

Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York

Silencing the Martyr in Second Isaiah's Suffering Servant

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of
Master of Divinity

by

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Introduction

How does the wanton destruction of innocent people matter in Christian theology? This is a central question for liberation theologians. James Cone, father of Black Liberation Theology, painstakingly describes how public lynchings of more than 5,000 black men, women and children have gone virtually unremarked in the annals of United States history. As Roman crucifixions controlled subjugated populations through terror, public hangings and burnings were conducted by white Christians to terrorize and control black communities. However, they remain poorly explored by Western theologians.¹ Nevertheless, Cone assures us, “Humanity’s salvation is revealed in the cross of the condemned criminal Jesus, and humanity’s salvation is available only through solidarity with the crucified people in our midst.”²

In Latin America, liberation theologians also tie salvation to the destruction of innocents. Theologian Jon Sobrino recounts the murders of his fellow Jesuits in El Salvador, along with tens of thousands of Salvadoran citizens, between 1977 and 1992. Many Americans are unaware of these atrocities and the fact that the U.S. government financed Salvadoran military operations and trained leaders, including those who led El Salvador’s most brutal massacres. Sobrino modifies the church’s first-millennium dictum, “outside the church, there is no salvation,” by stating, instead, that there there is no salvation outside the poor. However, like Cone, Sobrino admits this formula for salvation appears nowhere in traditional or progressive theology.³

¹ James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2011), 171, note 4.

² Cone, 160.

³ Jon Sobrino, S. J., *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 69.

If Cone and Sobrino are correct, and complicity in the destruction of innocent people needs to be the central concern of Christian theology, then why do these liberation theologians speak as if they are theological outsiders? How can their concerns — the deaths of the innocent victims in their communities — be irrelevant or, at best, relegated to the sidelines of Western theology?

This thesis shows that complicity and social solidarity held prominent places in early interpretations of Hebrew and Christian scriptures. However, when Reformation theologians systematized theology, and their adherents formalized Reformed doctrine, the social solidarity that lies firmly embedded in both Hebrew and New Testament texts was buried. As a result, Reformation interpretations, which remain highly influential today, muffle the cries of innocent people who are unjustly destroyed.

To demonstrate how this happened, this thesis examines a series of historical interpretations of a single passage from the Hebrew Bible, Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12, known as Isaiah's fourth or suffering servant song. It is about the murder of an innocent man and it matters, theologically, to most New Testament writers.⁴ In fact, for Christians who exegete Isaiah 53 along with the New Testament, there is an implied circularity of interpretation that is difficult to avoid. The gospel writer John quotes Isaiah 53:1 and 6:9-10⁵ when he proclaims that Isaiah saw the glory of Jesus and spoke about him (John 12:41). John effectively invites his readers to apply their gospel interpretations to Isaiah 53.

⁴ Isaiah 53 is explicitly quoted in Matthew 8:14-17; John 12:37-41; Luke 22:35-38; 1 Peter 2:19-25; Acts 8:26-35; Romans 10:11-21, but other allusions abound.

⁵ As I discuss later in this paper, this combination of verses is far from accidental. Hebrew scholars consider Isaiah 53:1 to be a response to Isaiah 6:9-10, see Benjamin Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 92-93.

When Christian theologians interpret Isaiah 53, they cannot help but reflect who Jesus is for each of them. My exegesis cannot help but reflect my own Christology. At the same time, I acknowledge with horror that for millennia, Isaiah 53 has been used as a proof text in polemical arguments for the Christian faith against Jews who refused to convert to Christianity. Christian authorities employed this text to persecute Jews in Europe and the Middle East who denied that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised messiah of Hebrew scripture.⁶ That this history of interpretation is covered in the blood of innocents makes it especially worthy of careful re-examination.

I compare and contrast the interpretations of Isaiah 53 of four influential theologians:

- **Origen of Alexandria** (186-255 C.E.) uses this passage to explain how Jesus' death as a martyr glorifies God, provides a moral example for young people and a whole nation, and glorifies the sufferings of many individual martyrs. The saving blood of each innocent contributes to God's ultimate victory.
- **Martin Luther** (1483-1546) uses this passage to explain how Christ's crucifixion achieved the redemption of sins. Isaiah's suffering servant song helps Christians say, "My sins have been transferred to Christ. He has them." While we may know good, holy, saintly people, their works cannot save or "justify" them, because God alone justifies. Instead of glorifying a community of martyrs, Luther advises Christians to reject "all works and merits" when they read this passage.⁷

⁶ Around 160 CE, Justin Martyr quoted Isaiah 53 in full in the early part of his *Dialog with Trypho the Jew*, in which scholars find the first accusation of the Jews for deicide, a thematic use that John Chrysostom extends in 386 CE, using Isaiah 53:8-9 to call Antioch's Jews ungodly, and which Augustine, followed by Jerome took up. John F. A. Sawyer narrates this history in his book, *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 108-116.

⁷ Martin Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 17: Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, eds. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 215-232.

- **John Calvin** (1509-1564) extends Christ's suffering in this passage to show that Christ subjected himself to hell—the punishment and damnation due to the entire human race, and “paid a greater and more excellent price in suffering in his soul the terrible torments of a condemned and forsaken man.”⁸ Calvin considers this epic punishment necessary to assure Reformed Christians that Christ's death achieved redemption and that their sins are forgiven at great cost. For Calvin, Christ's super-painful crucifixion is a deterrent to our future sin.
- **Jon Sobrino** (b. 1938) follows the 1977 exegesis of Archbishop Oscar Romero, who told villagers under siege from their own government, “You are the Suffering Servant of God.” Sobrino explains that Salvadoran martyrs enable their oppressors to confront their deepest truth—their responsibility for harm. The suffering servant bears the burden of sin to eradicate it.⁹

After each interpretation, I discuss how it reflects influential aspects of the theologian's Christology. My concern is that the interpretations of Luther and Calvin are so ubiquitous today, even among academics, that they are often considered to be synonymous with the Christian faith. In presenting these interpretations in their historical contexts, my hope is to liberate the passages from being subject to unconscious eisegesis. While I do not use these interpretations to prove the validity of one Christology over others, I find that the interpretations oppose one another. Questions about validity arise. However, my adviser Euan Cameron, Henry Luce III Professor of Reformation Church History, has helped me comprehend the injustice of arguing with 16th century

⁸ John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), II. xvi.10, 1:516.

⁹ Jon Sobrino, S. J., *Witnesses*, 112-113.

ghosts from a 21st century perspective.¹⁰ Wherever possible I try to argue against an unfiltered use of Reformation theology among Reformed Christians today and to differentiate Luther and Calvin's historical concerns from my own.

After explicating four historical interpretations, I enlist the help of modern Christian and Jewish scholars to attempt my own exegesis of Isaiah 53. My approach considers the song to be a three-dimensional drama, with multiple voices and characters, which leads to a dramatic, emotional effect that none of the four historical interpretations explicitly considers. I explore how this effect may support the martyrology found in Origen's interpretation and echoed, nearly two thousand years later, in Jon Sobrino's essays.

This thesis suggests that using Luther's and Calvin's interpretations outside their historical contexts may make it difficult for Reformed Christians to hear the gospel's response to the cry of innocents in our midst. I seek ordination in a denomination, The Reformed Church in America (RCA), whose 16th-century confessions and catechisms include no messages about our sinful complicity in the destruction of people. I fear that it is no accident that Reformed doctrines failed to prevent Reformed churches in Germany from colluding with the Holocaust, failed to stop the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa from initiating Apartheid, and failed to encourage American churches to condemn slavery, lynching, and, until the last few years, mass incarceration.

¹⁰ Both Luther and Calvin (especially as he describes the torturous journey to lead the church in Geneva in the Author's Preface to *Commentary on the Psalms*), were reluctant revolutionaries. My brief forays into their work are guided by Cameron's discussion about the personal motives of the reformers' conversions to Protestantism: "Where any evidence exists, it suggests that the reformers reached their positions only after serious and earnest heart-searching. They were some of the most conscientious revolutionaries ever to rebel against authority," from Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation*, Second Edition (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 20112), 131. Luther and Calvin's influence on Reformed doctrines in use today is a testimony to their courageous faithfulness. I owe them a personal debt. Without them, I could not seek ordination as a Minister of Word and Sacrament.

Salvific solidarity with the crucified people in our midst is missing from 16th-century Reformed confessions and catechisms. Instead, Reformed Christians profess Jesus Christ who “has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood” to be their only comfort, in life and in death.¹¹ In its historic context, this statement from the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism sought to invalidate the sacrifice of propitiation in the works of the Roman Catholic Church and its priesthood. In its section on the Eucharist, the Catechism states that the Roman Catholic Mass is “basically nothing but a denial of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ and a condemnable idolatry.”¹² In the 16th century, such statements of faith enabled ordinary Christians to take a stand against the tyranny of the Roman Catholic Church and the economic, political and military powers that colluded with it. In the century that followed, thousands of Reformed Christians were martyred for their faith. The problem is that, 450 years later, Reformed Christians consider it a universal article of faith that, if they acknowledge how great their sins and miseries are, if they know that they are set free from them, if they thank God for such deliverance, then they can live and die in the comfort of their salvation.¹³

¹¹ The Lord’s Day, Question and Answer 1 of The Heidelberg Catechism, *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1988), 13. Three examples show this Catechism remains critical among Reformed Christians: 1. The Christian Reformed Church, a denomination affiliated with the RCA, issued a resolution on the Heidelberg’s 450th anniversary for all its churches to recite this Q&A in unison during worship, see <https://www.crcna.org/resources/other-resources/synod-resources/celebrating-450th-anniversary-heidelberg-catechism> as accessed on 4/4/2017. 2. In the RCA, church leadership teams called consistories are charged with ensuring that “the points of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism shall be explained by the minister at regular services of worship on the Lord’s Day, so that the exposition of them is completed within a period of four years,” see 1.1.2.f of *The Book of Church Order, The Reformed Church in America* (New York: Reformed Church Press, 2016), 16. 3. This first question and answer remain beloved today; in the U.S., one can walk into homes of Dutch descendants and find this first question and answer embroidered as a framed needlework sampler and displayed prominently.

¹² *Our Faith: Ecumenical Creeds*, Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 80.

¹³ The full text of Question 1: “Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death? A. That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.”

James Cone will have none of this Heidelberg comfort. A sacred and profound *discomfort* is the goal of his bestselling book, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. “Just as the Germans should never forget the Holocaust, Americans should never forget slavery, segregation, and the lynching tree,” he writes.¹⁴ This is true, not just for the past, but for the present, as Americans perpetuate the violence of lynching through the national sin of mass incarceration¹⁵ and tolerance for the murders of innocent black citizens by police officers and white supremacists.

Liberation theologians place before us the bodies of innocent victims who were murdered, while shining a light both on people who are in danger and people who are in a position to help. Gospel texts present a range of actions Christians may take to live in faithful solidarity with people who are being harmed. Most importantly, like the Good Samaritan of Luke 10, we can help extricate people from danger. Jesus tells the Good Samaritan story to show the radical sense in which loving one’s neighbor saves people on both sides of the action: the one who helps—as well as the one who is helped.¹⁶ In chapter 25 of Matthew’s gospel, we learn that, although we may not realize it, every person who suffers is Jesus.¹⁷ “Truly I tell you,” says Jesus, speaking as the story’s king, “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (v. 40). This is not a statement of social justice, but faith. When someone asks for help and suffers openly and publicly, she provides loved ones, families, neighbors, even ene-

¹⁴ Cone, 165.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 163.

¹⁶ This story is told in response to the question: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” When the answer, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself,” seems insufficient to the lawyer who asks the question.

¹⁷ This is my summary of Matthew 25:31-46, which is subtitled “The Judgment of Nations” in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible.

mies, with the opportunity to faithfully respond to God’s call to restore each person’s dignity and well-being.

Like the Samaritan, all are saved who help restore God's people to wholeness. The specifics of how this salvation economy works — what acts are just, how much effort is required — remain cloudy. The Samaritan does not sacrifice his entire life, yet, in the course of one evening, the stranger who was beaten and robbed is snatched from certain death.¹⁸ Some of the gospel of Matthew's sheep that Jesus says the king will save from hellfire are saved because they provided cool, clean water to a neighbor who thirsts.¹⁹ No single effort seems to be enough, yet every step in the right direction matters in some extraordinary way. As this thesis shows, Reformed theology minimizes the importance of these salvific passages from Luke 10 and Matthew 25.

When God first appeared to the Prophet Isaiah, a seraph touched Isaiah’s mouth with a live coal that blotted out his sin. God asked, “Whom shall I send?” and the newly purified Isaiah responded, “Here am I; send me!”

God told Isaiah to go and tell God’s people:

‘Keep listening, but do not comprehend;
keep looking, but do not understand.’
Make the mind of this people dull,
and stop their ears,
and shut their eyes,
so that they may not look with their eyes,
and listen with their ears,
and comprehend with their minds,
and turn and be healed (Isaiah 6:9-10)

¹⁸ The Samaritan humbly goes on his way in the morning, attending to his business, paying the innkeeper to do what is in his purview. I owe this insight to Dr. Alliou Niang, from his class lecture on the Gospel of Luke, a component of his course, *Introduction to the New Testament*, at Union Theological Seminary, Spring 2015.

¹⁹ Again, from Matthew 25:31-46.

In order for us to turn and be healed, this passage suggests, something dramatic must happen to unblock our ears and open our eyes, before our minds can discern. Isaiah 52:13-53:12 presents such a drama in the life story of a servant who heals us because our own contributions to his downfall are painfully clear. Jesus of Nazareth, as he is found in the gospels and Paul's letters, follows in the footsteps of Isaiah's servant. However, Reformation theologians like Luther and Calvin created a Reformed Christ who dies in order to suffer eternal punishment, redeeming humanity by transferring all humanity's sins to himself. While a redeeming Christ may help believers feel remorse for their personal sins and seek personal salvation, he may also block their ears to the cries of society's most vulnerable people and shut their eyes to the martyrs who willingly die to draw our attention to society's most egregious sins.

The history of interpretation of Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12, Isaiah's fourth or suffering servant song, illustrates how the Reformation theology of redemption from sin through Christ's crucifixion suppressed two key gospel messages:

1. A call to acknowledge and repent the sin of our complicity in unjust persecution;
2. A call to join in social solidarity with people who are unjustly persecuted, by risking our own security to help them.

Origen of Alexandria's first-century interpretation recalls Jewish martyrs like Eleazar in Maccabees and is supported by the work of modern scholars including Stephen Patterson and Benjamin Sommer. However, when Martin Luther and John Calvin systematized Reformed theology, and their adherents formalized Reformed doctrine, social solidarity and repentance for sinful complicity were no longer considered key components of salvation. Redemption and forgiveness exhausted the good news. A spiritualized, all-powerful, redeeming Christ replaced the very hu-

man martyr at the center of this text. Jesuit theologian Jon Sobrino's interpretation is based on El Salvador's martyrs in the 1980's and echoes the themes of 20th and 21st century black liberation theology as propounded by James Cone and found in the essays of James Baldwin. In its conclusion, this paper proposes that reintegrating a martyrology at the heart of Reformed Christianity would improve its faithfulness to this and related biblical texts.

1. The Text

Since this thesis is about historical interpretations of a biblical passage, I will sketch its recent history within the historical-critical tradition. Since the late 18th century, Christian scholars have customarily separated the Book of Isaiah into two large sections, based on the fact that eighth-century historical events are depicted in chapters 1 to 39 that significantly pre-date the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE. From chapter 40 onward, the text addresses the needs of a people who experienced exile in Babylon two centuries later, while its literary style differs significantly. Chapters 1 to 39 became known as First Isaiah.

Of the four theologians I consider, Luther is the one who clearly divides Isaiah into two books, 1 to 39 and 40 to 66. He characterizes the author of the first book as a historical prophet and army leader who both chastised and comforted his people while he prophesied Assyria's defeat. The opening verse of chapter 40, "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God," inspires Luther to distinguish the audience of the second book as victims of a brutal exile — those "who are of a crushed and humble conscience and of a trouble heart" — and therefore ready to call upon God. Comfort, to Luther, means delivering the gospel's good news to people who are, "wounded and terrified by the Law and they are an empty vessel capable of receiving comfort. Only those who are afflicted have comfort and are capable of it, because comfort means nothing unless there is a malady."²⁰

In his 2001 commentary, Brevard Childs explains that in 1892, the German Lutheran theologian Bernhard Duhm (1847-1928) wrote a commentary that proposed separating a second Isa-

²⁰ Luther, Vol. 17, p. 3.

iah (chapters 44 to 55) from a third Isaiah (chapters 56 to 66). While Duhm's hypothesis about a third author is still debated, one of his lasting contributions was to designate four passages in Second Isaiah (40-55) as servant songs: 42:1-4 (where God alone speaks to no specific audience); 49:1-6 (where a servant tells Jacob and Israel that God gave him a mission to restore them as a light for the nations); 50:4-9 (in which God helps a servant who is accused, beaten, mocked, and spit upon, and his beard plucked out); 52:13-53:12 (in which God and a group of narrators speak about a suffering servant).²¹ This thesis considers historical interpretations of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 that Christian scholars call the fourth servant song, following Duhm.

²¹ Brevard Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 291.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12*

52: 13 See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high.

14 Just as there were many who were astonished at you²²—so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of mortals—

15 so he shall startle²³ many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.

53: 1 Who has believed what we have heard?

