

The Servant of the Lord: Language and Interpretation

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I. INTRODUCTION

Few Old Testament passages are as well loved among Christian people as Isaiah 52: 13-53: 12, or "the fourth Servant Song" as it is commonly known to critical scholarship. Unfortunately, few Old Testament passages are as difficult of interpretation as these Songs, not least the last of them. It is also sadly true that relatively few passages are so full of problems of text and translation.

The purpose of this article is not to offer fresh conjectures regarding text or vocabulary, still less to proffer yet another identity for the Servant of the Lord. The intention is rather to venture an appraisal of some recent textual and linguistic studies of the passage, and to consider what effect they may have on the interpretation of the Song. Isaiah 40-55 has attracted more commentaries in English in recent years than any other part of the Old Testament, and no fewer than four of them provide translations of these chapters.¹ Continuing linguistic research, together with additional textual data from the Qumran MSS, has culminated in important articles on our passage by the two leading British Hebrew philologists, Sir Godfrey Driver² and Professor D. Winton Thomas;³ both articles offer translations. The latter scholar has further aided the study of the text of Isaiah by editing the book

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for the revised "Kittel".⁴ Yet another translation with comment comes from the pen of Gerhard von Rad.⁵ Finally, recent translations have been provided for us in the Jerusalem Bible (JB) and New English Bible (NEB).

There is therefore no lack of recent contributions to the subject, though—predictably—it cannot be said that the views taken or the renderings given are marked by unanimity. One might be tempted to leave the field to the pundits, acknowledging the problems to be beyond solution, were it not for the fact that the interpretation of the Song is bound up with the translation of it.

¹ C. R. North, *The Second Isaiah* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964); G. A. F. Knight, *Deutero-Isaiah* (New York/Nashville: Abingdon, 1965); C. Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* (ET London: S.C.M., 1969; first German edition 1966); J. L. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968).

² G. R. Driver, "Isaiah 52¹³-53¹²: the Servant of the Lord" in M. Black and G. Fohrer (eds.), *In memoriam Paul Kahle* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter; 1968), pp. 90-105.

³ D. W. Thomas, "A consideration of Isaiah LIII in the light of recent textual and philological study", *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* xlv (1968), pp. 79-86.

⁴ *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1968-).

⁵ Originally incorporated in his *Old Testament theology* (ET Edinburgh/London: Oliver & Boyd, 1962-5); now conveniently in his *The message of the prophets* (London: S. C. M., 1968), chapter 17.

The relevance of language to interpretation may be illustrated from the conclusions drawn by Driver; his linguistic decisions lead him to assert that the "Servant" must surely have been "some unknown Jew... whose message inflamed and alarmed his fellow-countrymen or perhaps the Babylonian authorities against him... In either case he was successful in his mission, whatever it was, and was restored to favour with his fellow-men, Jews or Babylonians, and richly rewarded for the faithful fulfilment of the task which God had laid upon him."⁶ Not all writers, however, have proceeded from the language to the interpretation; it is all too easy to make a predetermined interpretation a Procrustean bed for the language. H. M. Orlinsky shows a tendency to do this; his remark that no translation of the first part of Isaiah 53: 10 "may be used as a basis for any theory"⁷ is revealing. True, one ought not to build too ambitious edifices on insecure foundations; but one suspects that Orlinsky's interpretation of the Servant Song in question prevents him from accepting any plausible rendering of the verse!

