be buried 'with the wicked' (v.9), but as Williams observes, his tomb is also 'with the rich'; this might be explained by the prophet's rebuke of those who exploit the poor earlier in the book, making a connection between 'wicked' and 'rich'.[11] It is clear the servant is innocent, unjustly accused, but accepting of his death 'for the transgression' of the people (vv.8-9). The reward for his obedience is revealed: his offspring, prolonging of his days (v.10), light, satisfaction through knowledge (v.11), and a 'portion with the great', all earned through his willingness as he 'bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors' (v.12). Williams eloquently identifies the theme of suffering and death for the 'restoration of the community'.[12]

Reception of this passage has been conflated with debate around the contested identity of the Suffering Servant, as Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler discuss: Jewish readers would typically identify the servant as representing either the whole nation of Israel or the holy remnant (Isa. 10:20), in either case, the treatment of the servant serves as a metaphor for the (unjust) punishment of the people at the hands of the Babylonians.[13] As discussed below, Christians have long identified the servant as Jesus, implying that Isaiah's prophecy foresaw the coming of Jesus; this discussion will be illuminated by an examination of the role of the Suffering Servant within its wider context.

The Suffering Servant within the Book of Isaiah

The Book of Isaiah, while recognised by many contemporary scholars as a cohesive whole,[14] has long been considered to have been written by (at least) two authorities,[15] with a shift in the narrative perspective between chapters 1-39, warning of the decimation of Jerusalem and the exile of the people, and chapters 40 onwards

[9] J. WILLIAMS *The Kingdom of our God*, pp.150-151.
[10] J. WILLIAMS *The Kingdom of our God*, p.151.
[11] J. WILLIAMS *The Kingdom of our God*, p.152.
[12] J. WILLIAMS *The Kingdom of our God*, p.153.
[13] A. BERLIN and M.Z. BRETTLER (eds.) *The Jewish Study Bible*. 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p.872.
[14] See: U. BERGES 'Isaiah: Structure, Themes and Contested Issues' in C.J. Sharp (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the Prophets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp.154-156.
[15] As discussed by John Goldingay, it is possible that the book was produced in two or three stages, the latter separated in time by at least 150 years from the former; the likelihood of the later author(s) being involved in the final arrangement and composition of the whole book of Isaiah is also acknowledged. See: J. GOLDINGAY *The Theology of the Book of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), pp.11-16.

(*Deutero Isaiah*), in which the people are to be freed from their exilic punishment and (from chapter 56) are sent to rebuild Jerusalem. The Suffering Servant comes at what Seitz describes as a 'critical juncture' in Isaiah 40-66: a transition between what has been achieved by the servant and what must proceed from this.[16] Reflecting on the overall composition of Isaiah, Coggins suggests that the text should be seen as a 'structured collection' of theological poetry, which implies a purpose to the positioning of the Suffering Servant within the wider book.[17] For Seitz, the Suffering Servant 'represents the culmination of all that precedes', noting a shift reminiscent of the end of Deuteronomy which marks a change from 'the received Torah and a dying generation' towards 'an ongoing and productive instruction within a new generation'.[18] The Israelites are encouraged to move away from dwelling on their previous struggles, to acknowledge the suffering of the present moment, and look forward to a future into which they must proceed in faith, and can only proceed into because of the suffering of the servant.

The Suffering Servant is the last of four 'servant songs' (Isa. 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; and 52:13-53:12), as identified by Bernard Duhm,[19] which describe someone chosen by God to restore Israel, but who will suffer physical and verbal abuse. Williams observes a shift in emphasis within *Deutero Isaiah* from the second 'servant song', as the downfall of Babylon and idols is no longer discussed in favour of a focus on God's relationship with the exiled people, narrated through the lens of a servant who suffers vicariously.[20] Leonora Tubbs Tisdale and Carolyn Sharp recognise in these passages 'a series of personifications of a multivalent figure who brings about God's purposes'; they note, however, that no single identification (the nation, an actual ruler, a messianic figure, a prophet or even Jesus Christ) can be applied reliably across the 'servant songs'.[21] Indeed, Brettler and Levine discuss a number of challenges to the concept of a unified group of 'servant songs',[22] casting doubt on the cohesiveness of this section of Isaiah.