And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

2 For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

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.

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

5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities;

upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth;

like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

8 By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people.

9 They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain. When his soul made itself²⁴ an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the Lord shall prosper.

²² *This is the NRSV translation, with the first of two changes. The NRSV does not follow the Masoretic text here, translating “him” instead of “you.” While “him” is more grammatical, Jan de Waard does not mention any textual problem, so I interpret this below as God’s familiar address to the servant. See Jan de Waard, *Textual Criticism and the Translator: Handbook on Isaiah* (Eisenbrauns, 1996), 193.

²³ The NRSV translates “startle” here and includes a note which I address in this paper.

²⁴ The form of the verb for appoint or establish (*shum*) implies a subject that is either third-person feminine singular, in which case it refers to the feminine *nefesh* or soul of the servant, as I have changed it here; or second-person male singular as the NRSV translates “you.”

11 Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

2. Origen of Alexandria (186 to 255 C.E.)

Origen provides an excellent contrast with Luther and Calvin because, like the reformers, he is a great systematizer of Christian thought and his interpretation of scripture influenced scholars for centuries. Luther, in particular, argues with Origen's methods of interpretation.²⁵ He was a philosopher and Christian theologian. When Origen was 17, his Roman citizen father was decapitated as a Christian martyr. To help support his mother and siblings, his father's bishop employed Origen as a religious educator in the lower echelons of the church in Alexandria. As he became more accomplished, Origen took on patrons including a wealthy Roman named Ambrose who commissioned his *Commentary on John* and *Treatise on Prayer*. Origen fled Alexandria amidst a storm of controversy (which remains shrouded by history), and was welcomed in Palestine where he established a Christian "School of Caesarea." One of Origen's last publications, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom*, is written to Ambrose as he faced imperial persecution.²⁶

Origen was a student of a wide spectrum of Alexandrian learning, including Greek philosophy and literature. He learned to use the interpretive technique of allegory from the Jewish master Philo and he maintained relationships with Jewish scholars both in Alexandria and also in Caesarea, where he spent the second half of his life. He had ties to Rabbi Hillel the Younger, son of the Jewish patriarch, Gamaliel III. Following the Apostle Paul, Origen believed that God

²⁵ In *On the Bondage of the Will*, Luther criticizes Origen and Jerome no fewer than 20 times for interpretative schemes that lack simplicity, including this one; "But is there any wonder that the Scriptures are obscure, or that with them you can establish not only a free but even a divine choice, when you are allowed to play about with them as if you wanted to make a Virgilian patchwork out of them? That is what you call solving problems, and removing difficulties by means of an "explanation." But it was Jerome and his master Origen who filled the world with such trifles, and set this pestilent example of not paying attention to the simplicity of the Scriptures." See Luther, Vol. 33, 213.

²⁶ John McGuckin, *The Path of Christianity: The First Thousand Years*, 165-218.

would never take back his promise from the Jews who were the chosen people, as Paul insists (Romans 11:26). Nevertheless, Origen taught that Christianity is the *telos* or completion of Jewish teaching. At age 69, Origen was tortured for his Christian faith. His tormentors refused to give him the honor of death by martyrdom and he died afterward, his health weakened by complications.²⁷

Origen's Interpretation

Origen's exegesis of Isaiah 53 is fragmented and can be found in his commentary on the first and sixth chapters of the gospel of John.²⁸ In Origen's discussion of chapter 1, he acknowledges that the speech of God the Father, which begins and ends this pericope (52:13-15 and 53:11-12), contrasts with the words of the pericope's narrators, who refer to themselves, and perhaps their audience, as "we" in the intervening verses (53:1-10). On the one hand, God the Father elevates the servant. On the other, the narrators describe twice how the servant did not open his mouth, first, as one oppressed and afflicted, and second, as a lamb led to slaughter and as a sheep silent before shearers:

Although the Father says it was great, the fact that he became a servant (52:13) is moderate indeed compared to the fact that he became an innocent sheep and a lamb (53:7).²⁹

Being oppressed and afflicted requires far greater effort than being elevated and praised, so for Origen, the weight of the passage is on verse 53:7: the servant willingly, passively suffers harm.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Origen of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John, Books 1-10*, translated by Ronald E. Heine (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 1.233-34 and 6.273-81; 80-1 and 242-5.

²⁹ Ibid, 80.

This willing, passive suffering is the reason why the Father elevates the servant and it wins him a warrior's portion of the victory spoils (53:12).

Later, in his commentary on chapter 6, Origen returns to consider the meaning of John's use of the words, Lamb of God. Here Origen says that John's Lamb of God is Isaiah's sheep led to slaughter and lamb before its shearer. He says Isaiah 53 is a restatement of Jeremiah 11:19: "I was an innocent lamb being led to be sacrificed."³⁰ Associating Isaiah 53:7 with Jeremiah 11:19 is startling.

It is significant that for Origen, Isaiah's servant is not modeled after the unblemished lamb of the passover (Exodus 12:5), nor does Origen identify the Lamb of God with the unmarred animal sacrifice offered in the temple on the Day of Atonement, even though the Masoretic text links Isaiah 52:15 with Exodus 16:14.³¹ Instead, Origen says Isaiah, and therefore also John, identifies the servant with the prophet Jeremiah, who was also led like a lamb to the slaughter. In this way, Jeremiah was a victim of community violence who was harmed for standing up for God's righteousness. As Jeremiah says, "And I did not know it was against me that they devised schemes, saying, 'Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, so that his name will no longer be remembered'" (Jer. 11:19).

Modern Hebrew scholars concur with Origen's assessment for two reasons. First, Jeremiah's passage and Isaiah 53:7-8 share the phrases "lamb led to the slaughter" and "cut off from the

³⁰ Ibid, 243.

³¹ In Dr. David Carr's Fall 2016 course, *The Book of Isaiah and the Christian Articulation of Hope*, my classmate Kristine Yi explained in her paper entitled, "The Suffering Servant-Poetic Intent," that the Masoretic scribes who copied the Hebrew text in the 6th to 10th centuries CE made notes on the side margin to indicate frequency of certain words with references (catchwords) that mark parallel passages. In verse 52:15 the word *yazzeḥ* (the same form of this verb means an Arabic-root for "startle" and/or "sprinkle" as is used in all other OT appearances) is noted as occurring twice with catchwords that refer to the parallel passage in Leviticus 16:14b.

land of the living.” Second, Isaiah 52:14 specifically calls the servant “marred.” In Leviticus the same Hebrew word for “marred” disqualifies an animal for ritual use and Isaiah’s servant is specifically unfit for ritual sacrifice, as in, “We accounted him stricken” (53:4) and “stricken for the transgression of my people” (53:8).³² In *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40:66*, Benjamin Sommer not only finds a preponderance of material from Jeremiah and first Isaiah in second Isaiah. He also finds evidence of Pentateuchal allusions that express an extended critique of Levitical priesthood. Exegetes who tie Isaiah 53 to Leviticus without this critique fail to comprehend second Isaiah’s nuance.

That Origen perceptively ties Isaiah 53 to Jeremiah 11 is an example of what John O’Keefe explains as Origen’s obsession with the literal level of scripture: “Origen’s desire to uncover spiritual meaning did not mean that he trivialized the literal text or was unconcerned with the actual words. In fact, Origen was one of the earliest and most careful text critics among early Christian writers.” O’Keefe emphasizes that Origen’s literal, text-critical work helped Christianity maintain its historical links to ancient Israel.³³

Origen combines the image of community violence of Jeremiah’s personal, bodily sacrifice with the symbolism of the sacrificial lamb³⁴ and then Origen adds another layer by connecting the gospel’s Lamb of God with the “standing though slain” lamb of Revelation (Revelation 5:6).³⁵ Origen says the servant, “purchased us with his own blood from [the devil] who had taken

³² See Jeremy Schipper “Interpreting the Lamb Imagery in Isaiah 53,” (*Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 132, No. 2) and Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40:66* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 93-96.

³³ John O’Keefe, “Scriptural Interpretation,” *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, edited by John A. McGuckin (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 193-7.

³⁴ Origen, 264-272.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 281.

possession of us when we had sold ourselves by our sins.” Origen says that, by Christ’s victory over the world’s evil powers, “all nations are set free from those who formerly controlled them,” and that the nations that have been set free are inspired to serve Christ because, “he delivered the poor from the mighty through his own passion and the needy who had no helper,” as Origen connects salvation with Psalm 71.³⁶ This psalm is a plea for salvation or rescue from brutal oppression.

For Origen, however, Christ the lamb is not alone because this image invokes the vision of Revelation’s altar and the multitude of holy martyrs beside it (Rev. 6:9). Similarly, says Origen, “among those sacrifices that are like this sacrifice (of the Lamb of God), one should include the shedding of the blood of the valiant martyrs.”³⁷ The death of the holy martyrs, says Origen, destroys evil powers. This is a kind of atonement in which innocent victims are tremendously powerful: “Their endurance and their confession even to the point of death, and their zeal for true devotion, blunt the sharp point of the treachery of their enemies against their victims.”³⁸ There is a greater evil than death, from which martyrdom rescues its victims: “Accommodating ourselves in speech to the will of the enemies of truth.”³⁹

Extending the saving actions of the servant in Isaiah 53 to a community of martyrs as Origen does makes sense because martyrdom itself is a public act. In Isaiah 53, the community of the narrators and their audience is cleansed or healed through their admission of complicity in the violence perpetrated on the servant. The narrators see their own hand in the stripes and bruising

³⁶ Ibid, 287.

³⁷ Ibid, 276.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid, 280.

es inflicted on the servant. They wrongly hid their faces from him and despised him (53:3), they wrongly esteemed him stricken and afflicted (53:5). Like wayward sheep, they turned away and left the servant responsible. Though they did not lead the servant like a sheep to slaughter, they failed to defend or protect him (53:7). Each step of the way, the narrators see the results of their waywardness, disregard, and abuse etched in the wounds carved into the servant's body.

In a Christian context, Origen's exegesis allows us to extend Christ's saving actions to the saving work accomplished through believers who follow Christ's example. They testify to the truth of the Gospel while shining a light on the evil of their oppressors. Their actions create a community of *metanoia*, whose minds have turned to protect the poor, the powerless, and the innocent. Back in his commentary on chapter 1, Origen describes how the work of Christ and the subsequent martyrs has an ultimate goal:

The 'taking away [of the sin of the world]' is at work in every single being in the world, until the sin of the entire world shall have been taken away and the Savior hands over to the Father a kingdom prepared to be ruled by the Father in which there is no sin and again all the things of God wholly and in every way will find a place. When this happens, the saying will be fulfilled, God shall be all in all (1 Cor 16:28).⁴⁰

Thus Origen's exegesis includes not only a vision of an end-time in human history, but also a description of the mechanism which will bring that end-time about: martyrdom.

Exegetical and theological principles

The mechanics of martyrdom figure into Origen's theory that Holy Scripture is divinely inspired by the Spirit, as he explains in the fourth book of his philosophical treatise, *On First Principles*. Scripture is so compelling that people from different nations voluntarily adopt its

⁴⁰ Ibid, 81.

laws and precepts and defend them in the face of persecution. In fact, the persecution and death of adherents continually resulted in increasing the popularity of scripture instead of suppressing it. With its effect on believers running counter to ordinary experience, this evidence of divine authorship indicates for Origen that a single intelligence unifies all scripture.⁴¹

Yet, despite its single, unifying intelligence, scripture is mired in all kinds of misinterpretation. This is deliberate, according to Origen:

The divine wisdom has arranged for certain stumbling blocks and interruptions of the historical sense to be found therein by inserting a number of impossibilities and incongruities, in order that the very interruption of the narrative might as it were present a barrier to the reader and lead him to refuse to proceed along the pathway of the ordinary meaning and so, by shutting us out and debarring us from that, might recall us to the entrance of a narrow footpath, to a higher and loftier road and lay open the immense breath of the divine wisdom.⁴²

Origen's exegesis of Isaiah 53 reflects the singular authorship of scripture by identifying its suffering servant with the Lamb of God from the gospel of John and the standing-though-slain lamb of Revelation. Perhaps we also find a divine stumbling block in the contradictory sense of how the Father's voice lifts up, exalts and glorifies the servant, while the narrators describe how the servant is abused and unjustly mistreated as a representative of his community. Origen's exegesis seeks to explain how divine glorification results from the the martyr's willing submission to humiliation and suffering by unjust, evil powers.

In *An Exhortation to Martyrdom*, Origen says that the definition of martyrdom derives from Psalm 116:13, "I will take the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord." Martyrdom, says Origen, is customarily called "the cup of salvation." This is what Jesus means when he asks his disciples, "Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" (Matthew 20:22) Martyr-

⁴¹ Origen, *On First Principles* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2013), 333-7.

⁴² Origen, 378.

dom is a second baptism, a forgiveness of sins.⁴³ Origen says that when Paul calls us to boast of our sufferings in Romans 5:3-5, Paul is exhorting us to martyrdom.⁴⁴ For Origen, the salvation of martyrdom is not restricted to Christians alone, but includes and builds on the tradition Jewish martyrs of 2 Maccabees 6-7, the old man Eleazar, and the mother and seven brothers tormented by Antiochus.⁴⁵

Historian of Religion Stephen Patterson connects the death of Eleazar with the Greek tradition of the “noble death,” exemplified by Socrates of Athens who chose to comply with his death sentence instead of escaping, as dramatized in Plato’s dialog *The Phaedo*. In a similar way, sympathizers among Eleazar’s tormentors suggest that the old Jewish sage only pretends to eat sacrificial meat to escape the punishment of death by torture for refusing to partake. Patterson points to Eleazar’s decision not to pretend to comply as critical for martyrdom: “The death he dies is not a private, solitary act. It is public, a witness to others. He will not ‘become a model of impiety for the young, by setting them an example of eating unclean food.’ His death is vicarious, for others, it gives others an example to emulate.”⁴⁶ As Eleazar explains:

Therefore, by bravely giving up my life now, I will show myself worthy of my old age and leave to the young a noble example of how to die a good death willingly and nobly for the revered and holy laws (2 Maccabees 6:27-28).

The narrator closes chapter 6 of 2 Maccabees by declaring that Eleazar’s death was an example of nobility and a memorial of courage, not only to the young, but to whole nation (v. 31), perhaps

⁴³ Origen of Alexandria, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom*, tr., Rowan Greer (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1979), XXVIII-XXXII, 58-63.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, XLI, 72.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, XXII-XXVII, 56-9.

⁴⁶ Stephen J. Patterson, *Beyond the Passion: Rethinking the Death and Life of Jesus* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 2004), 48-50.

in the same way as second Isaiah says, “The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous.”

Like Origen, Patterson goes on to argue that Christ’s death, especially as it is understood in the gospels of Mark and John and in Paul’s letters to the Philippians and Romans, is a martyr’s death. The death of Jesus bound his followers together in a new form of community that dared to live outside the imperial system of patronage sacrifices. For Patterson, there is a radical difference between saying, “Jesus died for our sins,” when that death is understood in purely sacrificial terms, and “Jesus died for our sins,” meaning that his public crucifixion exonerates or glorifies his life and completes his work as a teacher and healer. His followers believe themselves to be reconciled with God only because he suffered death willingly for his faith in God. Nevertheless, as Romans 5:10 states, although they “were reconciled to God through the death of his Son,” much more surely than that they “will be saved by his life.” Namely, his followers continued to be saved when they model their lives on the life of Jesus. According to Patterson, understanding the martyrological aspects of Christ’s death means that it “cannot be separated from the exemplary aspects of his life.”⁴⁷

The author of Revelation includes 144,000 sealed martyrs from the tribes of Israel and a “great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Revelation 7:1-9). Jesus was a martyr, following a long line of martyrs, and for Origen, Jesus aimed to inspire an even longer, more inclusive line of martyrs. Origen quotes from John’s chapter 12 to close *An Exhortation*: “When I am exalted from the earth, I will draw all men to

⁴⁷ Patterson, 70-85.

myself' (v. 32). In Origen's interpretation, this chapter which quotes Isaiah 6 and Isaiah 53, is an allusion to the martyrdom of Jesus.

3. Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Modern history dates the beginning of the Reformation to 1517, when the 34-year old Augustinian monk and biblical lecturer Martin Luther became irate about the sale of indulgences to his faithful flock in the small university town of Wittenberg. In response, Luther penned his scathing *Ninety-five Theses* or *Disputation on the Power of Indulgences*. The incendiary popularity of his *Theses* fueled a profusion of his pamphlets and disputations criticizing the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church. Originally, Luther had no intention of breaking with the Church. But the Vatican issued a bull of excommunication, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V condemned Luther as an outlaw, and Luther narrowly escaped a conviction of heresy and execution by burning at the stake. His outspoken stance left Luther and his followers with no choice but to form a church of their own.