II. EXPLICIT IDENTIFICATION?

It has long been axiomatic that the Suffering Servant is an anonymous figure, and one would not really expect any textual or linguistic studies to have thrown up any express identification. Nevertheless, one or two points of interest have emerged, first and foremost an intriguing variant reading in 52: 14 in the Dead Sea

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Scroll (1Q Isa^a). Here the Masoretic Text has the word *mišhat*, which must mean "disfigured" or "disfigurement".⁸ The Scroll presents the same four consonants (no vowels are supplied in the Qumran MSS), plus a fifth, the letter *yod*, yielding the word *mšhty*. A *yod* may be the smallest and most insignificant letter of the Hebrew alphabet, but here it would appear to have the effect of changing the meaning of the word completely, from "disfigurement" to the verbal form, "I have anointed". This would give some such sense to the clause as "By my anointing I took his human appearance from him" (JBmg), and if original would offer something approaching a Messianic identification of the Servant. However, there is little likelihood that such a sense is original; at most it would indicate the identification made by the Qumran sect.⁹

G. A. F. Knight has tried to establish a Messianic identification on linguistic rather than textual grounds. He notes that in 53: 2 the Servant is described as a "sucker" (RSV "young plant") and as a "root", and argues that the use of these terms must derive from 11: 1, 10, where the Davidic Messiah, explicitly, is called a "shoot" and a "root". The arguments adduced will not stand up to serious examination, however. To begin with, the word denoting a young plant is not the same, however close the literal meanings of the two nouns. Secondly, the "root" in chapter 11 is a clear metaphor, made meaningful by the addition of the words "of Jesse", and there is no indication

⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 105.

⁷ H. M. Orlinsky, "The so-called 'Servant of the LORD' and 'Suffering Servant' in Second Isaiah", in H. M. Orlinsky and N. H. Snaith, *Studies on the second part of the book of Isaiah* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), p. 61n.

⁸ The word is a little difficult grammatically, and it is common to emend its vowels (cf. *BHS*).

⁹ Not even that can be asserted with any confidence; Driver points out that an extra final *yod*, with no effect on meaning, can be found elsewhere in this Scroll (*art. cit.*, p. 92).

that the word "root" by itself would indicate the Davidic king; but in chapter 53 what we have is not a metaphor but a simile, the point of which seems to be the appearance of the Servant, not his function. There is no reason why the horticultural similes of 53: 2 should be taken as more cryptically significant than the pastoral comparisons of verse 7.

In short, the Servant remains as anonymous as ever. A Messianic identity is certainly not ruled out, but neither is it established, by recent textual and linguistic considerations. Nor is any other view of the Servant much affected by such studies. The NEB, it is true, appears to make a clear distinction between Israel ("my people") and the Servant in 52: 14, which would tend to militate against the equation "Israel = the Servant" of H. H. Rowley and others. The NEB is here (as often elsewhere) indebted to Driver, whose

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translation of the verse has some basis in the Targum. But the basis is slight, and the Targum's evidence of doubtful value in any case, so no weight whatever can be placed on the vocative addition to 52: 14.

III. THE SUFFERINGS

The problem about the sufferings of the Servant is highlighted by the RSV, which in the text retains the "griefs" and "sorrows" of the older English Versions, but in the margin offers the alternative "sicknesses" and "pains" which most modern translators would prefer. The question is whether the sufferings were due to human opposition or to disease of some sort. It may be that both elements of suffering appear in the passage, in which case one or the other (if not both) must be understood as figurative. Parallels can readily be found in the Psalter; the psalms of lament often present the reader with a succession of different portrayals of suffering, which make it very difficult to pin down the precise cause of the psalmist's complaint.¹⁰

It was Bernhard Duhm whose epoch-making commentary in 1892 laid stress on the disease interpretation; he gave new importance to the Vulgate's rendering of the Hebrew *nagu*^a (53 4; RSV "stricken") as *quasi leprosum*. The Servant died of leprosy, said Duhm;¹¹ and his view seems to have exercised a great deal of influence on later scholarship. If leprosy is too precise, "disease" or a synonym will be found somewhere in nearly every recent translation of the Song.

It is difficult, however, to pinpoint any statement in the Song which unequivocally refers to natural sickness. It is interesting to observe that, grammatically speaking, the words used are time and time again passive; *nagu*^a itself, though indeed used in the Old Testament for leprosy and the like, implies the agency of God simply, and JB cannot be seriously faulted for its rendering "punished". The parallelism is specifically "smitten by God". There is in all an

¹⁰ Cf. A. R. Johnson in H. H. Rowley (ed.), *The Old Testament and modern study* (London: Oxford U.P., 1951), pp. 170ff.

