THE SUFFERING SERVANT

By FREDERICK L. MORIARTY

THE journey of the two disciples to Emmaus on the very day of Christ's resurrection is narrated only by St. Luke. In preserving this moving incident, the third evangelist has brought us to a decisive turning-point in the human effort to understand the Person and work of Jesus. The perplexed and disheartend pair, rehearsing the sad events of the past few days, represent in the mind of the sacred writer something more than two individuals who have experienced a profound disillusionment; they symbolize, in climactic fashion, that persistent failure of his closest friends to grasp the meaning of the passion and death of our Lord. In a certain sense the episode on the road to Emmaus recapitulates the incident at Caesarea Philippi,[1] the failure to understand during the Galilean ministry,[2] along with many other occasions in which lack of comprehension met his efforts to initiate them into the mystery of his suffering. At the same time the words which Jesus, the hidden Stranger, spoke to the disconsolate pair were more than a summary of ancient prophecies about the Messiah's vocation to suffer; they also pointed ahead to the end-result of his suffering, the glorification of the Servant. This latter is the idea which appears inchoatively in Luke but which John, the evangelist of his glory, would take up and develop in his version of the Good News.

In this connection, it is interesting to note how Luke, writing for the educated Hellenists of his day, has singled out Second Isaiah as his guide to the meaning of Christ's suffering and exaltation. Compared to Matthew, who writes the most Jewish of the Gospels, Luke is relatively sparing in his use of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, in the two places where he cites the Old Testament at any length, Luke quotes Second Isaiah.[3] He is no exception, therefore, to the general proposition that the evangelists, building upon the foundation of the earliest preaching in the primitive Church, have seen in the theme of the Isaian Servant of Yahweh an important key to unlocking the mystery of his redeeming death and resurrection.

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[1] Mt 16, 21–23. [2] Mk 9, 29–31. [3] Lk 3, 4–6; 4, 18–19.

At all the great moments of his life – the baptism, transfiguration, predictions of the passion, and the last supper – Jesus was presented as the Suffering Servant obediently accepting his vocation to die for the salvation of all men. This was the stumbling-block, it was true, when the Apostles preached Jesus to the Jews; but it was a stumbling-block which had been fashioned centuries before in their own sacred writings.

To reject him because he had suffered would mean that the Jews were repudiating their own history as well as the testimony of one of their greatest prophets whose message adds up to a profound interpretation of Israel's place in the divine plan. It was one of these prophecies which echoes in Peter's second public discourse to the men of Israel after the descent of the Holy Spirit:

> The God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, the God of our father, has glorified his Son Jesus, whom you indeed delivered up and disowned before the face of Pilate, when he decided that he should be released. But you disowned the Holy and Just One, and asked that a murderer should be granted to you; but the author of life you killed, whom God has raised up from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.[1]

In this citation we should note how Peter's faith has radically modified his use of the Isaian passage. To call Christ 'the Holy One' was a startling innovation, for this epithet is never applied in the Old Testament to anyone but Yahweh. Peter is thus making explicit profession of his belief in Christ's divinity, boldly proclaiming the faith given to the chief Apostle with the sending of the Holy Spirit. Many other texts could be cited, either from the primitive preaching or from the Gospels, which underline the importance of the Servant theme in the first Christian century. The Christian now saw in our Lord the full meaning of the divine plan which had been worked out in history. In him was brought to completion the promises and hopes enunciated in the Old Covenant and in that glorious fulfilment of all that went before he could see in Jesus Christ the unique and supreme revelation of God.

Before taking up the Servant Songs individually two considerations deserve our attention. The first is that the precise identification of the Servant, as he appears in these poems, is still a debated question among Old Testament scholars. No one has yet succeeded

[1] Acts 3, 13–15.

in clearing up this problem to the satisfaction of all; and the present writer does not for a moment believe that he will turn out to be the exception. Dark corners, often in places where we would most like to find light, remain in the Old Testament; and we are time and again obliged to settle for something considerably less than absolute certainty. The most successful study of the Suffering Servant[1] devotes about one half of its pages to an historical survey of the interpretations which have been proposed in answer to the question asked Philip by the Ethiopian: 'Of whom is the prophet saying this? Of himself or of someone else?'[2] Even in the most recent literature, scholars, with varying degrees of ingenuity, continue to search for new answers to the question. There would be no point here in rehearsing the bewildering variety of opinions.