Luther had turned to Paul's doctrine of justification by faith well before he sought to undermine the validity of the medieval rites, sacraments and traditions administered by a corrupt Roman Catholic hierarchy. Although he had joined an Augustinian order and undertook a life of extreme mortification, these efforts did not leave him feeling that he was any less a sinner before God. While lecturing on Romans, between 1515 and 1516, he wrote in his commentary, "we are made righteous by God. This happens through faith in the Gospel." This insight confirmed the futility of his attempts to feel that he merited grace through penance and mortification. When he looked back later, Luther explained that he had wrestled with Paul's phrase, "for in it [the

gospel], the righteousness of God is revealed, through faith for faith” (1:17).⁴⁸ Over the course of the next decade Luther defined the doctrine of justification by faith as the cornerstone of his new theology, his “single solid rock:”

namely, that we are redeemed from sin, death, and the devil and endowed with eternal life, not through ourselves and certainly not through our works, which are even less than we are ourselves, but through the help of Another, the only Son of God, Jesus Christ.⁴⁹

Although Luther insists on the importance of good works, “works righteousness”— doing good works in order to justify one’s salvation — denies the necessity of Christ’s infinite sacrifice.⁵⁰

Luther’s Interpretation

Luther’s exegesis of Isaiah 53 is part of a series of lectures on the entire book of Isaiah that he delivered between the summer of 1527 and February 1530; these were compiled from notes collected by scholars and students.⁵¹ Luther wastes no time on the literal level of the text to explore Isaiah’s surface discussion about the servant before he discusses what he considers to be its true meaning. Ironically, this true meaning does not appear in the literal text. Instead, following Origen and Jerome (modern editors of Luther’s works think Luther spoke with a copy of Origen/Jerome’s commentary before him⁵²), Luther immediately provides an allegorical mean-

⁴⁸ Lyndal Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet* (London: Penguin Random House UK, 2016), 91.

⁴⁹ Luther, Vol. 27, p. 145.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Editor’s Preface, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 17, p. ix.

⁵² Editor’s note, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 16, pp. x–xi, “Additional elucidation of Luther’s words has come from the exegetical tradition on which he drew in these lectures, notably from Jerome, whose commentaries he seems to have had before him throughout much of his preparation, but also the medieval exegetes cited in our notes.”

ing that categorically equates the servant with Christ.⁵³ Luther begins his commentary on Isaiah 53 with a proclamation:

In this chapter the prophet speaks primarily of the Head of the Kingdom as he treats of the person of the King and the manner of His deliverance. This is the foremost passage on the suffering and resurrection of Christ, and there is hardly another like it.⁵⁴

While Origen's exegesis sought to tie Christian faith more closely with the book of Jeremiah and the history of ancient Israel, Luther is excited about this passage because it condemns the mistakes of the Jews. Luther accuses the Jews of holding out for a glorified messiah who does not suffer the humiliation of the cross:

Therefore we must memorize this passage, for it certainly drives out the stubbornness of the Jews. The Jews cannot deny that this passage speaks of Christ. They indeed grant the glories of Christ in this chapter, but they are unwilling to grant His cross and sufferings.

Luther, like Origen, focuses on the passage's core contradiction — glory through humiliation. Luther condemns the Jews for failing to embrace the suffering of the servant which is clearly a key component to the passage's literal reading. This is demeaning and insulting, to say the least, and also not true. Jews did not recognize Isaiah 53's suffering servant to be Jesus of Nazareth, whom they refused to worship as the son of God. That is not the same as failing to acknowledge the mysterious, grace-filled meaning of this haunting passage, in which glory arises for one who submits to compounded injustice on behalf of others.

⁵³ In Luther's first book of commentary on Isaiah, he condones the use of allegory but only to explicate the Word of Law and the Word of Grace: "Such allegory must be used in accordance with the Word of the Law and the Gospel, and this is the explanation of different matters by the same Spirit. These things must not be twisted to apply to works and station in life, as our papists have done, and both Origen and Jerome in their allegories are members of the same allegorical clan. Therefore note that allegories properly pertain to the Word, as Paul used it in Galatians (Gal. 4:22 ff.). I have called these things to your attention so that you may beware of a vulgar use of allegories." Luther, Vol. 16, pp. 326–327.

⁵⁴ Unless otherwise noted, Luther's quotes in this section are from pages 215-232 as found in the *Luther's works, vol. 17: Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*.

Nevertheless, Luther, as Origen, explores this core contradiction as the primary doctrine of his Christian faith. While Origen considers how glory might simultaneously arise from humiliation, Luther separates the two conditions in time: “This King will be glorious, but after his death.” With sagacity that is opposed to every kind of violent tyranny that earthly authorities seek to impose, Jesus “supremely and pleasantly” accomplishes his mission. This mission, though, takes its toll, producing the horror, disgust and revulsion of the passage that Luther considers key to his interpretation: “His appearance will be so vile that many will be sick and offended.” It is the effect of this horrid impression, in which Christ is so disgraced, that he dies between robbers. For Luther, that puts the contemplation of this passage outside reason: “This no reason can believe.” To Luther, only the work of the Holy Spirit permits believers to accept Christ’s “absurd” appearance, yet warrants “His exalted kingdom.” Luther declares the central importance of Isaiah 53: “This passage forms the basis of the church’s faith that Christ’s kingdom is not of this world.” Isaiah 53 is not about redemptive action in the outer, physical world, for Luther. Instead, this passage provides a window into Luther’s spiritual, non-earthly world, where an inward, spiritual Jesus “pleasantly” endures his physical destruction.

The mystical, spiritual, literal core of Luther’s other-worldly faith lies in the reality that Christ died “for us,” suffering not on account of his own sins, but “for our sins and griefs.” In fact, because Christ is innocent, his suffering is nothing else but our sin. Whoever does not believe this is not a Christian: “These words: OUR, US, FOR US [sic], must be written in letters of gold,” Luther exclaims, because according to the law, everyone bears his own sin, and this shows that Isaiah pushes us beyond our rational capacity. Preaching “the whole gospel” shows us that Christ suffered contrary to law, right and custom. Luther concludes that the law and any human

work profit nothing; as Luther says, Paul clings to “Christ alone as the sin bearer,” and John the Baptist calls Jesus, “Lamb of God” to reiterate the Levitical sacrifice.

Thus, we see that Luther misses some clues in his exegesis that Origen, in his fastidiousness with the literal level, is careful to distinguish. First, Luther reads Isaiah 53 as a version of Levitical temple sacrifice that is effective because it now takes place—not on a physical level, but on a spiritual level. Luther does not recognize Isaiah’s reference to Jeremiah that calls believers to account for their personal involvement in contributing to physical harm.

While Origen raises the sufferings of individual martyrs and considers their blood as a contribution to God’s ultimate victory, Luther instead commands, “If you want to be healed, do not look at your own wounds, but fix your gaze on Christ.” We may know good, holy, saintly people, but their works do not save or “justify.” Instead of revering the martyrs, we must reject “all works and merits.” Luther stresses that, “no one is excepted.” Luther gives up Origen’s community of martyrs and saints entirely for the sake of his non-rational acceptance of grace from Christ who shoulders our sins. Though Origen’s exegesis opens the door to experience our complicity in and silence concerning unjust persecution, Luther’s erases all contemplation of our contribution to community mistakes: “If you want to regard your sin as resting on you, such a thought in your heart is not of God but of Satan.” We need to say: “I behold my sins heaped on Christ,” and “My sins have been transferred to Christ. He has them.”

Luther’s conviction that Paul relied on Isaiah 53 is confirmed by modern English theologian and biblical scholar Francis Watson who states, “Isaiah 53.4 is the common source of the entire series of Pauline statements,” that “Christ’s death was “for us,” as the Septuagint says: οὗτος τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν φέρει καὶ περὶ ἡμῶν ὀδυνᾶται, which means, this one bore the sins of

us and felt pain⁵⁵ concerning us. While scripture alone did not teach Paul that a man named Jesus was killed by Roman crucifixion, Watson says that the Christ event for Paul is “read by” the text of Isaiah 53. Just as Watson is assured that “scripture *alone* teaches Paul that righteousness is by faith,” by which he means Paul’s certain inspiration is Habakkuk 2:4, so Isaiah 53 also teaches Paul that Christ died for us.⁵⁶ However, as Luther states in his commentary on Romans 5:1, justification by faith achieves peace with God while it sets Christians at odds with their fellow human beings:

*Since we are justified, through God’s imputation, therefore by faith, not by works, we have peace, in conscience and spirit, with God, although not yet with men and the flesh and the world and the devil, indeed, we have the more trouble, through our Lord Jesus Christ, as through our Mediator and not through ourselves, even though we are already justified by faith.*⁵⁷

While Watson supports Luther’s connection of the two passages, Watson does not support Luther’s interpretation that justification creates enemies. Watson’s highly speculative case that Isaiah 53:4 is Paul’s basis for Romans 5:6 relies on his text-critical findings that the earliest versions of Paul’s earliest works used *περὶ ἡμῶν*, instead of *ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν*, and that scribes had progressively changed *περὶ* to *ὑπὲρ* to match Paul’s later custom to use *ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν* exclusively in later letters such as Romans. The issue is one of intensity: *περὶ ἡμῶν* is a looser formulation, *περὶ* with a genitive originally signified, “about or concerning,” as in the matter over which armies

⁵⁵ Liddell, Scott and Jones, *Greek-English Lexicon*, “*odun-aiteros*” / “*odunesai*,” 1199.

⁵⁶ Watson includes 2 Cor 5:21; Gal. 3:13; Rom. 5:6; Rom. 8:32; Rom. 14:15; 1 Cor. 11:24; 1 Cor. 5:14-5; Gal. 2:20, see Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, Second Edition (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 508.

⁵⁷ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, vol. 25: Lectures on Romans*, J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds., (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 43.

fought a battle.⁵⁸ On the other hand, the object of ὑπὲρ is far more specific and definite; with the genitive it has a definite spatial meaning “over,” and so it is applied metaphorically, “on behalf of,” and in fact, is used in a judicial sense of “representative on behalf of.”⁵⁹ Watson posits that, as Paul wrote Romans, he intensified the reason for Christ’s death, replacing his use of “concerning us” with the stronger, more specific “for the sake of us” and our sins.

If Watson’s case has merit, Paul’s reliance on Isaiah 53 illustrates another of Luther’s exegetical principles: that the Hebrew Scriptures are the “swaddling clothes” of the New Testament’s “Christ Child” of the gospel message.⁶⁰ Luther means that apostolic writers base all their preaching on Old Testament texts, and that the New Testament was the revelation of the Old Testament. In the specific case of Paul, Watson agrees.

In summary, in Luther’s exegesis of Isaiah 53, he replaces Origen’s cosmic cycle of continual, communal progression toward godliness with another kind of struggle entirely — a spiritual struggle with personal self-righteousness whose head must be continually “lopped off” because we are beings in a world that likes to bask in its own glory. Luther’s exegesis provides personal comfort, a blessing for his audience, whom the Catholic church had terrified with stories about the fearsomeness of standing alone under God’s wrath. Today, however, when Reformed Christians read Luther’s guarantees of personal comfort in this passage, they weaken its ability to inspire action, build a sense of community, and help to repair or save the world, as we heard in Origen’s interpretation.

⁵⁸ Liddell, Scott and Jones (LSJ), *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1366-7.

⁵⁹ LSJ, 1857.

⁶⁰ Timothy J. Wengert, *Reading the Bible with Martin Luther* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 14.

Faith and Exegetical Principles

Today, in a world that loves simplistic binaries, it is common to hear about how Luther, a former monk of an Augustinian order, challenged the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and the Vicar of Rome with the authority of the Bible. This understanding is reinforced by Luther's copious commentaries, biblical translations into robust German vernacular, and his impressive publication of pamphlets and sermons that encouraged believers to read and wrestle with the Bible for themselves. However, Lutheran scholar and translator Timothy Wengert, repudiates that Luther would have ever called the Bible "inerrant" or "infallible," and provides interesting statistics that complicate Luther's relationship to the Bible's authority. Luther employs the phrase *Sola scriptura* merely 20 times in all 55 of his combined works; *Sola gratia* appears more than 200 times; and neither phrase compares with Luther's use of *Sola fides* more than 1,200 times. These show that Luther believed that faith surpassed scripture in importance.⁶¹ Wengert's tallies illustrate again the circularity of Christian interpretation of scripture.

Wengert quotes Luther as saying in 1533 that he hoped to be remembered for his simple acknowledgment that Jesus Christ is his Lord and Savior, relying on both scripture and his experience of faith. At the core of Luther's biblical theology, explains Wengert, is Luther's living encounter — in his faithful experience of the theology of the cross within and outside scripture — with Our Lord, Jesus Christ.⁶²

⁶¹ Wengert, 20-1.

⁶² Ibid.

To further complicate Luther's orientation to the Bible, Wengert defends as reasonable Luther's establishment of a "canon within a canon" as part of his exegetical method, with Paul's letter to the Romans at its center. As typical 16th-century humanists, explains Wengert, Luther and his closest colleague Philip Melanchthon assumed that a reader could analyze a book and figure out the central idea or main point, which they called its *argumentum*. Thus for Luther, Paul's letter to the Romans is the *argumentum* of the Bible and justification by faith is the *argumentum* of Romans. The drive to find this rational content fits with Luther's insistence that scripture contains only one literal meaning. This is contrary to Origen's proposal of a hierarchy of scriptural meanings, including the highest and most hidden.⁶³

As a principle of biblical interpretation, Luther posits a division of scripture into law and gospel because Christ's primary function, the reason why God came to earth as a human being, is to redeem—or forgive—the human race. This redemption is accomplished only with Christ's death and resurrection. Scripture's legal components are responsible first for restraining sinners and revealing God's will and order; and second, for killing (through judgment) the "old" creature, the human being who lives in the world, and driving that human being back to the comfort of the gospel. As the vehicle that delivers Christ within the intelligible word, the gospel part of scripture acts on the soul of its audience to reassure, pacify and then encourage believers to take Christian action. Thus, although Luther insists on the importance of good works, "works righteousness" — carrying out honorable acts to earn one's salvation — denies the necessity of Christ's infinite sacrifice.⁶⁴

⁶³ Torjesen opens her volume on Origen's Hermeneutics with this criticism leveled by Luther (in *On the Bondage of the Will*) and Melanchthon (in *Loci Communes*). See Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), 2.

⁶⁴ Luther, 44.

To Luther, therefore, all the gospel narratives, everything we hear Jesus saying and doing in the canonical gospels, albeit vital, are also accidental to his principal work as humanity's redeemer:

Besides, teaching the Law is not the proper function of Christ on account of which He came into the world; it is an accidental function, just as when He healed the sick, raised the dead, helped the poor, and comforted the afflicted.⁶⁵

Luther makes clear that he does not intend to denigrate the good works of Jesus, although for him, anything Jesus does as a human is not part of his essence as Christ.⁶⁶ Christ's essence is not to be a lawgiver, healer, helper or judge, but to be the passive receiver of all sin. Luther's theology relies on these two hermeneutical principles:

- 1) the doctrine of justification by faith is "the true meaning of Christianity, that we are justified by faith in Christ, not by the works of the Law;"⁶⁷
- 2) all law, including "love God, love neighbor" is the work of the devil in that it places the sinner in a position of condemnation, as no human is able to fulfill it.

My discomfort with Luther's method of exegesis includes his reduction of widely varied texts, in multiple voices, from multiple genres to a rational synthesis from which he extracts an *argumentum*. Luther's exegesis of Isaiah 53 fails to consider the poetic impact of some ineffable effects of Isaiah's fourth servant song, such as the variation in the characterization of different speakers and the unspoken impact on silent bystanders who the poet describes as stricken dumb.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Luther on Galatians 2:16, LW Vol. 26, 136.

For Luther, Melanchthon, and even a modern scholar such as Wengert, the fact that the gospel's *argumentum* saves souls from eternal hellfire makes such a rational reduction worthwhile. But when Wengert applies that *argumentum* to some of Luke's parables such as the Good Samaritan, the story loses power and impact. For Wengert, a spiritualized, allegorical reading is irresistible.⁶⁸ Christ, in his infinite capacity to absorb our sins, becomes the only viable candidate who could possibly serve as the Good Samaritan. This allegorical reading seems a sad replacement because, for me and with my Christology, the literal meaning of this parable saves. Jesus tells the story in answer to the lawyer who stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25). Wengert's Luther-inspired reading contradicts the literal gospel text.

Scholars associated with the New Perspective on Paul address the virulent anti-semitism that is endemic to Luther's core theology, dispelling Luther's accusations of legalism and his attacks on Jews for works-righteousness. Lutheran Bishop of Sweden, Krister Stendahl, explains that Jews alone did not suffer Luther's vitriol:

In Luther's biblical theology there is an adversary relationship toward everything that does not express the center of his theology. Luther's structure of theology, of exegesis, his perception of the early church, is grounded in this adversary or oppositional viewpoint.⁶⁹

Stendahl questions how this propensity for conflict fits with Jesus' underlying approach. I would add that Paul, as well, sought solidarity and worked to unite factions and divisions. Stendahl indicates that as a "highly male" way of viewing reality, Luther's approach has inflicted terrible costs and produced grave consequences. Stendahl questions the validity of the concept of a

⁶⁸ Wengert, 63-4.

⁶⁹ Krister Stendahl, "The Word of God and the Words of Luther," *Luther and Learning* (Sellingrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1983), 133-141.

“canon within a canon,” which provides human limits to the Word of God. Finally, Stendahl, as I do, bristles at the idea that all scripture that is worthy of attention can be reduced to proclamation and *argumentum*. Establishing a single meaning was important for Luther, who sought to reassure adherents that the Bible could replace the authority of the 1,500-year-old Roman Catholic Church. However, modern Christians can welcome a level of uncertainty.⁷⁰ And, why, asks Stendahl, must we coerce two authors as unique and complementary as Paul and John into the same expression of Biblical truth?⁷¹

Stendahl and other New Perspective scholars pose problems for those who embrace Luther and Melancthon’s theology. New Perspective scholars redefine justification by faith so that justification is no longer the central, life-giving statement of Christian soteriology. Instead, they consider justification to be a moral or ethical principal about how to include identities when there is conflict about not conforming to one another’s rules, such as Jews and Galatians, Hellenistic Romans and Christ Believers, etcetera.⁷² Yet, as Francis Watson’s speculation suggests, Stendahl’s position may also fail to take into consideration the centrality of Isaiah 53, on which Paul’s justification formulation depends.