¹¹ Cf. B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja übersetzt and erklärt* (Göttingen Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, ⁵1968), p. 368. (The first edition appeared in 1892.)

imposing array of passives in the passage; the RSV offers us "marred, stricken, smitten, wounded, bruised, oppressed, taken away, cut off."

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In the second place, there is no word in the passage which cannot be used of sufferings inflicted by human beings. We have relatively few words in English, apart from "suffering" itself, which can denote both natural and inflicted physical distress; but both Hebrew nouns in the first part of 53: 4 are in this respect ambiguous. The noun *h'li* frequently enough in the Old Testament denotes "disease"; but in 2 Kings 1: 2 it is used of Ahaziah's "sickness" resulting from a fall, while the cognate verb appears in 1 Kings 22: 34 describing Ahab's arrow-wound. So too the second noun in 53: 4, *mak'ob* ("sorrow" or "pain") in Exodus 3: 7 it is used of the "sufferings" inflicted by the Egyptian taskmasters' whips.

These two nouns, then, can be used of inflicted torments; and other items of vocabulary here—such as the "pierced", "bruised" and "stripes" of verse 5—are most naturally used of inflicted suffering. But could not these words be employed metaphorically of natural disease, viewed as inflicted by God? This is possible; but while God's hand is undoubtedly seen in the Servant's fate, yet certain statements in the Song surely suggest human agency. The term "oppressed" (53: 7) does not seem an appropriate description of divine actions; indeed, the same Hebrew verb yields the word for taskmasters in Exodus 3. Again, the opening phrase of 53: 8—whatever it means!—is difficult to ascribe to God's treatment of the Servant. One understanding of it makes it refer to injustice,¹² another to the operation of legal process,¹³ while yet another combines the two.¹⁴ The present writer would find some fixed legal idiom here, either "after arrest and sentence" or "from prison and lawcourt". Both JB and J. L. McKenzie by some minor emendation make the legal aspects stronger by taking the next clauses as meaning "pleading a case/cause".

On the other hand, two linguistic possibilities have been argued which would reinforce the view that natural disease is portrayed in the passage. The first is C. R. North's interpretation of 52: 15: "So shall many nations guard against contagion by him". One can place little reliance on this translation. however; the Hebrew

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¹² E.g. "without protection, without justice" (NEB).

¹³ E.g. "from prison and law-courts" (Winton Thomas).

¹⁴ E.g. "by a perverted judgment" (McKenzie). Among other renderings offered that of P. R. Ackroyd is of interest: "from (royal) power and administration" (*Journal of Semitic Studies* xiii (1968), p. 7). If it could be justified, this interpretation would of course support a royal identification of the Servant. However, it is clear that Ackroyd is arguing from such an identification, not towards it.

construction makes it much more likely that the "nations" are the object of the verb, not the subject. The great majority of recent exegetes and translators take the verb to mean "startle" rather than "sprinkle".¹⁵

The second possibility has limited support from Driver; in 53: 10 we could perhaps follow the LXX and take the verb *dakk^eo* ("to bruise him") to mean "to purify him", i.e. from sickness. Such a view would again reinforce the suggestion that disease is part of the portrayal of the Servant. The suggestion has very little plausibility, however, in view of the fact that the same verb occurs in verse 5, where it can only mean "bruise". In any case, Driver himself avoids the translation "purify" although he still prefers to understand the word in an Aramaic rather than a Hebrew sense, for no good reason.