John Goldingay discusses a Davidic motif, often considered to be a reference to messianic prophecy, although there is no explicit messianic vision in Isaiah; he argues that the Suffering Servant cannot be perceived as a type of David, since unlike David he is not attractive to others (1 Sam. 16:12).[23] This reading of a divine Messiah is refuted by Berlin and Brettler in their discussion of Midrash scholarship and debate on the Suffering Servant.[24] Indeed, the only person anointed in Isaiah is Cyrus, king of Persia (Isa. 45; cf. Ezra 4-5);[25] Seitz considers Cyrus' role, as God's anointed one, in restoring the people to Jerusalem: 'it is Cyrus through whom God's purpose will be carried out', casting Cyrus as the putative Messiah.[26] It is difficult,

---

[16] C.R. SEITZ 'The Book of Isaiah 40-66', p.492.
[17] R. COGGINS 'Isaiah', p.436.
[18] C.R. SEITZ 'The Book of Isaiah 40-66', p.492.
[19] As discussed by M.Z. BRETTLER and A.-J. LEVINE 'Isaiah's Suffering Servant: Before and After Christianity' in *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*. 2019, Vol. 73(2), 158-173 [Online], p.159.
[20] J. WILLIAMS *The Kingdom of our God*, p.137.
[21] L. TUBBS TISDALE and C.J. SHARP 'The Prophets and Homiletics' in C.J. Sharp (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the Prophets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.636.
[22] M.Z. BRETTLER and A.-J. LEVINE 'Isaiah's Suffering Servant', pp.159-160.
[23] J. GOLDINGAY *The Theology of the Book of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), pp.140-141.
[24] A. BERLIN and M.Z. BRETTLER (eds.) *The Jewish Study Bible*, p.872.
[25] Messiah' translates as 'anointed one'. See: M.Z. BRETTLER and A.-J. LEVINE 'Isaiah's Suffering Servant', p.160.
[26] C.R. SEITZ 'The Book of Isaiah 40-66', p.442.

however, for this student to identify Cyrus as the Suffering Servant; he might be perceived as a Davidic king, but this would preclude him from being the Suffering Servant.

The role of the Suffering Servant can therefore be described as one of transition within Isaiah and transformation for the people: through his suffering they can be 'healed' (Isa. 53:5) and therefore can move into their hopeful future, out of exile, albeit that they are reminded of the suffering with which the servant was afflicted on their behalf.

The Suffering Servant in the New Testament

The first followers of Jesus, who would have been familiar with the Suffering Servant through the reading of Isaiah in synagogue worship (see Luke 4:16-19),[27] clearly saw the Passion of Jesus as a fulfilment of Isaiah's prophetic vision. Ross Wagner observes that, for New Testament authors, the prophets 'are not simply individuals who spoke and acted for God in the past; the divine voice continues to address God's people through the scriptures'.[28] This is not dissimilar to contemporary Christian reception of the Bible which, as Jonathan Robert discusses, encourages readers to respond according to their own contexts.[29] Perhaps it should be of little wonder therefore that 'the prophets' were perceived as a 'conflated' unit of Scripture[30] which could be appropriated to explain the context of the early Church. Indeed, Goldingay discusses the 'significance' afforded to a text as distinct from its intended 'meaning',[31] allowing for later usage in potentially unanticipated forms. Whilst there are discernible prophetic motifs present in the New Testament, and others drawn from elsewhere (for example Psalm 22),[32] the impact of the Suffering Servant on the descriptions of Jesus' Passion, and the wider narrative around Jesus' identity, is compelling. The central focus of the passage, as discussed above, is the vicarious suffering of the servant for the sins of the people, which is certainly an important factor in the reception of Isaiah for early Christians.