Christ Who Redeems

Luther’s 1535 lectures on Galatians present an extensive explanation of justification by faith. At the center of his explanation, a redeeming Christ appears almost diametrically opposed

⁷⁰ My future work will explore how Luther and Calvin’s formulations of redemption open the way to reinforce biblical fundamentalism and inerrancy, although Wengert assures us this is far from Luther’s intention.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Erik M. Heen argues against these characterizations of Lutheran justification in his article, “A Lutheran Response to the New Prospective on Paul,” *Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 24 no 3 (January 2010): 263-291.

to the savior found in all four canonical gospels. The redeeming Christ came not to institute laws or give commandments, but to abolish them.⁷³ That includes the command to love one another, which in John is called a *new* commandment. Commandments, including the command to love, are not part of Christ's work as redeemer, because when "Christ issues commandments in the gospel and teaches, or rather interprets, the Law, this belongs not to the doctrine of justification, but to the doctrine of good works."⁷⁴ The doctrine of good works, according to Luther, is vitally important for the earthly realm, but it is not primary. Luther makes clear that he does not intend to denigrate the good works of Jesus, although for him, anything Jesus does as a human is not part of his essence as Christ: "These are glorious and divine works, of course; but they are not peculiar to Christ." These good works are works on the same level as the works accomplished by the best of humans. Luther adds, "For the prophets taught the Law too, and performed miracles."⁷⁵

Luther is reacting to the prevalent view of his time that viewed Jesus primarily as a law giver who imposed a code of morality more stringent and internalized than one laid down by Moses. Luther's redeeming Christ freed people from an unrealistic standard of asceticism. However, today, when I hear that the miracles, the stories, and the narrative of the gospel are not essential to Christ's mission in so far as Jesus is the son of God, I am helplessly confused. The stories of Jesus' work on earth taught me who Jesus *is*. Those actions compose my faith.

⁷³ Luther on Galatians 4:6, Vol. 26, 327: "Thus Christ, the divine and human Person, begotten of God in eternity and of the Virgin in time, came not to institute laws but to bear them and abolish them. He did not become a teacher of the Law; He became a disciple obedient to the Law, so that by this obedience of His He might redeem us who were under the Law."

⁷⁴ Luther on Galatians 4:5, Vol. 26, 372.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Luther says that even Jesus admits the works of other humans exceed those performed by Jesus: “For the prophets and especially the apostles did greater miracles than Christ Himself did.”⁷⁶ Luther refers here to John 14, where Jesus says that once the Holy Spirit comes, believers — presumably even present-day audiences, as well — will contribute greater works than those of Jesus:

Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it (John 14: 12-14).

In this Johannine dialogue with his disciples, faith enables great works. Yet Luther twists this passage to support his own point: works are not core or essential to Christ’s purpose on earth. For Luther, Jesus as Christ must be entirely unique—even though the gospels feature plenty of evidence that we are to understand Jesus as truly human. The cost of believing in Christ as an all-powerful, sin-absorbing, divine antibody, however, is that Luther’s theology lacks faithfulness to scriptural texts, as Luther reads his own understanding of the supremely passive nature of Christ, back into Isaiah 53:

But the true theology teaches that there is no more sin in the world, because Christ, on whom, according to Is. 53:6, the Father has laid the sins of the entire world, has conquered, destroyed, and killed it in His own body.

The individual sinner who believes in Luther’s Christ’s success participates in Christ’s victory over all sin. This is what Luther means by calling faith the “form of Christ” in which our

⁷⁶ Ibid.

understanding grasps or takes hold of Christ.⁷⁷ However, because Christ receives and destroys all our sins, the cognition of faith is yet “dark” to us. As Finnish theologian Tuomo Mannermaa says, faith to Luther is “knowledge that sees nothing.”⁷⁸ The only evidence of faith is the effect of the Word on our hearts. Nothing more than faith is required for full redemption and justification. Yet when Christ is present within the Christian, he does not leave the believer to rest. Instead, Christ prods the believer until He becomes incarnate through the Christian’s good works.⁷⁹ Worldly works are only good when Christ has dominion over the actions of a true believer. I fear the price of this dark and mysterious faith today comes at great cost of engagement and meaning.

⁷⁷ Luther illustrates the connection between the form of knowledge, Christ and the preaching of the gospel in his commentary on Galatians 4:19, Vol. 26, 430: “My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!” According to Luther, “with whom I am again in travail” is an allegory. “The apostles—like all teachers, though in a special way—acted in the place of parents; just as the latter give birth to the form of the body, so the former to the form of the mind.” (Note that in Plato’s *Theaetetus*, Socrates describes himself as midwife to knowledge in his dialogue partners.) Luther continues: “Now the form of the Christian mind is faith, the trust of the heart, which takes hold of Christ, clings only to Him and to nothing else besides. A heart that is equipped with such confidence has the true form of Christ, which is provided by the ministry of the Word. 1 Cor. 4:15: “I became your father through the gospel,” namely, in the Spirit, so that you might know Christ and believe in Him; 2 Cor. 3:3: “You are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God.” For the Word proceeds from the mouth of the apostle and reaches the heart of the hearer; there the Holy Spirit is present and impresses that Word on the heart, so that it is heard. In this way every preacher is a parent, who produces and forms the true shape of the Christian mind through the ministry of the Word.”

⁷⁸ Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification*, trans. Kirsi Irmeli Stjerna (Minneapolis : Fortress Press, 2005), 26.

⁷⁹ Luther on Galatians 3:10, Vol. 26, 255: “You cannot produce anyone in all the world to whom the title “doer of the Law” applies apart from the promise of the gospel. “Doer of the Law” is, therefore, a fictitious term, which no one understands unless he is outside and beyond the Law in the blessing and the faith of Abraham. Thus he is a true doer of the Law who receives the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ and then begins to love God and to do good to his neighbor. Hence “to do” includes faith at the same time. Faith takes the doer himself and makes him into a tree, and his deeds become fruit. First there must be a tree, then the fruit. For apples do not make a tree, but a tree makes apples. So faith first makes the person, who afterwards performs works. To keep the Law without faith, therefore, is to make apples without a tree, out of wood or mud, which is not to make apples but to make mere phantasies. But once the tree has been planted, that is, once there is the person or doer who comes into being through faith in Christ, then works follow. For there must be a doer before deeds, not deeds before the doer. So “the doer of the Law is justified”; that is, he is accounted as righteous (Rom. 2:13). A doer does not get this name on the basis of works that have been performed; he gets it on the basis of works that are *to be* performed. For Christians do not become righteous by doing righteous works; but once they have been justified by faith in Christ, they do righteous works. In civil life the situation is different; here one becomes a doer on the basis of deeds, just as one becomes a lutenist by often playing the lute, as Aristotle says. But in theology one does not become a doer on the basis of works of the Law; first there must be the doer, and then the deeds follow.”

Other works may seem “good,” but without the Redeeming Christ, they do not serve Christ and cannot be good. According to Luther, no one can be defined as good through their actions, Christians included.⁸⁰ For Luther, the great commandment, the super-law of love, has only a negative value. It indicts us when we know we have given in to selfishness and it inspires us to do better. Love and acting out of love, though, never justifies, redeems, or saves us. This directly contradicts Matthew 25 where sheep enter everlasting life because they cared for their neighbor and goats enter everlasting hellfire because of their disdain; neither group recognized their Lord, and salvation lay entirely in their actions. Thus for Luther, as I described above for Wengert, the parable of the Good Samaritan preaches best as allegory. Jesus alone is qualified to act as the Samaritan, the true alien wayfarer who heals those of us who are reviled sinners.

“We are that wounded man who fell among robbers; whose wounds the Samaritan bound up, pouring on oil and wine; whom he set on his own beast and brought to an inn and took care of; and whom he entrusted to the innkeeper upon departing, with the words: “Take care of him” (Luke 10:30–35). Thus we are cherished meanwhile as in an inn, until the Lord reaches out His hand a second time, as Isaiah says, to deliver us (Is. 10:10–11)⁸¹

Today, when Reformed Christians ask, along with the lawyer in the gospel: “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?,” Reformed ministers must hesitate before replying, as Jesus did when he counseled on the Samaritan’s example: “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10: 25-37). For Luther, there

⁸⁰ Luther on Galatians 3:25, Vol. 26, 350: “Thus we have received the first fruits of the Spirit (Rom. 8:23), and the leaven hidden in the lump; the whole lump has not yet been leavened, but it is beginning to be leavened. If I look at the leaven, I see nothing but the leaven; but if I look at the mass of the lump, there is not merely the leaven anymore. Thus if I look at Christ, I am completely holy and pure, and I know nothing at all about the Law; for Christ is my leaven. But if I look at my flesh, I feel greed, sexual desire, anger, pride, the terror of death, sadness, fear, hate, grumbling, and impatience against God. To the extent that these are present, Christ is absent; or if He is present, He is present weakly. Here there is still need for a custodian [the moral law] to discipline and torment the flesh, that powerful jackass, so that by this discipline sins may be diminished and the way prepared for Christ. For just as Christ came once physically, according to time, abrogating the entire Law, abolishing sin, and destroying death and hell, so He comes to us spiritually without interruption and continually smothers and kills these things in us.

⁸¹ Luther on Galatians 3:10: Vol. 26, p. 260.

is a pause—the only way to inherit eternal life is first to believe that Christ’s death redeemed one’s sins. Only when that belief is enacted may the Holy Spirit spur Christian action. What if, instead, as the Samaritan text describes, the Holy Spirit comes upon us precisely when we take action to promote healing?

While Origen’s interpretation shared the glories of Isaiah 53 among a long line of martyrs whose blood eventually saves the world, Reformation interpretations bestowed its glory to Jesus Christ alone. Martin Luther and, as I discuss in the next section, also John Calvin, exhaust the meaning of this passage in explaining how Christ’s death achieves redemption from sin. Although they are both students of Augustinian schools, Luther and Calvin limited grace to forgiveness. Thus they restricted the more comprehensive understanding of Augustine of Hippo (354 to 430) who considered grace to be an infusion by the Holy Spirit, God’s love poured into our hearts (Romans 5:5); that frees our will from bondage to sin so we can be moved to actively love God and our neighbor.⁸² Luther and Calvin’s greatest concern however, was to assure Reformed Christians that they receive grace or forgiveness not through the rites, rituals and sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church, but through correct belief, or “justification by faith.” Thus for them, Isaiah’s fourth servant song illustrates the Reformed concept of justification: the redemption of an individual soul through the gift of faith in God’s forgiveness for our sins.

However, Luther and Calvin’s interpretations include no messages that would compel a community to respond in solidarity on behalf of people who are being persecuted. By this I do not mean to say that messages about brotherly love and social welfare are missing from either

⁸² This summation is from Randall Zachman, *The Assurance of Faith*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 1, relying on *The Confessions of Augustine*, Book X, chapter 36 and I have added emphasis from chapter 43 of *The Confessions*.

theologian's worldview. Both Luther and Calvin define a subsequent action of the Holy Spirit on the will that moves us to good works in the process of "sanctification." For them, sanctification, which includes doing good, is a second step that follows justification.

Luther and Calvin's priorities honored the persecuted position of Reformed Christians during the Reformation and the murderous century that followed. Thousands chose martyrdom as a way of testifying that their faith did not rely on the Roman Catholic Church. However, I have shown that, as Luther and Calvin erase social solidarity from their interpretations of this key passage in Isaiah, they also remove it from primary consideration in gospel narratives. Solidarity with the poor and crucified people in our midst — Cone and Sobrino's primary theological concerns — becomes at best a secondary step in Reformed theology. Although this enabled Reformed Christians to repudiate the authority of the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th and 17th centuries, today, the omission of these messages as key to Christian salvation dramatically reduces the power of the gospel to save our world.

James Cone blasts white Christian theologians for reducing the cross to abstract, sentimental piety.⁸³ He blames white theology for constructing a Christian identity that is immune to acknowledging that racial persecution contradicts the gospel.⁸⁴ However, Cone attributes the faults of white theology to the negligence and blindness of white theologians. I'm concerned that negligence and blindness are *personal* failings. Cone fails to systematically address the fact that Protestant theologians in the Reformation re-wrote the "take-aways" of gospel narratives so they could be encased in brief, rational statements found in Reformed confessions and catechisms.

⁸³ Cone, 161.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 159.

Through the Heidelberg Catechism, Reformed Christians who believe Christ satisfied the penalty for their sins are assured that God no longer remembers any of their sins or the sinful nature against which they continue to struggle all their lives. By grace, God grants them the righteousness of Christ and frees them forever from judgment. Eternity is taken care of. “Based on the belief that I am righteous before God, I am heir to life everlasting. All of this comes without any merit of my own, out of sheer grace.” As a Reformed Christian, all I must do is accept this gift with a believing heart, and God grants me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient to God on my behalf.⁸⁵

For Reformed Christians today, Luther’s interpretation of Isaiah 53 erases:

1. A call to acknowledge and repent the sin of our complicity in unjust persecution;
2. A call to join in social solidarity with people who are unjustly persecuted, by risking our own security to help them.

Luther’s account of justification also does not consider the meaning of this doctrine within the context of Paul’s conversion in Acts of the Apostles. Paul is deeply complicit in the stoning of the martyr named Stephen (Acts 7) which sets Paul on a rampage of persecution (Acts 8). A blood-thirsty Paul is en route to Damascus, with approval from Jerusalem to imprison Damascene Jews who followed Christ, when a light from heaven flashed all around. Jesus revealed himself in the place of Paul's victims as Paul fell to the ground.⁸⁶ In Luke's narrative version, Jesus took the place of people whom society unjustly oppressed, persecuted and destroyed, to bring

⁸⁵ *Ecumenical Creeds*, Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 23, Q & A 60-2,

⁸⁶ In an echo of Matthew 25, Paul hears Jesus calls out to him from the position of Paul’s victims, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4).

about a *metanoia*, a change of heart and mind, in one of their central oppressors. Reading Luke's narrative version, Reformed Christians can imagine ourselves to be like Paul, when we contribute to harm and abuse. The crucified and resurrected Christ died for us, too. When we see that we destroy people, we can die to our persecuting selves and be saved by serving one another.⁸⁷ Paul's conversion—not from Jew to Christian, but from persecutor to persecuted, explains why Paul dedicates his life to building communities that challenge their members to see Jesus crucified for one another.

The distinction comes down to what Aristotle would call an efficient cause. In Luther's writings, Paul has a life-changing experience of an all-suffering Christ who redeems Paul. In Luke's writings, Paul has a life-changing experience of Christ who redeems Paul—by revealing himself as present and harmed in the human beings whom Paul victimized. Luke placed Christ clearly on the side of and in the place of, the people whom we oppress, those who suffer from our judgment that their wholeness matters less than our self-righteous agendas. Thus, Luke corrected our very human tendencies to spiritualize Christ and thereby avoid the mirror that reveals our darkest truths.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ The story of Paul's conversion in Acts mirrors the conversion experience of parents who previously condemned their children for expressing a non-heterosexual orientation, as described by Lutheran pastor, Christian Scharen in his article, "Experiencing the Body," *Sexuality and the Sacred, Second Edition* edited by Marvin Ellison and Kelly Brown Douglas, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2010), 42-5.

⁸⁸ My future work will include reading justification by faith in Galatians and Romans while imagining Luke's narrative of Paul's life.

4. John Calvin (1509 to 1564)

Persecution is a significant theme in the lives of all four theologians in this study, though that was not my intention as I started out. An excommunicated Martin Luther appeared before the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, at the Diet of Worms, knowing he stood in grave danger of being burned as a heretic. Origen fled his native Alexandria for Caesarea, where his life ended in a slow death as a result of being tortured. The next theologian in this study, John Calvin, also began his theological career as a refugee from violence. Calvin left his precarious position as a humanist lawyer, secretly fleeing Paris one November night in 1533, after the orthodox faculty of the Sorbonne virulently objected to a brash sermon by one of his colleagues, Nicholas Cop, that included Lutheran ideas. Calvin stayed underground in Basel and at first hoped to return when the climate grew more tolerant. However, the French government put its weight behind purifying the Sorbonne of anyone whose ideas opposed the Roman Catholic Church. In December, Francois I ordered Parlement to investigate Lutheran influences in the university.⁸⁹ In October 1534, Protestants orchestrated a demonstration, known as “Placards against the Mass,” that included posting crude denunciations of priests. In response, French-instituted repression included rigid control of printing and a series of executions through burning.⁹⁰

In his “Author’s Preface” to his *Commentary on the Psalms*, Calvin recounts the profound impact this persecution had on him. Not only were his comrades burned alive, but to allay international opprobrium against France, pamphlets were circulated that defamed the victims as

⁸⁹ Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 130-1,

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 291.

being seditious and Anabaptists (perhaps equivalent to anarchists today). To prove these reports false, to vindicate the victims whom Calvin calls his brothers, and to prevent other like-minded people from falling victim to the same charges, Calvin wrote and published the first version of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.⁹¹ We can hear echoes of Origen's martyrology inspiring Calvin to systematize Protestant theology, as he responded to the call of his compatriot's innocent blood:

Observing that the object... was not only that the disgrace of shedding so much innocent blood might remain buried under the false charges and calumnies which they brought against the holy martyrs after their death, but also, that afterwards they might be able to proceed to the utmost extremity in murdering the poor saints without exciting compassion towards them in the breasts of any... unless I opposed them to the utmost of my ability, my silence could not be vindicated from the charge of cowardice and treachery.