IV. THE SERVANT'S DEATH

The question was raised long ago as to whether the Servant really died, as the traditional understanding of the passage affirms. North¹⁶ therefore addressed himself to this problem, and answered it in the affirmative (against E. Sellin and W. Staerk in particular). However, Orlinsky and Driver have recently reopened the question, again challenging the traditional view. Driver argues that every phrase which might mean death is in fact ambiguous; for instance; to say that "they appointed his grave..." is not necessarily to imply that he was put in it! Orlinsky's argument is that death is ruled out by the clear portrayal of life at the end of chapter 53. It need scarcely be said that Orlinsky thereby begs the question; one is in no position to assert dogmatically, *a priori*, that resurrection cannot have been in the prophet's mind. A relevant linguistic factor is the use of the word "death" (*mawet*) itself; Winton Thomas has argued that often in the Old Testament the word can be taken simply as a sort of superlative, comparable with our English idiom "bored to death" 1.17 On this basis, he translates the statement "he poured out his soul to death"¹⁷ (53: 12) as "he gave himself to the uttermost",

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a rendering which clearly leaves open the question whether or not the Servant died.

To take the later point first, the present writer cannot go all the way with Professor Thomas's arguments; while a certain amount of superlative usage of *mawet* may be admitted, it seems on general grounds likely that in a "death" context, the word "death" would be both employed and understood literally.¹⁸ That there is a "death situation" in Isaiah 53 brooks no denial.

¹⁵ The meaning "startle" can be arrived at either by emendation or by assuming (with Driver) that the Hebrew verb had a second meaning, evidenced for Arabic, to make jump". While it is true that the ancient Versions support the rendering "startle", the sense "sprinkle" remains a possibility, and the easiest way of taking the Hebrew as it stands (cf. F. F. Bruce, *This is that* [Exeter: Paternoster, 1968], p. 88).

¹⁶ Cf. C. R. North, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah* (London: Oxford U.P., 1956), p. 148.

¹⁷ D. W. Thomas, *Vetus Testamentum* iii (1953), pp. 209-224.

¹⁸ Cf. D. F. Payne, *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* v (1967), pp. 59f.

In 53: 9, however, it is not certain that the word "death" is original; there is some textual variation in the MSS. here, and most moderns prefer to find a word meaning "tomb", which would yield good parallelism with "grave". JB, for example, renders: "They gave him a grave with the wicked, and a tomb with the rich". Even so, G. Knight's acceptance of the word "death", and rendering "When he was dead...", cannot be ruled out.

If death is excised from verse 9 on textual grounds, in any case, we may be obliged to bring it in again at the end of the previous verse, where the literal "a blow to him" of MT (*nega' lamo*) is quite probably to be emended to "he was put (or "stricken") to death" (*nugga' lammawet*), on the basis of the Scroll and the LXX. JB, NEB, McKenzie, Snaith and Westermann all take it thus, as a plain statement of the Servant's death. Indeed, it is possible that the last word of the verse in MT, *lamo*, is simply an abbreviated form for *lammawet*, in which case no consonantal correction is necessary to achieve this sense.¹⁹

It must be admitted that Driver's general statement bears consideration. A term liked "pierced" (53: 5) is not necessarily fatal; and the clause "led to the slaughter" (verse 7) is taken as applying to the lamb rather than the Servant by most recent commentators. McKenzie is an exception; and the present writer feels that a good case can be made for taking the clause as a description of both lamb and Servant, in view of the technique employed elsewhere in this prophet's use of similes.²⁰ However, it is clear that one ought not to place undue weight on such a simile. But while Driver may be right about several at least of the words and phrases in the passage, one still feels that the onus should be on him to show that death did not occur in the prophet's portrayal of the Servant; for instance, "they made his grave with the wicked..." (53: 9) strongly implies death—Driver's choice of the English verb "appointed" seems to

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import a rather more ambiguous note than the Hebrew *wayyitten* warrants.