Whilst asserting that the First Letter of Peter draws many of its allusions from Psalm 34, David Allen recognises the Suffering Servant's significance in 1 Peter 2:22-25.[33] Indeed, the correlation between v.22 and Isaiah 53:9b, that 'there was no deceit in his mouth', the use of 'sheep gone astray' in v.25 (cf. Isa. 53:6), and being healed through Jesus' bearing of our sins in v.24 (cf. Isa. 53:4-5, 12), is unmistakeable. Peter uses

---

[27] Avigdor Shinan discusses the place of Scripture reading in the Second Temple period (538 BCE – 70CE), and the importance given to the reading of the Prophets, noting that it was often for the reader (*maftir*) to select which passage he would read. It is interesting to observe that much of the evidence for synagogue practice during this period is drawn from New Testament sources (including Luke 4 and Acts 15). See: A. SHINAN 'The Bible in the Synagogue' in A. Berlin and M.Z. Brettler (eds.) *The Jewish Study Bible*. 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp.2049-2057, particularly p.2053.

[28] J.R. WAGNER 'The Prophets in the New Testament' in C.J. Sharp (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the Prophets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.376.

[29] J. ROBERTS 'Introduction' in M. Lieb, E. Mason, J. Roberts and C. Rowland (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of The Reception History of the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.1-8.

[30] J.R. WAGNER 'The Prophets in the New Testament', p.376.

[31] J. GOLDINGAY *The Theology of the Book of Isaiah*, p.35.

[32] David Allen analyses the use of many texts from the Hebrew Bible within New Testament literature, highlighting, for example, the use of Psalm 22 in Mark's account of the Passion (Mark 14-15). See: D. ALLEN *According to the Scriptures: The Death of Christ in the Old Testament and the New* (London: SCM Press, 2018), pp.44-46.

[33] D. ALLEN *According to the Scriptures*, p.162.

this imagery to argue that the experience of persecution faced by early Christians follows the pattern of Jesus, 'so that you would follow in his footsteps' (1 Peter 2:21), as Wagner asserts.[34] Scott Hahn identifies a secondary reason: Peter understood Isaiah to have prophesied with the authority of the Holy Spirit, enabling him to foretell the events of Jesus' Passion from a distance of 500 years.[35] Williams finds this perspective troubling, however, as this would either separate Isaiah 52:13-53:12 from the surrounding chapters, or alter the previously accepted interpretation of God's actions to save the exiled Israelites.[36] This is certainly a valid concern for this student, considered further below.

Allen reports that the apostle Peter (presumed author or inspiration for 1 Peter) is considered to be the source behind Mark's Gospel,[37] and so resonances between the texts are to be expected. Indeed, as Allen notes, the Markan account has Jesus declare the fulfilment of Scriptures at the beginning of his Passion (Mk 14:49), with the remainder of the narrative exploring the way in which this would occur.[38] There are allusions to the first three 'servant songs' with the 'bruised reed' (Mk 15:19; cf. Isa. 42:3), and 'spitting and scourging' (Mk 15:15, 19; cf. Isa. 50:6); however, as Allen asserts, Mark appears to have drawn principally from Psalm 22 for his Passion account.[39] A direct citation of Isaiah 53:12 can be found in Mark 15:28, however: 'The scripture was fulfilled, which says, "He was numbered with the transgressors"'; Allen observes that this use of Isaiah's Suffering Servant by Mark is considered by many scholars to be a later addition, however.[40] [41]

Mark sets the clear pattern for the Passion narratives in the other Synoptic Gospels: Matthew and Luke. Indeed, Matthew's account follows Mark closely, with the addition of certain details; this, Allen asserts, is in contrast to the rest of Matthew's Gospel, in which specific fulfilment of Scripture (particularly regarding the Nativity) is emphasised.[42] One of these fulfilment verses cites Isaiah 53:4, where Jesus 'cured all who were sick' (Matt. 8:16-17), quoting the prophet directly; his emphasis here, as Williams observes, is on the 'Servant's vocation, rather than his sufferings'.[43] Luke's Jesus declares his fulfilment of Isaiah 61:1-2 with an (almost) direct citation in Luke 4:17-21, which, for Allen, demonstrates the depth of Luke's understanding of Jesus as fulfilling Scripture, which permeates his Gospel.[44] Indeed, in Luke 18:31-33, Jesus warns his disciples that he will fulfil the suffering foretold 'by the prophets'. Luke also includes a reference to Isaiah 53:12 being fulfilled by Jesus: 'And he was counted among the lawless' (Lk. 22:37), which does not appear in Matthew, although might be seen to reflect the contested Mark 15:28; Allen discusses a difficulty with Luke's Passion, however, in that there are allusions to Jesus' suffering (as the servant) but it is seen as voluntary rather than inflicted, perhaps making the implicit connection between Jesus and the Suffering