Today we might say that Calvin's motivation for *The Institutes* was a kind of "Silence=Death" moment for the Reformation.⁹² In 1541, he moved to Geneva when its government asked Calvin to lead the church in that city, even though he had previously fled controversy there. In addition to his work organizing the church and writing extensive biblical commentaries and sermons, Calvin dedicated his life to and revising multiple editions of *The Institutes*, which became his theological compendium. Feminist Theologian Serene Jones emphasizes that in a preface to the *Institutes*, Calvin explains that this major doctrinal work is "first and

⁹¹ John Calvin, "Author's Preface." *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1949).

⁹² "Silence=Death" is a protest poster and campaign designed by Avram Finkelstein, as explained by James Emmerman, "After Orlando, the Iconic Silence = Death Image Is Back. Meet One of the Artists Who Created It," *Outward Blog* (July 13, 2016), accessed online on 4/6/2017 at http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2016/07/13/silence_death_artist_avram_finkelstein_on_history_of_queer_art_and_activism.html

foremost a tool designed to help students read the Bible,” which Calvin believed was a first-hand encounter with the Word of God.⁹³

Calvin’s Interpretation

Calvin’s interpretation of Isaiah 53 is found in multiple sources. This thesis considers his sermons, his Commentary on Isaiah, and *The Institutes*, where Calvin, as his predecessors, interprets the suffering servant as Jesus Christ.

In his Commentary on Isaiah, Calvin fails to notice any points of similarity between the horrible, bloody, unjust persecution experienced by his brothers, the “holy martyrs” whose lives and reputations were destroyed in Paris and the situation described by the fourth servant song. Calvin follows Luther and provides a purely spiritual interpretation that is entirely allegorical. There is no suggestion that some actual event may have inspired the song. Thus, Calvin says Matthew was mistaken when the gospel writer applies Isaiah 53:4, “he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows,” to the healing ministry of Jesus, because certainly Jesus was, “appointed not to cure bodies but souls; it is spiritual disease that the prophet means.” We were wicked, not because we considered the servant to be afflicted by God, but because we failed to realize that God smote him on our account. In 53:5, the servant’s wounds heal us, but not because we feel remorse for our complicity in his suffering, but because God counts the servant’s punishment as expiation for our sins.

⁹³ Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 45.

For Calvin, the suffering servant does not suffer injustice. Instead, “the cause of Christ’s death is lawful.”⁹⁴ The law, the court, the judge—all of these have purely spiritual meanings. Calvin does not entertain the idea that the servant is unjustly accused. Calvin does not consider that Jesus came to address a particularly sinister kind of collusive human evil, one where the chief priest recommends sacrificing the life of a petty preacher because he stirred up trouble that would bring down the ire of Rome, saying, “You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed” (John 11:50). I wonder if Calvin’s flight to the spiritual level was his way of escaping from the brutality he and his compatriots experienced all around him, as political powers strove to suppress the disruption of religious authority they had relied on for centuries. Perhaps this is why Calvin’s Christology does not include an analysis of the cross as an instrument of unjust torture. For Calvin, the cross is onerous and demanding, but not wrong, a mistake, or evil.

Whereas Origen found the servant to be the victim of community violence, in Calvin’s sermons, only the hand of God afflicts the servant. Calvin’s interpretation is brutal. Calvin does not interpret 53:4 as meaning that the servant was disparaged by his community who deemed him to be stricken by God and afflicted. For Calvin, Isaiah’s fourth servant is the same as I Peter’s “Lamb without blemish” (1 Peter 1:19) and therefore he had no sin or imperfection at all. To Calvin, this was necessary to show the servant carried all humanity’s burdens. Calvin bids his congregants to imagine themselves on God’s judgment seat in order to gaze upon the punishment that Jesus suffers. We will see that, “God executed the severity of His judgment upon Him.”⁹⁵ In

⁹⁴ John Calvin, *Isaiah*, Alister McGrath, J.I Packer, eds. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 324-8.

⁹⁵ John Calvin, Translated by T.H.I. Parker, *Calvin’s Sermons on Isaiah’s Prophecy of the Death and Passion of Christ* (London: James Clarke & Company, Ltd., 1956), 71.

fact, Calvin interprets Isaiah as saying, not only was Jesus Christ crucified by the hands of men, “but also appeared before the judgment seat of God and there took our case upon Himself and surrendered Himself to bear the accusation that we have earned.”

Jesus endures not only physical, earthly punishment, but also divine wrath upon his immortal soul.⁹⁶ Calvin compels us to envision this divine punishment in a “homely manner” so that we may understand that “our Lord Jesus was beaten and smitten by the hand of God so that we might be acquitted.” By imagining this divine pummeling, we can see ourselves that the “Judge of the world, God with good cause hates and abhors us... We never cease to provoke the anger of God.”⁹⁷

For Calvin, “by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5) means that “we must come to our Lord Jesus Christ who was willing to be disfigured from the top of His Head even to the sole of His feet and was a mass of wounds,” in order to appease God’s wrath against us.⁹⁸ If we had been summarily forgiven without this sacrifice, “we should all shrug our shoulders (an English approximation of the French *torcherait sa bouche*) and make it an opportunity for giving ourselves greater license.”⁹⁹ Anyone who thinks he or she can pay the penalty of their own sins (including the Jews and the Papists) seeks to “abolish the power of the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and blasphemes against God.¹⁰⁰ The silence of Jesus as the Lamb in 53:7 is the humility that earns him a voice to speak on our behalf as our mediator.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Ibid, 70.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 71.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 75.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 72.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 73.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 89.

While Luther forbids his congregants to entertain the presumption of modeling themselves after Jesus, Calvin instead recommends his listeners follow the example of the submissive, humble servant. Calvin exhorts congregants, in their earthly lives, to conform to Christ's example: "If we are overwhelmed, we must nevertheless keep silence, confessing that God is righteous and fair, and not letting one murmur be heard from our mouths." Calvin commends them to suffer silently without complaint, whether the harm they experience is just or unjust: "when we are afflicted by the hand of God, even persecuted by the hand of men, we must not cease to bear patiently all the injuries done to us: knowing that God wishes to test us or even to punish us for our faults."¹⁰²

David Carr, Professor of Old Testament at Union Theological Seminary, suggests that reflection on a suffering servant, like the one Calvin describes in his interpretation of Isaiah 53, may provide a safe way for a whole community to speak of horrific trauma that is too painful for individuals to recall. Carr explains that Judean exiles from Jerusalem almost never describe their painful experiences in Babylon, except perhaps through the stories of anonymous, fictional figures such as Isaiah's Daughter of Zion and suffering servants. In the same way, perhaps Calvin reads into Christ's passion the unspeakable cruelty that his fellow exiles experienced at the hands of their countrymen.¹⁰³ To universalize Calvin's interpretation, to accept it as valid without understanding its historical context, imprisons the Bible in the bloody 16th century forever.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ David Carr, *Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 88-90.

Theology of Atonement

Reformed Christians today wrestle with opposing beliefs about Christ's role in our salvation: Does the crucifixion magnify the love of God or does it satisfy the wrath of God?¹⁰⁴ Calvin also wrestles with the paradoxical nature of God's wrath and love. For Calvin, though God in his full being loves us "in a manner wondrous and divine, he loved even when he hated us."¹⁰⁵ When it comes to God's persona of Judge, God is hostile to us.¹⁰⁶ Since our offense is "obnoxious to the wrath of God" as well as "odious and abominable" to him, God's wrath can only be appeased by a priest.¹⁰⁷ However, the priestly rules for entering God's sanctuary require making a blood sacrifice, as an acknowledgment of sin. So to appease God's wrath, Jesus himself became a blood sacrifice to cleanse or erase our guilt and pay the penalty for our sin.¹⁰⁸

Spanning three chapters of his *Institutes of Christian Religion*, Calvin's argument for the redemption of sins through satisfaction atonement relies heavily on his exegesis of John 1:29 and 36 where John the Baptist hails Jesus as the Lamb of God.¹⁰⁹ Tying these verses to the suffering servant in Isaiah 53, Calvin cites both texts more than 20 times, focusing on 53:7: "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."

¹⁰⁴ Theological and cultural differences emerge starkly and amusingly in an infamous hymnal controversy that took place in 2012- 13. See Bob Smietana, "'In Christ Alone' Dropped From Presbyterian Church Hymnal Over Lyric Dispute And Scriptural Debate," USA Today, August 7, 2013, as accessed in 2017 at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/07/in-christ-alone-dropped_n_3719253.html

¹⁰⁵ *Institutes*, 2.16.4.

¹⁰⁶ *Institutes*, 2.15.6.

¹⁰⁷ *Institutes*, 2.2.1.

¹⁰⁸ *Institutes*, 2.15.6.

¹⁰⁹ *Institutes*, 2.15-17.

Isaiah's servant is shamefully disfigured, yet his death through unwarranted suffering will be glorified by God: "Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (53:12). The Hebrew word for "made intercession" or *paga* means to strike a peace or covenant. Calvin equates this reconciling act with a priestly sacrifice conducted by a sinless mediator to appease a wrathful God.

To buttress his case for satisfaction atonement, Calvin feels compelled to explain why Jesus was killed in a particular way: "Had Jesus been cut off by assassins, or slain in a seditious tumult, there could have been no kind of satisfaction in such a death." The attorney in Calvin gets the best of him: "But when he is placed as a criminal at the bar, where witnesses are brought to give evidence against him, and the mouth of the judge condemns him to die, we see him sustaining the character of an offender and evil-doer."¹¹⁰ This reading is necessary to meet Calvin's requirements that Jesus meet death not just as an innocent but also as a sinner. Then Calvin insists Pilate confirms the innocence of Jesus to establish that he suffers as a substitute for another's and not for his own crime.

For me, the problem with Calvin's tale of spiritual, metaphysical antinomies is that it distracts gospel readers from grappling with the real-life terror, trauma and grief imposed by societal forces in Jerusalem who turned against their own people. The high priests and Pilate make a horrific decision, one of countless atrocities they regularly commit. Yet to Calvin's readers they are fulfilling a divine plan for reconciliation. Calvin's portrayal of Jesus as the priest and sacri-

¹¹⁰ *Institutes*, 2.16.

vice for divine propitiation prevents Reformed believers from grasping the wrongness of their own—our own—collusion in the destruction of people that is sanctioned and executed by our legal systems. Even if we do not read the marks of divine retribution on Jesus’ tortured, crucified body, nevertheless, for Calvin, the marks of man’s-cruelty-to-man are divinely ordained. They are necessary. The redemption of humanity’s sins *requires* Jesus to be executed.

The Belgic Confession, one of the standards of my denomination to this day, transforms Calvin’s arguments into statements of beliefs for Reformed Christians. Just as persecution spawned Calvin’s theology, the confession was written to defend people who embraced Reformed faith. Its primary author Guido de Bres penned the confession in 1561 to answer King Philip II’s charges and prove Reformed Christians professed true Christian doctrine. Six years later, de Bres was one of thousands martyred for his faith.¹¹¹

Isaiah 53 is quoted explicitly as evidence for Article 21, “The Atonement.” There we hear that Jesus Christ is a high priest, like Melchizedek, who presented himself in our name before his Father, “To appease his Father’s wrath with full satisfaction by offering himself on the tree of the cross and pouring out his precious blood for the cleansing of our sins, as the prophets predicted... he endured all this for the forgiveness of our sins.” Isaiah 53 is produced as evidence.

For it is written that “the punishment that made us whole” was placed on the Son of God and that “by his bruises we are healed.” He was “like a lamb that is led to the slaughter”; he was “numbered with the transgressors” and condemned as a criminal by Pontius Pilate, though Pilate had declared that he was innocent.

While this confessional guarantee of redemption of sins through satisfaction atonement was encapsulated and embellished by Guido de Bres, Gootjes shows that de Bres based the Bel-

¹¹¹ Leonard Vander Zee, Theological Editor, *Our Faith Ecumenical Creeds, Reformed Confessions, and other Resources* (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 2013), 43.

gian on the Gallican confession, whose original version Calvin drafted. Gootjes cites a letter from Calvin to de Bres where Calvin states that he and others fully approve the doctrine of the Belgic Confession.¹¹² The Belgic suggests, following Calvin's exegesis above (and, along the lines of Mel Gibson's 2004 film, *The Passion of the Christ*) that Christ's crucifixion, in that his punishment was commensurate with the sins of all humanity, must have caused Christ more pain than other people suffered when subjected to Roman crucifixion:¹¹³

When he sensed the horrible punishment required by our sins, 'his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.' He cried, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' And he endured all this for the forgiveness of our sins (Article 21).

The doctrine promises that, because Christ's death completely satisfied God's wrath once and for all, therefore it renders all believers perfect forever, as Article 21 concludes:

We find all comforts in his wounds and have no need to seek or invent any other means to reconcile ourselves with God than this one and only sacrifice, once made, which renders believers perfect forever.¹¹⁴

This redemption enabled Reformed Christians to no longer rely on the sacraments conferred by the Roman Catholic Church for their salvation, as Reformed Theologian Hughes Oliphant Old explains in *Worship: Reformed According to Scripture*. Satisfaction-atonement enabled Reformers to revise sacramental practices that had developed over 1,500 years. But Old goes further and declares that the core of Protestant theology, both in the 16th and his own 21st century, is the affirmation that "Christ's sacrifice on the cross was full, perfect, and more than sufficient to re-

¹¹² Nicolaas H. Gootjes, *The Belgic Confession: Its History and Sources* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 59-70.

¹¹³ A case could be made that this view "deifies" the human nature of Christ's death—clearly outside the scope of this paper. Mel Gibson's 2004 film "Passion of the Christ" exemplifies a theology that Jesus' suffering was extraordinary, obliterating the significance of commonplace crucifixions.

¹¹⁴ *Our Faith*, 45.

deem the whole human race.” To Old, this requires the substitutionary aspect of satisfaction atonement: “Christ died for us and in our place. He made the sacrifice we could not make.”¹¹⁵ Article 21 reflects this aspect of substitution when it states, “[Christ] presented himself in our name before his Father, to appease his Father’s wrath.” This statement by Olds shows how minimized atonement theology has progressively become increasingly absolute, so that Olds feels compelled to explain events in history through his own formulation of satisfaction atonement.

Satisfaction atonement can be expressed simply, convincingly and briefly. Article 21 is less than 300 words. It encapsulates a thought experiment, conceived originally by Anselm of Canterbury at the beginning of the second millennium. It can be comprehended without needing to spend time reading, reflecting, discussing and potentially disagreeing about the meaning of scripture. Vivid, evocative, heart-rending, compelling, pithy, and absolute, Article 21 is a model for promulgating a doctrine by word of mouth. The reformers’ efforts to “encapsulate” leads me to strongly agree with Euan Cameron when he characterizes the work of reformers, based on the texts of Calvin and Melancthon, as not expanding medieval concepts of Christ, as he says:

“Although it is generally agreed that Reformation teaching was ‘Christ-centered’, the nature of Christ actually took up less space in the doctrinal statements of early Protestant theology than one might have expected.”¹¹⁶

However, Cameron’s evaluation fails to consider the impact of *minimized* and reduced creedal statements such as the Belgic and Heidelberg. These statements are far more definitive, precise, obligatory and certain than the sum total of Luther and Calvin’s full thoughts about the subject,

¹¹⁵ Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship: Reformed According to Scripture*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 125-6.

¹¹⁶ Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation, Second Edition*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 146.

as Cameron summarizes: “On the ‘atonement’, the explanation of *how* Christ’s mediation is effective, there never had been any single authoritative explanation.”¹¹⁷ Those who study the works of the reformers—not only Luther, but also Calvin, Zwingli and others—affirm that their views on salvation were wide-ranging.¹¹⁸ However, the situation for laypeople was quite different.

I agree with Cameron when he states that a key benefit for laypeople was that the Reformation abolished their servile and expensive reliance on Catholic rites. Nevertheless, I propose that an alternate, far more direct route to salvation, guaranteed to every one who confessed belief in it, provided a compelling reason to *switch* allegiance. The prominence of redemption achieved by Christ’s death and resurrection in the Heidelberg Catechism and Belgic Confession indicates that it is not quite the case that, as Cameron says, “many who followed the reformers were neither required nor able fully to understand the complex reasons for their advice.”¹¹⁹

Instead, as the Reformation spread to France, Germany and the low-countries, this reductive, simplified doctrine, strengthened in its utter lack of uncertainty, bolstered common people in their Reformed convictions and increased their willingness to publicly protest for religious freedom from the Roman Catholic Church. Self-justification became internalized. Historian Diarmaid McCulloch points out that while modern audiences bristle at descriptions of Calvinistic discipline, Genevans took pride in public displays of “penitents sitting on a special bench” before congregations—because they were the ones judging. However, internalized, absolute conviction

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 147.