In any case, there is one clause which it is virtually impossible to read in any sense other than death: "he was cut off out of the land of the living" (53: 8). "The land of the living" is a phrase consistently used of this world as opposed to Sheol; Ezekiel 32: 22-32 gives particularly clear examples of its use and meaning. Nor is there anything ambiguous about the verb; the word (*nigzar*) is regularly used of death or destruction, and Psalm 88: 5 (Hebrew, 88: 6) offers a good example. It is moreover a strong word, as Knight's and North's renderings testify (respectively "wrenched" and "forcibly removed"), North maintains that it is a verb implying "swift tragedy"; to the present writer, its general connotation seems to be finality rather than suddenness.

The statement, therefore, is quite unequivocal: the Servant was wrenched from this life. Now one could argue, as Sellin did, that the statement is to be applied metaphorically, i.e. that the prophet is depicting exile as a living death, so to speak; but what the literal sense of the clause amounts to is surely plain enough. Orlinsky's attempt to dispute this is extremely weak. He can only refer to

¹⁹ Cf. G. R. Driver, *Textus* iv (1964), p. 94n.

²⁰ Cf. Isaiah 40: 11; 41: 25; 42: 13f.

the not dissimilar passage in Jeremiah 11: 19, where Jeremiah speaks of being cut off²¹ from the land of the living; "of course", states Orlinsky triumphantly, "Jeremiah lived long enough after this outburst to be taken down to Egypt against his will".²² But this is dodging the issue with a vengeance! Jeremiah does not say that he was "cut off from the land of the living", but that his enemies "devised schemes" to achieve that end. Indeed, in verse 21 he states plainly—in cold prose!—that these enemies sought his life. Isaiah 53: 8 is not retailing mere threats made against the Servant, but purports to describe what actually happened to him.

In the light of this unequivocal statement, then, the clause in 53: 12, "he poured out his soul to death" can hardly mean no more than "he risked his life", even if the verb does mean "made naked" rather than "poured out".²³ The use of the English verb "exposed" (McKenzie, Driver, and now NEB) seems to me not altogether happy, since it seems to carry little of its connotation of nakedness nowadays. D. W. Thomas, though weakening the force

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of "death", notes the parallel in Isaiah 58: 10 of giving oneself without stint; and JB probably offers the most accurate recent translation of the clause: "surrendering himself to death".

V. WHAT AFTER DEATH?

Orlinsky uses the plain language regarding earthly life in 53: 10 as an argument in support of his view that the Servant's death is not depicted in the chapter—an improbable and implausible view, as we have seen. McKenzie, for his part, speaks of some inconsistency between what we might call "the death paragraph" (verses 8f.) and "the life paragraph" (verses 10ff.) which follows. The *a priori* dismissal of the possibility of any concept of resurrection is too facile;²⁴ however, it must be admitted that Isaiah 53 contains no plain statement of resurrection, and one does not know by what process the prophet envisaged death as giving place to life.

But is it in fact normal earthly life that is promised to the Servant? Orlinsky may be satisfied that "length of days" (53: 10) always means that and no more, but M. J. Dahood does not share his conviction. Psalm 23: 6, for example, Dahood relates to the afterlife, maintaining that "the house of the LORD" is God's celestial abode.²⁵ In this connexion, Dahood focuses attention on Isaiah 53: 11 as well;²⁶ here he accepts the extra word "light", found in both Isaiah Scrolls from Qumran Cave 1, and so translates the relevant clause "he shall see light". This "light", he asserts, is the "beatific vision", and signifies immortality.

²¹ The Hebrew verb is not the same as in Isaiah 53: 8, but the argument is not affected.

²² *Op. cit.*, p. 61.

²³ The verb appears to be ambiguous out of context, although there is no certainty that it ever meant "pour out" in the *hiphil*, as opposed to the *piel*.

²⁴ H. H. Rowley's common-sense discussion of Job 19: 25ff. in *The faith of Israel* (London: S.C.M., 1956, p. 164) seems to me worth considering; even if there was as yet no clearly formulated doctrine of resurrection, the inspired writer, in both Job 19 and Isaiah 53, may well have ventured beyond "the ordinary views of his time".