[34] J.R. WAGNER 'The Prophets in the New Testament', pp.382-383.
[35] S. HAHN *The Creed: Professing the Faith Through the Ages* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road, 2016), p.130.
[36] J. WILLIAMS *The Kingdom of our God*, pp.154-155.
[37] D. ALLEN *According to the Scriptures*, p.162.
[38] D. ALLEN *According to the Scriptures*, p.51.
[39] D. ALLEN *According to the Scriptures*, pp.48-51.
[40] D. ALLEN *According to the Scriptures*, p.35.
[41] Indeed, NRSV omits 15:28, noting it is included by 'Other ancient authorities' in a footnote between 15:27 and 15:29.
[42] D. ALLEN *According to the Scriptures*, pp.52-56.
[43] J. WILLIAMS *The Kingdom of our God*, p.150.
[44] D. ALLEN *According to the Scriptures*, pp.70-71.

Servant less secure, although he reflects that where the citation of Isaiah 53:12 is used it can be perceived (and might have been intended) as a 'hermeneutical key' to the entire narrative.[45] The Synoptic Gospels, collectively, can therefore be seen to demonstrate that Scripture is fulfilled in the life and Passion of Jesus, and it is clear that the Suffering Servant is a motif which features prominently, although not primarily, within this function of the Gospel narratives.

In contrast, John's Gospel highlights the crucifixion of Jesus as his hour of glory, a concept which draws on a number of texts from the Hebrew Scriptures, but in particular Isaiah 52:13: 'he shall be exalted and lifted up', as David Ford explains, noting the glory afforded to the Suffering Servant through his death which resonates with the death of Jesus.[46] Mitzi Smith posits that Jesus is silent during his inquisitions because of his desire to fulfil Isaiah 53:7, which would enable him to be identified as a 'silent, suffering lamb', potentially developed by John into his image of Jesus as 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world' (John 1:29).[47] This is an interesting view, since it highlights not only John's use of Isaiah 53:7, but also implies Jesus as a willing agent, emphasising his agency and victory over his suffering, very much in line with scholarly thinking about the Johannine portrayal of Jesus,[48] which this student finds persuasive.

It is important to note that in the Gospel accounts Jesus explains the Scriptures, and their fulfilment in his life and Passion, to his followers (for example, Luke 24:27). Ronald Heine observes the fundamental dependence on this understanding for early Christians to be able to connect Jesus with their Scriptural heritage.[49] Indeed, for Christian readers since the first century, this makes it possible to believe that Jesus has fulfilled Messianic prophecies from the Hebrew Bible, and indeed that these Scriptures were written about him.[50] The Nicene Creed (325 CE), a 'standard of faith', includes an explicit reference to Jesus' death 'in accordance with the Scriptures';[51] in reciting the Creed, an acknowledgement of Jesus' fulfilment of Scripture is made regularly by Christian communities during acts of worship. It should also be noted, however, that the *Pontifical Bible Commission* advises Christian readers of Isaiah to consider alternative perspectives, including interpretation by Jewish scholars, since 'the original task of the prophet was to help his contemporaries understand the events and the times they lived in from God's viewpoint' and that Christian understanding of Jesus as the Suffering Servant is 'a retrospective perception'.[52] It is therefore only possible for Christians to imagine Jesus in the role of Suffering Servant because of their knowledge of Jesus, thus Jesus is overlaid onto Isaiah's words.