¹¹⁸ John Hesselink states: “Calvin concedes that there is ‘some sort of contradiction here, i.e., the tension between God’s wrath and love.’ Hesselink reminds us that Calvin expanded Christ’s two-fold office as king and priest to include also prophet. And that, as king, Christ is victor over death and devil, showing that Calvin, as Luther before him, held “Christus Victor”-type interpretations of salvation through Christ. See John Hesselink, *Calvin’s First Catechism: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster, 1997), 122-3

¹¹⁹ Cameron, 159.

could spur violence. Where civil authorities opposed religious freedom for Protestants, Calvin was alarmed to find his thought had inspired revolution. McCullough imagines that people who considered themselves to be elect—a.k.a. that they had been saved by their belief in redemption, and doubly, in that Calvin deduced that God alone could have predisposed them to election—felt they had a personal duty to take on the Antichrist.¹²⁰

For all the empowerment this doctrine provides to individual believers, a review of Calvin's atonement argument shows that Calvin's attempt to derive this doctrine from scripture came at a great cost to our modern ability to hear the full gospel story. We should not underestimate the power of reducing and rationalizing the content of the gospel.

Once, in June 2014, I spent a week at my denomination's national conference called General Synod in Pella, Iowa, where I was in a minority that supported same-sex marriage. My table-mate and companion for the week was a conservative businessman from Des Moines who voted to define marriage as "between a man and a woman." When the man-woman definition of marriage was approved by a two-thirds majority vote, I cried for the people who continue to be disciplined in RCA churches; for young people who come out as gay and whose parents and pastors would pressure into conversion therapy; for gay people who refuse to comply and are subject to brutal family rejection; for those who comply and live lives without sexual intimacy; for those who become depressed and commit suicide. But my table-mate thought I was just confused about what the gospel meant. To him, the gospel message was perfectly, easily communicated with an anagram. As he drew on a napkin, he tutored me about Dutch Calvinism.

¹²⁰ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity The First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 634-9.

“All you need to know is TULIP,” he began. He wasn’t referring to the petal-shaped cuts in the shutters that framed Pella, Iowa’s Dutch-inspired architecture. TULIP is a mnemonic for English-speakers, a short-hand way to remember the five main points that summarize the conclusions of the Synod of Dordrecht that took place over the course of five months in 1618-9 in the Netherlands, in order to settle certain questions about Calvinist doctrines once and for all: **T**otal depravity—man is utterly lost without God; **U**nconditional election—God alone chooses his elect through no merit of theirs but only according to his will; **L**imited atonement—Christ bears only the sin of the elect; **I**rresistible grace—like it or not the elect cannot turn aside from God’s call; **P**erseverance of the saints—the chosen cannot lose salvation. Once the dye had been cast, there was no turning back. The brevity and compelling logic of formulations like TULIP and redemption through satisfaction atonement enable Reformed Christians to believe they have an unshakeable handle on the gospel’s definitive *argumentum*.

When we exhaust the full meaning of the cross in the redemption of all humanity’s sins, we suppress the gospel’s depiction of the cross as a tool that enables us to analyze unjust oppression that is achieved through legalized, socially-approved means. When we tell redemption-believing Christians that their faith is based on a principal that is *unbiblical*, we risk offending them greatly. However, in the 16th century, the belief in the redemption of sins through Christ’s crucifixion was a martyrological stance that enabled resistance to the tyranny of the church-state oligarchy. But outside that historical context, in a world that is no longer dominated by that historical power structure, the Christian belief in redemption—without a martyrology for justice—not only fails to bring good news to the poor, but it can be used to justifiably oppress them. As dis-

cussed in chapter 6 below, theologians like Jon Sobrino who are accused of denying the validity of Reformation-age redemption risk censure and disapproval.¹²¹

Feminist Theologian Dr. Serene Jones is a Calvinist scholar who personally and publicly disavows satisfaction atonement. Jones describes how Calvin's approach to prayer in his *Commentary on the Psalms* provides a framework to pray with victims of trauma.¹²² However, she states that as a systematic theologian, she "strongly reject[s] any aspect of a theology of the cross that turns God into an intentional agent of traumatic violence."¹²³ Yet Jones does not address the status of Reformed confessions that uphold this atonement theology or the faith of Reformed Christians that relies on it. Instead, Jones writes about the many other ways Reformed doctrine and theology can be helpful and life-giving.

James Cone also personally and publicly disavows the doctrine of satisfaction atonement in *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, using a series of "I" statements: "I accept [womanist theologian] Delores Williams's rejection of theories of atonement as found in the Western tradition....," he writes, as well as: "I find nothing redemptive in suffering itself." Even when he presents his alternative theory for how the cross saves, Cone chooses the words of another womanist theologian to represent his views: "I am closer in agreement with other womanist theologians like Shawn Copeland...."¹²⁴ However, Cone's rejection seems to side-step the issue. He does not offer an objective critique but instead he accepts a criticism as if it were directed only to him and

¹²¹ "Gospel cannot be truly preached without offense and tumult," a quote attributed to Martin Luther, be-decks a linocut my husband crafted for me, along with a portrait of Luther that he modeled after Cranach.

¹²² Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 43-67.

¹²³ *Ibid*, 45.

¹²⁴ Cone, 151.

then stakes out his own point of view. Thus, Cone leaves atonement theology in tact. Nevertheless, Cone concludes with a concise statement about salvation that makes no concession to atonement theology at all. He appeals to the gospel narrative and states its central scandal:

Humanity's salvation is revealed in the cross of the condemned criminal Jesus, and humanity's salvation is available *only* [sic] through solidarity with the crucified people in our midst.¹²⁵

Cone stresses the word only. "Only" is the issue.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 160.

5. Jon Sobrino (b. 1938)

Born in Spain, Jon Sobrino was 18 when he entered the Jesuit order that sent him to El Salvador a year later. He studied engineering at the Jesuit's St. Louis University in Missouri and then received his doctorate in theology in Germany. Returning to El Salvador, Sobrino helped found the University of Central America (UCA) in San Salvador where he remained through semi-retirement. Closely affiliated with Archbishop Romero, a Catholic martyr, Sobrino drafted some of the cleric's letters and speeches.¹²⁶ In 1989, toward the end of El Salvador's civil war, Sobrino narrowly escaped assassination when six UCA Jesuits, their housekeeper, and her daughter were killed. Sobrino happened to be traveling out of the country. In 2006, following an inquiry started by Pope Benedict when he was a cardinal, the Congregation of Christian Doctrine decided that Sobrino's works contained propositions that did not conform with Church doctrine.¹²⁷

In performing theology, Sobrino urges believers to prioritize place. Therefore, a brief historical sketch of El Salvador may be helpful for readers who are unfamiliar with the country. Gross economic inequity has plagued El Salvador since its independence in the 19th century. To help poor Salvadorans in the mid-1920's, social activist Farabundo Martí founded the Communist Party of Central America. He also led an alternative to the Red Cross, called International

¹²⁶ James R. Brockman, S.J., *Romero A Life: The essential Biography of a Modern Martyr and Christian Hero* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 225-6. See also Jon Sobrino, *Witnesses to the Kingdom: The Martyrs of El Salvador and the Crucified Peoples* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 6.

¹²⁷ "Certain propositions which are not in conformity with the doctrine of the Church regard: 1) the methodological presuppositions on which the Author bases his theological reflection, 2) the Divinity of Jesus Christ, 3) the Incarnation of the Son of God, 4) the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God, 5) the Self-consciousness of Jesus, and 6) the salvific value of his Death." Found in Notification on the Works of Father Jon Sobrino, SJ, accessed online on 3/31/2017 at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20061126_notification-sobrino_en.html

Red Aid, that had a Marxist-Leninist ideology that strongly rejected Stalinism. The country's economy and government were dominated by an oligarchy of 14 families who profited from coffee plantations until a global depression gutted the market. In 1931, Martí, Alfonso Luna and Mario Zapata led a guerrilla revolt of indigenous farmers. The government's response was *La Matanza*, the slaughter of 30,000 people who had been invited to what they thought was a peaceful meeting.

Economic justice required land reform, but all attempts failed. In the 1960s, inspired by Vatican Council II, Roman Catholic priests encouraged the country's poorest citizens to join Christian base communities that began as learning centers. Groups of farmers, *campesinos*, met to analyze the Bible, apply scripture lessons to their lives, and take group action to improve their lot. Members joined local and national protests for better wages, decent working conditions, and education. Hostilities escalated into civil war after March 24, 1980, when Archbishop Oscar Romero was fatally shot. Many Christian base communities supported the guerrilla forces of the left-wing, Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) party. Owners of large plantations and corporations in the right-wing party, Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA), controlled El Salvador's government. Cold war allegiances aggravated the conflict. Cuba and Nicaragua supported FMLN guerrillas. The United States financed the military efforts of the ARENA government. By January 16, 1992, when FMLN and ARENA leaders signed peace accords, 75,000 people had died. Inspired by Romero's legacy, international aid agencies and partnerships with North American communities helped hundreds of base communities to rebuild after the war. Like Sobrino, those communities had a tenuous connection to the Roman Catholic Church. Although

no one has asked for forgiveness for Romero's death or solved the crime, Pope Francis beatified Romero in 2015, after declaring him a martyr of the faith.¹²⁸

Using Isaiah 53 to Interpret Life in El Salvador

In his book *Witnesses to the Kingdom, The Martyrs of El Salvador and the Crucified Peoples*, Jon Sobrino does not exegete Isaiah 53. Instead, he explains events in El Salvador using concepts from Isaiah 53. Reality is so intense and extremes are so vivid in El Salvador, Sobrino says, that the country can serve as a universal paradigm of liberation and martyrdom.¹²⁹ He recounts the dramatic circumstances under which Oscar Romero first interpreted the suffering servant as applying to Salvadoran people. Romero was installed as Archbishop late in February 1977 and met Sobrino two weeks later at the vigil Mass for Rutilio Grande, a close friend of both Sobrino and Romero's, who had been assassinated. Until that night, Romero had not been supportive of Rutilio's work helping or organize *campesinos* for living wages. Later, Romero explained, "When I looked at Rutilio lying there dead I thought, 'If they have killed him for doing what he did, then I too have to walk the same path.'"¹³⁰

Grande had been the parish priest of Aguilares, a town 20 miles from the capital of San Salvador where Romero was Archbishop. By May of 1977, the army had declared a state of emergency there after imprisoning one priest, killing another, and expelling three more. At the

¹²⁸ Elisabeth Malkin, "Honor Comes Late to Óscar Romero, a Martyr for the Poor," *The New York Times* (May 23, 2015), accessed online at: https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/23/world/americas/honor-comes-late-tooscar-romero-a-martyr-for-the-poor.html?_r=0

¹²⁹ Jon Sobrino, *Witnesses to the Kingdom: The Martyrs of El Salvador and the Crucified Peoples* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 103.

¹³⁰ Michael A. Hayes and David Tombs, *Truth and Memory: the Church and human rights in El Salvador and Guatemala*, (Leominster, England: Gracewing Publishing, 2001).

end of a month's-long siege, Sobrino accompanied Romero to Aguilares to say Mass. Romero opened his homily saying that he had taken the job of "picking up the trampled, the corpses, and all that persecution of the church dumps along the road." He offered thanks for the work of the Jesuit priests and the Sisters who replaced them when priests were barred from entering. The first reading was Isaiah 53. Romero told the *campesinos* of Aguilares, "You are the image of the divine victim, 'pierced for our offenses.'" By identifying them with Christ, Sobrino says, Romero sought to restore their dignity and maintain their hope. Romero told those who had run away, "We suffer with those who have suffered so much... We suffer with the lost... We are with those who are being tortured." Sobrino calls this identification between the Archbishop, who had formerly identified with El Salvador's wealthy elites, and the *campesinos*—through the text of Isaiah 53—no less than a miracle.¹³¹ It is an example of how in Latin America, according to Sobrino, the concepts of salvation and liberation take on greater weight and become incarnate.

Martyrs show us the light, enabling oppressors to see themselves and confront their deepest truth in crucified peoples. By identifying and standing in the place of the *campesinos*, clerical martyrs used their bodies to show the deadly evil that was perpetrated on the villagers. This was violence that might have been invisible because *campesinos* had no voice and were accorded no dignity.

The Suffering Servant, explains Sobrino, bears the burden of sin to eradicate it. Archbishop Romero dedicated every waking moment to halt the slaughter of El Salvador's people in the months before he was assassinated. Archbishop Romero talked to the leaders of the military

¹³¹ Sobrino, *Witnesses*, 28-31.

junta. He called on cabinet members. He wrote U.S. President Jimmy Carter. He traveled to Rome to beg Pope John Paul II for help.

Two weeks before he died, Romero spoke by telephone with a Guatemalan correspondent for a Mexican newspaper about death threats he had repeatedly received. Romero said he did not believe in death without resurrection. "If I am killed," he said, "I shall arise in the Salvadoran people." As a shepherd, he was obliged to give his life for all Salvadorans, even those who might kill him. "If death threats are carried out," he said, "From this moment I offer my blood to God for the redemption and the resurrection of El Salvador."

Always known as a humble man, Romero said he didn't believe that he deserved the grace of martyrdom. If God accepted the sacrifice of his life, he said, "Let my blood be a seed of freedom and the sign that hope will soon be reality." If he were to be killed, he willed his death to be a witness for his people's liberation and hope in the future. Yet Archbishop Romero did not want to die. He was a coward, terrified of bullets and bombs, so he spent his last nights sleeping in an altar chamber in a hospital chapel, praying for safety. Nevertheless, on the Sunday before his murder, while delivering a sermon on national radio, Monsignor spoke brashly, addressing government soldiers directly:

Brothers, you are part of our people. You kill your own campesino brothers and sisters... No soldier is obliged to obey an order against the law of God. No one has to fulfill an immoral law...I beg you, I beseech you, I order you in the name of God: Stop the repression!

Romero continued to explain that the church, according to the Bible, instructed that liberation includes respect for people's dignity, salvation of the people's common good, and transcendent hope that comes from God alone.

Archbishop Romero did not get to break the Communion bread in his last Mass before his heart was pierced by an assassin's bullet, fired from a car passing by the *hospitalito* chapel where he lived. He had told the Guatemalan correspondent that he forgave any future assassins, and wished they would come to understand the futility of such a possible act. "A bishop may die, but God's church, which is the people, will never perish," he was quoted as saying.¹³² The *campesinos* were inspired by Romero's death to resist military rule. Romero was like the suffering servant, says Sobrino, bearing the sins of the country's elite-run military government. To believe that salvation comes through this heinous action is a hard-won act of faith in a world that can see only the destruction of a country destroyed by the killing of its archbishop and his people.¹³³ Grace, then, is the ability to find in this disaster, "an inverted mirror in which a disfigured image shows the truth that the First World seeks to hide or dissemble."¹³⁴

Martyrology of Christ

Sobrino describes Christ as a martyr and identifies two kinds of Christ-like Salvadoran martyrs. The first kind he calls active martyrs, people like Romero and Martin Luther King, Jr. They are leaders whose heroism defied oppressors and defended the persecuted. Sobrino calls them "Secondary Saints of the Kingdom of God." Sobrino calls the second kind of martyr passive martyrs: the poor, children, elderly, women. Their lives are heroic because of their persis-

¹³² In this story, I hear traces of Matthew's parable of the sower in chapter 13, where the "seed" is mostly rejected, and which Matthew frames with Jesus reciting the call from Isaiah 6 (v. 13-15). I wonder if Isaiah 53—understood martyrologically—is the seed, the word of the kingdom (v. 19). This Romero quote: "Let my blood be a seed of freedom and the sign that hope will soon be reality" seems to hark back to Isa. 53:10, "he shall see his seed/offspring (*tsere*), and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the Lord shall prosper."

¹³³ Sobrino, *No Salvation*, 3.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 5. Or, "the coproanalysis, an examination of the feces" whereby the crucified peoples reveal the true state of the First World's health, offers Sobrino, via Ellacuria.

tence in living despite all the factors that make their lives impossible. Sobrino calls these innocents, “Primary Saints of the Kingdom of God.”¹³⁵ In the Roman Catholic Church, remarks Sobrino, we know how to venerate active martyrs, but, “one almost never knows what to do with the crucified peoples.” They do not stand up to defend God’s kingdom, but simply die unknown, en masse, sometimes in painstakingly slowness through hunger and disease; at other times, they are killed violently and quickly. Sobrino has no doubt, that too often, their deaths are silenced.¹³⁶

Sobrino offers a bitter theological critique that includes New Testament texts: “Christ’s martyrdom was absolutized, placing the emphasis on salvation as redemption from sin, while the liberation implied in the kingdom of God was ignored.”¹³⁷ Sobrino eschews the traditional doctrine that Christ’s death effects redemption because it overshadows a smaller kind of communal martyrdom, exhibited in El Salvador’s clergy that correlates to the ability of God’s people to prosper in God’s kingdom, Sobrino’s definition of liberation.

Among its explanations of Sobrino’s errors, the Roman Curia emphasized efficient causality — *how* does Christ save us? The Curia charged that Sobrino failed to uphold the truths established in the Decree on Justification from the Council of Trent (1545 to 1563), as it explained, “The mystery of the Incarnation, Death and Resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God become man, is the unique and inexhaustible font of the redemption of humanity, made efficacious in the Church through the sacraments.”¹³⁸ Thus, the Curia identified Trent as the decree that “affirms that the meritorious cause of justification is Jesus, the only Son of God, who, ‘while we

¹³⁵ Sobrino, *Witnesses*, 104-133.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 132-33.