²⁵ Cf. M. J. Dahood, *Psalms* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965-), i, pp. 148f.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

Dahood's interpretation, at first sight attractive, would seem to support the view we have taken that the Servant really died, but to rob us of any hint of resurrection-immortality in the celestial abode is patently not the same thing as resurrection. But Dahood's approach to the whole question of the afterlife in Old Testament thought is controversial, and raises issues beyond the scope of this article.²⁷ Since it to say that it is still perfectly legitimate to understand "length of days" in the most general way.

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The "light" of 53: 11 is a doubtful quantity, despite its double support from Qumran:²⁸ Recent scholarship in general seems to accept the word without much reserve, but D. W. Thomas is a notable exception. He puts a good case for following the Massoretic Hebrew Text and ignoring the Qumran variant. The verb *yir'eh* is a common enough form meaning "he shall see", but could instead be viewed as a variant form of *yirweh*, meaning "he shall be flooded, sated", which would yield excellent sense in parallelism with *yišba*, "he shall be satisfied" and which has been adopted—in paraphrastic fashion—by the NEB (probably following Driver): "After all his pains *he shall be bathed* in light, after his disgrace he shall be fully vindicated". But if the verb is taken in this sense, it is in fact quite unnecessary to have the word "light" as object. A rendering "he shall drink deep of his anguish" has much to commend it.²⁹ But such a statement, if original, has no bearing on the question of resurrection, one way or the other. That life after death is predicated of the Servant is scarcely to be denied, however, in the light of 53: 10: "he shall prolong his days", or as NEB neatly turns it, "so shall he enjoy long life".³⁰ But the prophet tells us nothing of the "mechanics" of the process.

If on the other hand we follow the majority of recent scholars and accept the originality of the word "light", the Hebrew verb must surely be taken in its usual sense, "he shall see", since sight and light are natural concomitants. (The NEB rendering of 53: 11 seems to me to have the worst of both worlds!) "His soul's anguish over, he shall see the light" (JB) makes good sense, and offers the only statement in the chapter which can be construed as a direct reference to the Servant's God-given victory over death. As Professor F. F. Bruce has paraphrased it, "From the darkness of death he comes forth to the light of new life".³¹

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²⁷ See for instance the review of vol. 1 of Dahood's *Psalms* by D. A. Robertson, *Journal of Biblical Literature* lxxxv (1966), pp. 484ff.

²⁸ The LXX also includes the word "light", but its evidence is of uncertain value, since it differs in other respects from the M.T.

²⁹ Cf. D. W. Thomas's rendering, "When he shall have drunk deep of his anguish...". If this interpretation of the verse is correct, one can easily understand why the noun "light" came to be interpolated. Some such word as object will have seemed desirable once the rarer sense of *yir'eh* was forgotten, and the verb taken to mean "he shall see".

³⁰ It is tempting to accept an emendation in 53: 10 which is gaining currency (cf. recently Driver, Westermann, NEB), reading *hēhelim* ("he healed, restored") for MT *hēheli* ("he has made him sick"—RSV "he has put him to grief"). The MT is difficult, but obviously one can put no great weight on a conjectural emendation, however plausible. The conjectured verb occurs in Isaiah 38: 16 in parallelism with a verb denoting "to give life".

³¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 87.

VI. WAS THE SERVANT'S DEATH VICARIOUS?

The Christian church has always taken it for granted, as the self-evident meaning of the passage, that the Servant's death was vicarious. However, Orlinsky argues powerfully that Christians have been reading Isaiah 53 through New Testament spectacles, and that the passage means nothing of the sort. That the Servant suffered is beyond dispute (though at times Orlinsky comes close to disputing it!), and it is expressly said that his suffering was undeserved (cf. 53: 9); the passage also makes it clear that "we" were guilty and deserved punishment, that the Servant entered into "our" sufferings, and that he thereby relieved "us" of them. Is not this vicarious suffering?