---

[45] D. ALLEN *According to the Scriptures*, pp.79-82.
[46] D.F. FORD *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), pp.238-242.
[47] M.J. SMITH ''He Never Said a Mumbalin' Word': A Womanist Perspective of Crucifixion, Sexual Violence and Sacralized Silence' in J.R. Reaves, D. Tombs and R. Figueroa (eds.) *When Did We See You Naked? Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse* (London: SCM Press, 2021), p.53.
[48] For example, David Ford highlights Jesus' agency in determining the course of his Passion, leading to a reception of Jesus' death as his hour of glorification rather than of defeat and shame. See D.F. FORD *The Gospel of John.*
[49] R.E. HEINE 'Early Christian Reception of the Prophets' in C.J. Sharp (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the Prophets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp.407, 413.
[50] See David Allen's exploration of Peter's use of prophetic imagery and understanding of Scriptural prophecy: D. ALLEN *According to the Scriptures*, p.162.
[51] L. AYRES *Nicaea and its Legacy: an approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.85.
[52] PONTIFICAL BIBLE COMMISSION (2002) 'The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible' [Online], No.21.

Indeed, Berlin and Brettler note that the Christian identification of the Suffering Servant as Jesus has been widely refuted by Jewish scholars, especially by rabbinic writers in the Middle Ages.[53] Brettler and Levine note that much Medieval interpretation accepted the Suffering Servant as a metaphor for the nation of Israel,[54] although their own textual analysis suggests that 'my servant' (Isa. 52:13; 53:11) refers to an individual and therefore cannot literally refer to the 'collective Israel'.[55] Even within Jewish scholarship, there is evidently no consensus on this matter. Brettler and Levine also draw attention to the lack of any reference to a 'servant-messiah' in the Dead Sea Scrolls, inferring that the Qumran community held no such interpretation of the Suffering Servant as representing Jesus.[56] Goldingay posits, however, that the purpose of 'preserving' prophetic writings was to ensure that their significance for readers in later generations could be discovered, in addition to their immediate contextual usage.[57] This affirms the acceptability of receiving Isaiah on more than one level, and therefore the acceptability of multiple understandings of the Suffering Servant.

Whilst Isaiah 52:13-53:12 might be perceived as part of a hermeneutical key to understand the person of Jesus, it is interesting that, as Wagner asserts, the authors of the New Testament shared 'a fundamental conviction that Jesus himself is the hermeneutical key to the scriptures'.[58] This highlights the intertextual connections and interdependence within the canon of the Bible, which gives credence to Christian claims for Jesus' fulfilment of the Hebrew Scriptures, although, as noted above, this should be treated with caution.

Conclusion

This essay has considered Isaiah's vision of a Suffering Servant, and analysed potential meanings which can be drawn from this image: one who suffers vicariously for the sins of others; a metaphor for the punishment and redemption of the people of Israel through the Babylonian exile; and the possibility that Isaiah foresaw the coming of Jesus. It has been recognised that the identity of the Suffering Servant is disputed. The role of the Suffering Servant within the wider context of Isaiah has been explored, and it has been observed that the servant represents a transition from exile and suffering towards freedom, a transformation achieved through his suffering on behalf of the people (whether or not this is metaphorical). The reception of the Suffering Servant by the early followers of Jesus has then been assessed, with the Passion narratives in 1 Peter and the Gospels explored.

For this student, there appear to be three major possible explanations for the reception of the Suffering Servant by the followers of Jesus. Firstly, that Isaiah's prophetic vision included the person of Jesus from the time of its composition (as implied in 1 Peter); this is certainly possible since the prophet might have foreseen the distant future, although the evidence in the text would suggest against this. Secondly, that Jesus' Passion

[53] A. BERLIN and M.Z. BRETTLER (eds.) *The Jewish Study Bible*, p.872.
[54] M.Z. BRETTLER and A.-J. LEVINE 'Isaiah's Suffering Servant', p.171.
[55] M.Z. BRETTLER and A.-J. LEVINE 'Isaiah's Suffering Servant', p.163.
[56] M.Z. BRETTLER and A.-J. LEVINE 'Isaiah's Suffering Servant', p.165.
[57] J. GOLDINGAY *The Theology of the Book of Isaiah*, p.35.
[58] J.R. WAGNER 'The Prophets in the New Testament', p.376.