¹³⁷ 104.

¹³⁸ See Item 10 in the work cited above, “Notification on the Works of Father Jon Sobrino, SJ.”

were still sinners' (Rom 5:10), 'out of the great love with which He loved us' (Eph 2:4) merited for us justification by His most holy passion and the wood of the cross, and made satisfaction for us to God the Father." Thus, the Curia agreed with Luther and Calvin insofar as Christ's death achieves redemption from all humanity's sin by satisfying God's wrath. While this redemption pertains to Roman Catholics who partake in the sacraments, the same redemption pertains to Protestants who believe through justification by faith. I happen to agree with the Curia. Sobrino's work dismantles both Reformation-era avenues to redemption — Catholic and Protestant.

In 2014, a retired priest wrote about the Urbana, Illinois community where he belonged to the "Friends of Calavera," named for five settlements the group supported in El Salvador's eastern mountains. Severe drought threatened the region's bean and corn harvest. The friends sent money for planting seeds, medical supplies, and scholarships. The priest offered two reasons for his 22-year involvement. First, he said his support was a form of political indictment: "The United States gave \$5 billion dollars in military aid to the Salvadoran government's war against its people." The priest's secondary rationale was spiritual: "El Salvador exports more hope than coffee." He was repeating the words of his Jesuit teacher, Jon Sobrino at the University of Central America.¹³⁹ Separated by national boundaries, geographical, cultural, and language barriers, the Friends of Calavera in the U.S. and the Calavera settlements in El Salvador formed a long-distance community of interdependence, one that saved people on both sides.

When Sobrino considers the world's hundreds of millions of poor and oppressed people, he finds "primordial holiness" in their resilience to survive through repression, war, and refugee

¹³⁹ Tom Royer, "The People's Struggle in El Salvador Continues," in the *The Public i*, (November 2014), a project of the Urbana-Champaign Independent Media Center, organized and edited by volunteer citizen-journalists, accessed online on 4/1/2017 at <http://publici.ucimc.org/the-peoples-struggle-in-el-salvador-continues-2/>

exile. This holiness arises from their ability to create, or, even better “convene” communities into existence to receive from one another mutual support: “Giving to one another and receiving one another with the best that one has.” Sobrino extends this sense of community further when he says, “Those who come from the world of plenty to help the poor repeatedly say, with thanks, that they have received more than they have given.” It is not only true that outside the poor there is no salvation, according to Sobrino. Instead, he says, “salvation comes from the poor. They are the servant of Yahweh.”¹⁴⁰ With this formulation, Sobrino locates the saving power in the victim of persecution. This is an echo, an isomorphism, of Origen’s schema of salvation. For Origen, innocent martyrs convene a community of people who are willing to testify to and live by the values the martyrs die for. When it comes to the poor and the oppressed, their refusal to give in to defeat is martyrdom. James Cone quotes from James Baldwin to describe this kind of heroism, “The man who is forced each day to snatch his manhood, his identity, out of the fire of human cruelty that rages to destroy it...achieves his own authority, and that is unshakeable.”¹⁴¹

Sobrino describes how the poor save the rich. Those who are crucified save their crucifiers, but only when we allow them to offend, shame and scandalize us into action. When we change the conditions that threaten their existence — persecution, isolation, hunger, healthcare deprivation, unemployment, underemployment, poverty, immigration systems, jail, illiteracy, invisibility, homelessness, statelessness — we begin to cure the unholy part of us that benefited at a cost to people who suffer. This is not action that *merits* salvation, to which Luther and Calvin object. Instead, this action, this reciprocal solidarity, *is* salvation. It is Paul’s command to the

¹⁴⁰ Jon Sobrino, “Jesus of Galilee from the Salvadoran context: compassion, hope, and following the light of the cross,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, Baltimore, Vol. 70, Iss. 2, (June 2009), 437-460.

¹⁴¹ Cone, 163, quoting from James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage International, 1993, origin., 1963).

church in Galatia: “[T]hrough love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal. 5:13-5). Here, Paul has collapsed the prototypical golden rule, love God/love neighbor, into a single command. To love my neighbor is to love God. The cross of Christ reveals this as a matter of faith. Enacting this faith justifies us when it causes us to disobey any other law. “Taking the crucified down from the cross,”¹⁴²— and, whenever possible, dismantling the cross itself — saves us.

¹⁴² This phrase was used by Ignacio Ellacuria and is quoted by Sobrino in *No Salvation Outside the Poor*, 8.

6. Interpreting Isaiah 53 with Modern Scholars

The question of how the murder of innocents matters theologically is critical to evaluate a theologian's interpretation of scripture. I turned to second Isaiah's fourth servant song because it concerns the murder of one innocent that matters theologically, not only to the gospel writer John and the Apostle Paul, but to four pivotal theologians who based their theology on systematic biblical interpretations. While Origen, Luther and Calvin are all similar in that they interpret the Isaiah's fourth servant as Jesus Christ, they are different in that:

- **Origen** described how Jesus' death as a martyr glorifies God, and provides a moral example for young people and a whole nation, as it glorifies the sufferings of a multitude of individual martyrs. The saving blood of each innocent contributes to God's ultimate victory.
- **Luther** urges his followers to reject "all works and merits" to focus on the primary comfort of the gospel — the redemption of sin that is achieved in the crucifixion. Luther eschews contemplation of our own responsibility for individual wrongs or community mistakes: "If you want to regard your sin as resting on you, such a thought in your heart is not of God but of Satan." We need to say: "I behold my sins heaped on Christ," and, "My sins have been transferred to Christ. He has them."
- **Calvin** magnifies the punishment described in this passage on an epic and divine scale and uses it to comfort Reformed Christians that their sins are forgiven, as he exhorts them to conform to Christ's example and suffer all harm — just and unjust — silently without complaint.

- **Sobrino** finds his interpretation of Isaiah 53 in the moment when Oscar Romero powerfully connected with the *campesino* farmers of a besieged village and told them, You are the Suffering Servant of God. This identification, says Sobrino, is a miracle. He invited theological inquiry into the reality of El Salvador because salvation and liberation become incarnate there. Martyrs enable oppressors to see themselves and confront their deepest truth in crucified peoples. Active martyrs are willing heroes who defend oppressed people. Passive martyrs, the anonymous poor, are the primary saints of God's kingdom. As God's suffering servants, both kinds of martyrs bear the burden of sin to eradicate it.

Now that I have identified ways in which each theologian's Christology and soteriology affected his interpretation, I can attempt to exegete this passage for myself, aware of their influences.

An A-B-A Structure

Since I seek a revised exegesis, I follow the recommendation of David Clines, biblical scholar and professor emeritus at the University of Sheffield. I aim to liberate Isaiah's fourth servant song from the controversy over the servant's identity by approaching the text as if it were a dramatic play, presented through the speech of distinct characters, indicated by their use of pronouns. Thus Clines separates the larger song 52:13-53:12 into two components based on who is speaking.¹⁴³ The first component comprises the divine speeches that open and close the song. God describes how the servant will be seen and understood in the opening verses 52:13-15 and the two closing verses 53:11-12. This frame provides us with a window into a divine perspective

¹⁴³ David Clines, *I, He, We, They: A Literary Approach to Isaiah 53*, Supplement Series of the Journal for the Study of the Old Testament (Sheffield, England: University of Sheffield, 1976), especially 37-39.

that explains the meaning of the narrative. Without God's interpretation, the servant's story might confound our imagination.

The second component of the song, identified by Clines, is the text, 53:1-10, which I call the song's narrative because a group of first-person narrators tells a story. This narrative begins with a chorus-like call, in the form of a question, asking its readers to believe its eyewitness testimony of God's power as it works in the life of the servant and in the narrators' own lives. Not only does the narrative recount key events of the servant's life, from childhood (53:2) to his demise, but it also includes an account of the narrators' interactions with the servant. They do not find him attractive (53:2), hold him to be of no account (53:3), and commit transgressions for which he takes the blame (53:5). The narrators are healed and made whole because the servant is punished and bruised, and yet they abandon him and his way that contributed to his destruction (53:6). The narrative recounts the life of the servant in which the narrators and God are involved, and Clines proposes that we will understand more if we view the poem more as a "language-event" than "the poem as problem."¹⁴⁴ In the following reading, I imagine the song as a play viewed from the position of its narrators.

The Opening Frame (52:13-15)

The opening frame sketches the scope of the story that will follow in a more detailed narrative. Robert Harris explains that, in the 12th century, Rabbi Eliezer found that biblical narratives often begin with a summary statement.¹⁴⁵ His suggestion seems particularly suitable in a

¹⁴⁴ Clines, 59.

¹⁴⁵ Robert Harris, "Structure and Composition in Isaiah 1-12: A Twelfth Century Northern French Rabbinic Perspective," 182-183.

case in which these three verses encapsulate not only a reversal of fortune (from disaster to elevation), but also emotional effects (from exultation to horror), and, as I propose, a move from cursedness to blessing. Using Rabbi Eliezer's rule, I read this introduction not to understand how these contradictions make sense, but instead to anticipate that the ensuing narrative will lead me, as a reader, through the experience of disaster, horror and cursedness to elevation, exultation and blessing.

God elevates the servant in our estimation and invites the audience (the narrators and readers) to behold the servant from God's point of view and also from the perspective of men who include kings. God addresses the servant directly when he says, "many who were astonished at *you*." At this point, God addresses the servant directly, refusing to objectify the servant. This is startling because the rest of God's speech places us at a kind of crime scene, where many spectators are gaping, shocked at the servant's condition. The servant's appearance is marred (*mishchath*), a word that appears only in Leviticus to describe strangers so corrupted that they must be barred from sharing the Lord's bread (Lev. 22:25). This mention is part of the sacrificial code of Leviticus 22:19-25 that bars any animal that is marred, blemished, disfigured, corrupted, or in any way imperfect to be offered as a sacrifice. This disqualifies the servant as a sacrifice in the Levite code, casting doubt on Calvin's priestly sacrifice interpretation. Nevertheless, another allusion to priestly sacrifice follows.

Like an old-fashioned horror movie bereft of special effects, we see the catastrophe of the servant through the appalled expressions of those observing him. We imagine the worst. We are told the servant is not recognizable as a man, and then the couplet's second line enhances our sense of disgust and distance by describing the servant's form or outline as far from human. God

summarizes the effect of this horrific sight by saying that the servant sprinkles (*nazah*) (the NRSV translates as “startles”) the nations, so that even kings shut their mouths (52:15). The word appears throughout the Hebrew Bible when a priest sprinkles attendees and altars with the blood of sacrificed animal victims, as part of ritual cleansing or consecrations as expressed in Pentateuchal codes from Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers.¹⁴⁶ However, the unusual use of this word in a situation that resembles a royal court, where heads of state are present, makes a visually identical word with an alternate meaning, “startle,” drawn from an Arabic root more appropriate to the setting.¹⁴⁷ Yet even if the meaning “startle” is more appropriate, Isaiah has used a homophone, and so both words stubbornly remain, visually and aurally. Thus the song’s opening frame presents two “priestly” words, one disavowing a priestly sacrifice, the other suggesting a priestly sacrifice. Because they are both single words, an interpreter would have reason to discount either one as an allusion to priestly practices. However, the fact that they are both specialized, technical vocabulary that contradict each other leads me to propose that these words are purposefully used to evoke Levite sacramentalism in a way that creates an emotionally discordant effect.

The final lines of the opening frame further pique our curiosity, driving our desire to understand more.: “For that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate” (52:13b). In isolation, this statement sounds like another impenetrable enigma. But Benjamin Sommer, professor of Bible at Jewish Theological Seminary, assures us that these lines most likely recall the central starting point of the entire book of Isaiah,

¹⁴⁶ Ex. 29:21, Lev 4:6, 17; 5:9, 6:27; 8:11, 30; 14:7,16, 27, 51; 16: 14,15,19; Numbers 8:7; 4,18,19,21. The only non-sacramental use of *nazah* in 2Ki 9:33 retains the sprinkling of blood, and for its cruelty, may also be reflected here.

¹⁴⁷ According to Jan de Ward, 193, both translations are equally possible.

the prophetic call narrative of the eighth-century Isaiah ben Amos.¹⁴⁸ In that initial call, after an angel blotted the sin from the prophet's lips with a fiery coal, Isaiah responded to God's "Whom shall I send?," with "Here am I; send me!" God then instructed him to tell the people of Judea: 'Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand' (Is. 6:9) Thus, in the fourth servant song, God claims that the core message around which chapters 1 to 11 of the book of Isaiah revolve¹⁴⁹ is finally communicated successfully in the communal experience of the fourth servant's physical destruction.

At this point we do not yet know what the message is, but we "see" that its reception seems to be flawless. The deafening silence from kings who shut their mouths mirrors the servant who does not open his mouth (twice, 53:7 and 9). Because the servant embodies the message, it is broadcast both within and outside the community where it had been told, though not understood, for centuries.

Further comparing these verses with Isaiah 6, we wonder: How can one so defiled and marred be lifted (*nasa*) and exalted (*rum*, 52:12) as God himself is described on his throne in Isaiah's prophetic call vision, lifted (*nasa*) and exalted (*rum*, 6:1)? These questions — purification in the face of defilement, a message that cannot be understood but seen and heard — push our comprehension beyond normal understanding and suggest that our participation as onlookers is critical to the narrative that follows.

¹⁴⁸ Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40:66* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 93-96.

¹⁴⁹ Dr. David Carr, Fall 2016 course, *The Book of Isaiah and the Christian Articulation of Hope*, in class notes and worksheet, charted the first 11 books of Isaiah as a chiasma surrounding Chapter 6's "call narrative," using a structure suggested by Erhard Blum in 1996.

The Healing Narrative (53:1-10)

The opening frame promises that through the course of the narrative, the disfigured servant somehow delivers the message that was impossible in Isaiah 6. Sommer points to more evidence that the narrative presents healing/repentance that contrasts with the lack of healing/repentance that Isaiah was told to expect in Isaiah 6. The prophet had been told to block the ears and cover the eyes of the people, lest they repent and be healed (*rapha*, 6:10). Yet, through the bruises of the fourth servant, the chorus is healed (*rapha*) and wholeness (*shalom*, 53:5) for them results from his punishment. In the prophet's early call narrative, the burning coal is used by an angel to touch (*paga*) the prophet's lips and turn away his iniquity (*avon*, 6:9). In chapter 53, the coal seems to be replaced by the servant's destroyed body when God lays (*paga*) our iniquity (*avon*, 53:6) on the servant. The strong parallels between chapters 53 and 6 compel us to wonder: How does this wounding produce healing and this punishment create wholeness? Could Calvin be right? Could healing come about because the servant has collapsed the priestly and victim roles, evincing God's forgiveness?

The typological simplicity of Calvin's explanation may make it tempting. Yet, the work of Jeremy Schipper, assistant professor of Hebrew Bible at Temple University, suggests that Isaiah's full intention disrupts Calvin's sacramental framework. In "Interpreting the Lamb Imagery in Isaiah 53",¹⁵⁰ Schipper says the lamb fits neither the mold of Exodus 12's paschal lamb nor the ritual sacrifices involving a ram or a lamb in Leviticus 5; 7:2; and 14:24. Both the paschal lamb and animals for ritual sacrifice must be unblemished, as explained above, while Isaiah 52:14 specifically calls the servant "marred" and in Leviticus, the same Hebrew word for "marred"

¹⁵⁰ Jeremy Schipper, "Interpreting the Lamb Imagery in Isaiah 53," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 132, No. 2 (2013), 315-325.

disqualifies an animal for ritual use. Isaiah's servant is specifically unfit for ritual sacrifice: "We accounted him stricken" (53:4) and "stricken for the transgression of my people" (53:8).

Then, the Hebrew word for "slaughter" in the phrase "a lamb that is led to the slaughter" (53:7) never appears in the books of Leviticus or Numbers or in the context of a ritual sacrifice performed by a priest. Instead, this type of animal slaughter refers to the work of a cook or butcher killing for food (Gen. 43:16; Exod. 21:37; Deut. 28:31; 1 Sam. 25:11; cf. 1 Sam. 9:23-24). Other texts extend this image metaphorically to the wartime slaughter of humans as a divine punishment (Isa. 34:2; 65:12; Jer. 25:34; Lam. 2:21; Ezek. 21:15, 20, 33). None evokes ritual sacrifice performed by priests. Therefore in Isaiah 53, we lack both a priest and the statement that the lamb is a fit offering.

To understand the lamb imagery, Schipper points to a Jeremiah passage that closely parallels Isaiah 53. The image of a slaughtered lamb expresses how Jeremiah's opponents deceived the prophet: "But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. And I did not know it was against me that they devised schemes, saying, 'Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, so that his name will no longer be remembered.'" (Jeremiah 11:19) Jeremiah's passage and Isaiah 53:7-8 share the phrases "lamb led to the slaughter" and "cut off from the land of the living." Yet Jeremiah uses these phrases in the context of someone who is the victim of the larger community's abuse instead of a ritual sacrifice. Schipper sees this same metaphorical description of community violence in the image of an animal led to a slaughterhouse where the psalmist complains to God, "(b)ecause of you we are being killed all day long, and accounted as sheep for the slaughter" (Psalm 44:23). The Psalmist sees the hand of God in the deaths of soldiers. But the narrators also see their own hand in the stripes and bruises inflict-

ed on the servant. They wrongly hid their faces from him and despised him (53: 3). They wrongly esteemed him as stricken and afflicted (53:5). Like wayward sheep, they turned away and left the servant responsible. Though they did not lead the servant like a sheep to slaughter, nevertheless, they failed to defend or protect him (53: 7). Each step of the way, the narrators see the results of their waywardness, disregard, and abuse etched in the wounds carved into the servant's body.