Orlinsky's counter-argument runs as follows: "Like all spokesmen and prophets of God, from first to last this person [the Servant] too suffered on account of and along with the people at large, the latter directly because of their transgressions and the former, though not guilty of transgression, because of his unpopular mission. And when the people were made whole again, when their wounds were healed, it was only because the prophet had come and suffered to bring them God's message of rebuke and repentance".³²

Note that this position can only be adopted once you have decided who the Servant is. The only scientific way to approach the passage is first to investigate what is actually said, and then ask the question who best fits the description given.

Orlinsky uses linguistic arguments to show that 53: 5 need not be taken as a reference to substitution; it could simply mean that the Servant's sufferings were the result of "our" sins and iniquities. This much may perhaps be conceded as a possibility—or at least it could be, if verse 5 stood on its own. But the statement "the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (53: 6) suggests that "we" have, at least in some measure, been relieved of the guilt; while 53: 11 goes even further and talks of justification for those whose iniquities he bore. The chief single objection to Orlinsky's view of the matter, however, centres on a single Hebrew word in 53: 10, which depicts the Servant's death as an *'ašam*, an "offering for sin". Orlinsky is not unaware of this, but airily dismisses the problem in a footnote which labels the verse as "of uncertain

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meaning and corrupt".³³ It is true that the first part of the verse is textually difficult, but unfortunately for Orlinsky's arguments, there is neither doubt nor difficulty over the word in question. The ten recent English translations of the passage offer a variety of interpretations and emendations of the first few words of the verse, but are unanimous that the Servant made himself an *'ašam*; the Hebrew is to that extent perfectly clear. Nor can it be said that such a note is out of keeping with the rest of the Song. The specific sacrificial term in 53: 10 both elaborates and elucidates a verse like 53: 5.³⁴

³² *Op. cit.*, p. 57.

³³ See note 7.

³⁴ The noun *'ašam* does not in itself necessarily imply the death of a sacrificial victim; cf. T. H. Gaster, *s.v.* "Sacrifices and offerings, O.T." in *IDB*. But where, as here, we already have the death of a victim portrayed, the word undoubtedly serves to add a sacrificial frame of reference and interpretation.

Nor is the last verb of the chapter to be overlooked. Traditionally rendered "made intercession", *yapgi*^a is very probably to be taken in a stronger and more positive sense than that of making verbal entreaty. The participle of the same verb occurs again in 59: 16, where it must denote physical intervention. Knight and Winton Thomas accordingly employ the English verb "interposed (himself)" at 53: 12, and North describes the Servant as "standing in the place of the transgressors".³⁵

The total picture, then, is of one who suffered at men's hands, offering himself as a willing sacrificial victim; one who was himself guiltless, and as a result of whose death others gained "righteousness" and whole-ness.

VII. CONCLUSION

It is not the intention of this paper to investigate all the textual and linguistic problems of the passage, and to offer definitive answers to them. Nor have I attempted to discuss the problem of the identity of the Servant as such. As far as purely linguistic considerations go, it would be possible to apply the data of Isaiah 52f. in a completely metaphorical fashion; Sellin's approach, noted above, seems to me linguistically legitimate—right or wrong. But it is a different matter with views like Orlinsky's and Driver's; can it really be said that the portrayal of the Servant fits any historical individual of the exilic or pre-exilic period? Such

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conclusions can only be reached by dubious linguistic procedures, or else by labelling as "hyperbole" any statement of the prophet which do not happen to fit one's own preconceived notions.

On the other hand, recent linguistic and textual contributions to the study of Isaiah 52f., while they have tended to alter the traditional understanding of certain elements in the passage, do not seem when seen in perspective in any way to have undermined the New Testament and Christian application of the prophet's words to Jesus of Nazareth.

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³⁵ The verb could be used of verbal entreaty, to be sure; but the sense in which any person "interposed" himself must be deduced from the general context.