took place in a specific way in order that the Scriptures (Isaiah, Psalms 22 and 34, and others) might be seen to be fulfilled; this would need either divine activity or intentional actions and words chosen deliberately by Jesus, but which Jesus could then explain to his followers so that they would understand. The third possibility is that the early Christian communities mapped details of the Passion onto the Scriptures so that it might appear that Jesus fulfilled various prophesies, to give authority to their claims about him as the Messiah – a perspective which Jewish scholars would support; as a Christian and priest, however, this student cannot accept this third option fully, this being a fundamental aspect of Christian faith, and, although he appreciates the reception of Isaiah in adding depth to the New Testament texts, he is most drawn to the second position.

Clearly, the image of the Suffering Servant has had a significant impact on those who have received it. As a Christian, with knowledge of the Gospel narratives, it is very difficult to read Isaiah 52:13-53:12 without reading Jesus' Passion into the text, but it is important to acknowledge that the text was written for an entirely different context, and that there are multiple ways in which Isaiah's Suffering Servant has been received.

Word count: 3,300 words, excluding footnotes.

Bibliography

Unless indicated, all biblical references and quotations are taken from:
The Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version, Anglicized edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) [NRSV].

ALLEN, D. *According to the Scriptures: The Death of Christ in the Old Testament and the New* (London: SCM Press, 2018).

AYRES, L. *Nicaea and its Legacy: an approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

BERGES, U. 'Isaiah: Structure, Themes and Contested Issues' in C.J. Sharp (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the Prophets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 153-170.

BERLIN, A. and BRETTLER, M.Z. (eds.) *The Jewish Study Bible*. 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

BRETTLER, M.Z. and LEVINE, A.-J. 'Isaiah's Suffering Servant: Before and After Christianity' in *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*. 2019, Vol. 73(2), 158-173 [Online] Available at: 10.1177/0020964318820594 [Accessed 28 July 2023].

COGGINS, R. 'Isaiah' in J. Barton and J. Muddiman (eds.) *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 433-486.

FORD, D.F. *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021).

GOLDINGAY, J. *The Theology of the Book of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014).

HAHN, S. *The Creed: Professing the Faith Through the Ages* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road, 2016).

HEINE, R.E. 'Early Christian Reception of the Prophets' in C.J. Sharp (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the Prophets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 407-422.

Holy Bible: New International Version Anglicised (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984) [NIV].

The Jerusalem Bible (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1968).

PONTIFICAL BIBLE COMMISSION (2002) 'The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible' [Online] Available at: www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020212_popoloebraico_en.html [Accessed 14 August 2023].

ROBERTS, J. 'Introduction' in M. Lieb, E. Mason, J. Roberts and C. Rowland (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of The Reception History of the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1-8.

SEITZ, C.R. 'The Book of Isaiah 40-66: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections' in *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*. Vol. IV (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 375-561.

SHINAN, A. 'The Bible in the Synagogue' in BERLIN, A. and BRETTLER, M.Z. (eds.) *The Jewish Study Bible*. 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2049-2057.

SMITH, M.J. ''He Never Said a Mumbalin' Word': A Womanist Perspective of Crucifixion, Sexual Violence and Sacralized Silence' in J.R. Reaves, D. Tombs and R. Figueroa (eds.) *When Did We See You Naked? Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse* (London: SCM Press, 2021), 46-66.

TUBBS TISDALE, L. and SHARP, C.J. 'The Prophets and Homiletics' in C.J. Sharp (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the Prophets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 627-651.

WAGNER, J.R. 'The Prophets in the New Testament' in C.J. Sharp (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the Prophets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 373-387.

WILLIAMS, J. *The Kingdom of our God: a theological commentary on Isaiah* (London: SCM Press, 2019).