The servant takes the narrators' abuse, and much more, and does not respond. This ensures that the evidence of abuse is indelible and unmistakable. In no way can the narrators let themselves off the hook. The crescendo of the narrative occurs in its last line. The abuse only stops when the servant "makes of his life an offering for sin" and the reversal of fortune that leads to the servant's exaltation begins: "(H)e shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the Lord shall prosper" (53:10). Only with the narrators' acknowledgment of their complicity does the servant's fate change from worthless to supremely valuable. This is only possible when they see the full horror they've contributed to, in all their disdain and disregard. By absorbing not only their neglect, but also the horrific violence that had been intended for them, the servant literally — not at all figuratively — holds up their iniquities in his body. As God held (*nasa*) his body up in 52:13, then in 53:12 the servant holds up (*nasa*) their sins in his body for all to see.

When Clines first describes the passage's take-away, he appeals to C. Westerman¹⁵¹ who says that "the actual way in which the 'we' came to change their minds about the servant remains secret. And where the report is silent we must defer to it." In other words, a cognitive formula

¹⁵¹ Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66, A Commentary*; David M. G. Stalke, trans. (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1969), 264 and following, as quoted in Clines, 31.

cannot sum up the song's effect. For Clines, unless we both share the narrators' rejection and revulsion of the servant as an objectified and despised "other," and unless we feel ourselves "converted" when the narrators see their error, the narrative's meaning will be lost on us.¹⁵² While I respect this reverence for the passage's sublime poetic effect, Calvin's reading may have rendered Reformed Christians somewhat tone deaf. In deference to the art, liturgy, and theology that have reinforced Calvin and Luther's dominant reading for centuries, I explicitly name this effect. The silence, the point of the poem for its ancient audience, is a horrified, stunned acknowledgment of the community's complicity in deliberate evil. This effect cannot be reduced to a rational concept. Instead, it is a three-dimensional experience, the "owning" of whatever drove them to contribute to the servant's demise, even if their contribution was a passive malaise or neglect, concern for self-preservation, an expression of anxiety, or more active disparagement due to pride, self-interest, or greed. The fourth servant makes his community righteous when he breaks their hearts, and shows the guilt they can not bear to admit on their own.

The Final Effect

Sommer not only finds a preponderance of material from Jeremiah and first Isaiah in second Isaiah, but he also finds evidence of Pentateuchal allusions that express an extended critique of Levitical priesthood. At first, Sommer's identification of anti-priest bias adds strength to Schipper's argument against Calvin's Levite priest-victim interpretation to explain the accomplishments of 4th servant. However Sommer also describes an overarching practice of second Isaiah *not* to supersede previous scripture. According to Sommer, second Isaiah's aim as an exil-

¹⁵² Clines, 63.

ic/post-exilic writer was to uphold the very idea of divinely-inspired Scripture. He venerates older scripture by enabling his own work to be considered as part of a deeply woven fabric of a larger corpus. According to Sommer, second Isaiah re-energizes older scripture by reading it in an exilic/post-exilic reality.¹⁵³

Sommer's work suggests that instead of following Schipper's rejection of Isaiah's allusion to the forms and memes of Levite priestly sacrifice, we might look to how Isaiah may be critiquing and transforming priestly sacrifice in a way that is meaningful for people who witnessed the destruction of the temple where the priestly cult was centered. If the fourth servant is a priest, he can no longer be a symbolic intercessor in a glorified temple. Instead, second Isaiah has re-envisioned the priestly office as an embodied combatant who calls out evil by absorbing its full force and then unveiling his community's complicity in his destruction.

The effect of this passage might be closest to that dreaded sense of "God forgive us" that Reformed Christians feel when religious leaders we trust, who tried to call our attention to great evil, are destroyed. That includes El Salvador's Archbishop Oscar Romero or, in the United States, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King. We desperately want to look the other way from our complicity. But the selfless service of these men will not allow it. Their murders accomplish what their lives could not. Perhaps this passage also helps explain the terrible gift that Mamie Till-Mobley gave our country in 1955 when she sacrificed the privacy of a family funeral for her 13-year old son and enabled Americans to come face-to-face with murderous racism that no one

¹⁵³ Sommer, 149-159, contrasts second Isaiah with the writers of Deuteronomy who discredited the version of the law in Exodus, ignoring that it existed and then enforcing the inability of anyone else to super-cede its own version of the law

wished to openly acknowledge.¹⁵⁴ “Because Emmett Till was remembered,” James Cone concludes, “the civil rights movement was born.”¹⁵⁵ This passage may also help explain how the repentance inspired by an ever-growing AIDS quilt, unfolded repeatedly on American football fields, town commons and across our National Mall, opened the door for our homophobic society’s national *metanoia* that would one-day support a U.S. Supreme Court ruling for same-sex marriage.¹⁵⁶

Closer interpretation of the fourth servant song suggests, following Sommer, that we might re-examine the gospel of John not only for its criticism of the priestly sacramental system, but also for a blueprint of its transformation.¹⁵⁷ Perhaps the wrath Jesus expresses is not the wrath of divine justice for the totality of the sins of humankind, as Calvin and Reformed Theolo-

¹⁵⁴ Cone tells the main parts of this story, 65-72. After being accused of interacting inappropriately with a white woman, Emmett Till was abducted and brutally murdered. The following month, Roy Bryant and his half-brother J.W. Milam were acquitted by an all-white jury after a five-day trial and a 67-minute deliberation. Months later, in an interview with *Look* magazine and protected against double jeopardy, Bryant and Milam admitted to killing Emmett Till. For her son's funeral, Till insisted that the casket containing his body be left open, as she said: "I wanted the world to see what they did to my baby." Tens of thousands of people viewed Emmett's body, and photographs were circulated around the country. The NAACP sponsored a tour for Mamie Till Mobley to communicate this story, one of the NAACP's most successful fundraising campaigns ever.

¹⁵⁵ Cone, 165.

¹⁵⁶ Marc Jordan writes about the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt as a family and national reliquary, unfolded as a cloth on a Eucharistic table, a portable shrine visited by mourning pilgrims, see Mark Jordan, *Recruiting Young Love: How Christians Talk About Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 182. In an interview about the 2015 Supreme Court ruling, Cleve Jones, the activist credited with creating the AIDS Memorial Quilt, said he believed the push for same-sex marriage was, “rooted in our experience with the AIDS pandemic. After what we went through — the losses we endured — and all of the loving couples then who cared for partners as they died, sometimes for many years, and the millions of dollars we had to raise to care for our brothers and sisters, all of that, I think, left us with this feeling of: “How dare you say this isn’t a marriage? How dare you say this isn’t a family? This is what a marriage looks like, this is what families are. Tara Siler and Lindsey Hoshaw, “Cleve Jones: Marriage Equality Is An Extraordinary Victory for Everybody,” June 25, 2015, KQED Public Radio News, accessed on 4/7/2017 online at <https://ww2.kqed.org/news/2015/06/26/cleve-jones-marriage-equality-is-an-extraordinary-victory-for-everybody/>

¹⁵⁷ Perhaps Jesus seeks to make a correction because something has gone terribly wrong in Second-Temple Judaism. In John 7, Jesus who feared the retribution of the crowd, secretly attends the festival of Sukkhot where the Temple priest would lead a parade to exit through the Water Gate holding a golden pitcher, walk several hundred yards to the pool of Siloam to fill the pitcher with water, march back to the temple, and spill the water from the pitcher on the altar where the animals were sacrificed. On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” (John 7: 37-39)

gy insist, but God's wrath at the oppressive elements of Jerusalem's society that commit violence to maintain Judaea and Galilee under Roman control, and the irresistible pull of authoritarian idols on our anxious yet eternal souls.

Conclusion

When I first turned to Isaiah's fourth servant song, I hoped to uncover common ground between Reformed and liberation theology that I had previously overlooked. Instead, I found that this passage is contested territory in the history of interpretation. With the help of modern scholars I have shown that Isaiah's ancient audience understood the fourth servant, like Jeremiah understood himself, to be a willing victim of community violence. As such, the fourth servant is disqualified from serving the role Reformation theologians assigned him as an unblemished sacrifice. The servant achieves atonement, but not because he satisfies God's wrath as a temple priest and sacrifice. Nor does his death redeem all the sins of all humanity, past, present and future. Instead, more in line with the interpretations of Origen of Alexandria and Jon Sobrino, the community's acknowledgement of its complicity in the servant's demise binds the community in social solidarity with its victims.

Luther, Calvin, and Origen emphasize the connection of Isaiah 53 with the Gospel of John. Chapter 12, in which John quotes both chapters of Isaiah, 53 and 6 directly, seems to be a clear turning point that launches that gospel's narrative of the Passion, signaling for John that these two texts are inextricably enmeshed. A next step would explore ways in which gospel writers considered Jesus of Nazareth to be a community martyr.

This result does not disprove the Reformed doctrine that Christ's death achieved the redemption of all sins, as Luther and Calvin argue. Nor does it prove claims of liberation theology, that, "humanity's salvation is available only through solidarity with the crucified people in our midst" (Cone), and "there there is no salvation outside the poor" (Sobrino). Instead, this study

has shown first, that a careful, close and responsible reading of Isaiah 53 does not support the Reformation reading; and second, that Luther and Calvin's Reformation interpretation invalidates a reading that empowers and blesses community martyrology as a last drastic step.

Since theologians use the passage to support their soteriologies, this finding raises theological questions it cannot answer. Further exploration is required to determine whether and in what way the martyrology of liberation theology can fit with the Reformed reliance on Christ's cross as the sole guarantor that God forgives our sins. Through this exploration, I learned that I cannot escape the circularity of this inquiry. It is critical to expose the ways in which faith and personal Christology influence the work of exegetes — especially as the Bible warns us that its messages purposefully offend us.

At the heart of their soteriologies, both Sobrino and James Cone locate the graves of victims from their own brown and black communities. First and foremost, they say, Jesus died as a suffering servant in solidarity with people whose lives are destroyed by other human beings. This may take some Christians aback. Wait a minute, they may say. Jesus died for us all; if I am not in danger, is there no salvation for me?

White Christians in America who are not in danger, say Cone and Sobrino, are challenged by Jesus to act in solidarity with people who are in danger. The suffering servant saves us when our hearts break, as God's heart breaks, and we step out in some form of action, as God sent his only Son to save us from ourselves. Until everyone is safe, no one is safe. Sitting in a Birmingham jail, Martin Luther King described this web of reciprocal dependence in terms of justice: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of

mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”¹⁵⁸

I find New Testament support for King’s “inescapable network” in Jesus’ gospel message that a hierarchy of laws establishes the law of love¹⁵⁹ as a super-law that undergirds all other laws. Love for God and our siblings is a deep-seated vine that sustains all branches. Any law that stops the flow of love withers and dies. Liberation theologians like Cone and Sobrino require us to acknowledge that our world is wrapped up in a corresponding hierarchy of sin, where collusion in fratricide is equivalent to deicide, the most ungodly sin of all.

I believe that Jesus willingly took the place of people whom society unjustly oppressed, persecuted and destroyed, to bring about a *metanoia*, a change of heart and mind in society’s oppressors — like the one that overcame Paul on his way to imprisoning Christ followers in Damascus. For me, Paul’s conversion was not about religious faith in a Redeemer alone. It was about halting his persecution and turning him around to embrace his victims. For Paul, the revelation of Christ resurrected reflected, through a mirror as Ignacio Ellacuria suggested,¹⁶⁰ the murderous idolatry of his punitive adherence to scripture and tradition.

Reformed Christians today who follow Luther and Calvin may regard actions of social solidarity with suspicion. Are they examples of “works-righteousness,” enacted, pridefully or

¹⁵⁸ Martin Luther King, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” as found in *Loving Your Enemies: Letter from a Birmingham jail; Declaration of Independence from the War in Vietnam* (New York, A.J. Muste Memorial Institute, 1981).

¹⁵⁹ “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-5), and again: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12). “I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another” (John 15:17).

¹⁶⁰ See footnote 132 about the value of coproanalysis, above.

fearfully, to merit salvation? Jesus worries aloud about this, too.¹⁶¹ Are acts of solidarity the inspired work of the Holy Spirit? Is justice a political, secular concept divorced from faith, or dubiously tethered to faith? These are concerns, but I am more concerned that these Reformed questions beget apathy, indifference, and isolation. When we hear about the crucifixion of black and brown bodies, both within U. S. borders and elsewhere, white Christians like me may ask, along with Luke’s lawyer, “Who is my neighbor?” But Jesus simply responds: my neighbor is whoever crosses my path and needs my help. Anything that prevents solidarity — ideology, fear, pride, tradition, doctrine, greed, security, isolation, nationalism, loss of status, indifference — obstructs God’s salvation.

During the Reformation, the faith that Christ’s death alone redeemed sins was a brave, martyrological stance, taken against the Pope who stood at the center of Western Europe’s major system for the delivery and justification of oppression. Today, outside that context, the redemption of sins remains undefined; the sins redeemed remain to be specified. This sets Christians in a polemical stance against a perpetually expanding list of enemies, such as secularism, the Enlightenment, science, evolution, consumerism, Judaism, Islam, other Christians, and support for same-sex marriage. When we exhaust the meaning of Christ’s death in the redemption of generic sins, we unbind faith from specific acts that prevent the destruction of people. Reformed theologians may argue for this prevention as a subsequent step, but they have forfeited the primary use of the cross as an analytic tool. To help us acknowledge our complicity in systemic, state- and religion-supported evil, the cross is a life-giving tool that has been blessed by the holy blood of Jesus Christ.

¹⁶¹ “Why do you call me good?” asked Jesus. “No one is good but God alone” (Luke 18:19).

In January 2017, as El Salvador prepared to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the peace accords that ended its savage civil war, I traveled with a group of seminarians and visited nationally recognized shrines to martyrs, including those for Jon Sobrino's colleagues, six Jesuit priests and two women who were murdered at the University of Central America (UCA) by an elite military squad in 1989. In 1992, Sobrino decried the "incredible silence" about the country's martyrs by the 1992 Latin American Bishop's Conference, which, he said, denied the "massive and undisguisable" reality of the murder of hundreds of thousands of citizens, the extermination of whole tribes of indigenous people, and the deaths of many clergy.¹⁶² He included Archbishop Oscar Romero in 1980 as well as Father Rutilio Grande in 1979, whose murder converted Romero from a supporter of his country's right-wing government into a shepherd for his people.¹⁶³

Martyrs accuse, offend and indict us. As El Salvador rebuilds, its divided Roman Catholic Church has taken decades to accept the central role of its martyrs. In 2012, a new archbishop destroyed a campesino-inspired, tile mural that the country's famed folk artist Fernando Llort installed on the facade of San Salvador's Metropolitan Cathedral to mark the fifth anniversary of the peace accords.¹⁶⁴ Romero himself was only beatified in 2015, with the arrival of Jesuit Pope Francis.

¹⁶² In *Arrogance of Nations*, Neil Elliott cites this statement from Sobrino and laments that we never ask forgiveness for the innocents killed in war, from Vietnam to Iraq, nor for "the slow death of the Southern half of the planet." See Neil Elliott, *The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press 2008), 214, Note 64.

¹⁶³ "Archbishop Romero's conversion used to be referred to in those days as 'Rutilio's miracle,'" see Sobrino, *Witnesses*, 18.

¹⁶⁴ Heidenry, Rachel, "Archbishop Orders Destruction of Salvadoran Mural," published by the Pulitzer Center online at <http://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/archbishop-orders-destruction-salvadoran-mural>, and downloaded in 2017.

Returning from El Salvador to my home in New Jersey, I attended services at neighborhood churches and chapels, and yet, I felt something was missing. Salvadorans had plastered their church walls with brilliant murals of devastation. Photos and names, sometimes entombments of civil war martyrs, graced every sanctuary. In El Salvador, church side aisles featured contextualized Stations of the Cross. Each station mapped a scene from the community's story of persecution and its path to restoration against the backdrop of Christ's passion and resurrection. Back in New Jersey, my church walls showed only the stylized stories of Jesus of Nazareth who died 2000 years earlier. Since that time, had no one stood up to the forces of evil and stubbornly refused to acquiesce? Somewhere along the way we lost our capacity to hold onto such life-giving stories.¹⁶⁵

I hope Reformed Christians will consider — along with Origen, the author of Revelation, and liberation theologians like Jon Sobrino and James Cone — that Jesus never wanted to be revered in isolation from the everyday heroes and saints who challenge and restore our communities. He died, searing our souls with the image of his body on the cross, so that those who believe in him may do greater works than he (John 14:12-14). To help Reformed Christians recover our reverence for martyrs, theologians and exegetes need to encourage us to re-think our allegiance to the Reformation's all-forgiving Christ. The fourth servant song presents communal remorse as a last, desperate act of hope for cleansing a community of its most murderous, scapegoating tendencies. I hope that my revised exegesis enables Reformed Christians to hear the social solidarity messages that the Reformed theology of atonement and redemption too often bury.

¹⁶⁵ This trend does not carry over to predominantly-black, activist churches I have visited, whose social halls are plastered with posters that extoll black heroes such as Sojourner Truth, Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks.

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