The theory which appears to raise fewer objections is one which takes fully into account an observable characteristic of Hebrew psychology, whereby the nation or family or any corporate group is grasped as a perduring totality, while a member of the group, at any period of its existence, may be thought of and described as so representative of the group that he summarizes the totality in his own person. The term used to describe this Hebrew way of conceiving groups in their totality as well as under a highly personalized form is 'corporate personality'. This is no mere figure of speech but a thoroughly realistic approach to the Semite's understanding of family, tribe, nation and any other unity within society. Israel's understanding of her own existence, of the punishment received for her crimes and the blessings given her, was conditioned by this way of apprehending reality. Needless to say, her liturgical life was profoundly enriched by her self-understanding as the perduring entity which could be personified in a great ancestor of the past, a present leader, or an ideal figure of the future.

The Servant Songs call for an application, in one form or another, of this Hebrew approach to the group, as most scholars have now recognized. In some of the Songs the community of Israel, or the collective idea, is more prominent; in others the Servant is highly personalized and the individual comes into prominence. Whether the author of the poems is thought to oscillate between the collectivity and the individual, or that they both can be simultaneously expressed in the Servant idea is still an open question. But practically

[1] C. R. North: *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah* (revised edition 1956).
[2] Acts 8, 39.

all will agree that both the group and the individual elements must be included in any adequate view of the Servant in Second Isaiah. This leaves the way open for a messianic understanding of the Songs within the framework of Hebrew psychological processes. Respected also is the inchoative and imperfect character of this ancient reaching out towards an ideal which would, in God's own time, find its realization. For there can be no doubt that the figure of the Servant reflects the vocation, aspirations and response of historic Israel; and any attempt to erase this element, so firmly grounded in Israel's dialogue with her God, falsifies the picture of the Servant. To do so even in the name of a more Christian understanding of the Songs betrays a dangerous misunderstanding of the divine pedagogy which uses historical events as a vehicle of his revelation. As Christians we believe that in Jesus the mission of Israel was effectively and perfectly realized. This is eminently true of the figure of the Suffering Servant, and we do God no honour by embarrassed efforts to explain away the straight line of development between Israel and him who, in his atoning death and glorious resurrection, fulfilled as he transformed the destiny of God's people.

The second consideration concerns the great antiquity of the notion of the servant *('ebed)* and service in the Old Testament. The figure of the Suffering Servant can be properly evaluated only when it is seen as the culmination of a long inner-Israelite development. To serve was an ancient and essential part of Israel's vocation as it had been revealed to her by God. This applies to the individual as well as to the community. The Israelite believed that, from the time that God created man, one of his functions was to serve or work. The same Hebrew word from which we derive the noun 'servant' is used to describe the obligation of service imposed upon man from the beginning. 'Then the Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and to keep it.'[1] What has not been sufficiently stressed about this passage is that the obligation to work is prior to the Fall and therefore belongs to the initial design which God had for man. Work or service is not simply the penalty of sinful disobedience but something divinely willed for man in his state of elevated nature. This work would be a corollary of man's relation to God, of the servant to his master, of the creature to his creator. To be a servant or slave is thus a reflection of man's essential condition; the only tragedy consists in a free man allowing

[1] Gen 2, 15.

himself to become a slave of anyone or anything less than God. In a certain real sense we must make a choice between different kinds of servitude. The 'servant of Yahweh' is the man who has ratified his fundamental condition before his Creator.

This option between states of servitude becomes especially clear in the Exodus narrative describing God's deliverance of his people. They who had been slaves of Pharaoh would be freed from this abject and humiliating servitude; but Yahweh would perform this wonder only to proclaim them for His own service. From the time of the exodus the Hebrew gloried in the freedom which Yahweh's miraculous deliverance had made possible; and to be a slave of any man was henceforth an abomination for any Israelite. His own Law, or way of life mediated through Moses, reminded the Israelite that Yahweh had not repealed the essential conditions of man's nature but only made it possible to live in terms of that status. 'Since those whom I brought out of the land of Egypt are my servants, they must not be sold as slaves to any man . . . For the Israelites belong to me as servants; they are my servants because I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I, the Lord, your God.'[1]

Israel's vocation to Yahweh's service is the backdrop against which we must view Second Isaiah's use of the term. For, as we have already noted, this great poet-prophet stands at a climactic point in the history of God's people. And he was given a vision which summarizes all that had been said before about Israel's role as God's servant while it pointed ahead to a figure who would perfectly fulfil that mission to be a 'light to the nations'. The prophet, with the strong sense of tradition characteristic of these spokesmen of God, could draw upon all of Israel's history up to that time; and he was conscious of standing in a direct line with the great personalities of Israel's past. These were the men who had constantly summoned God's people to assume their responsibility as servants of the Lord and threatened them with disaster when they proved faithless to this vocation. Moses, whom Yahweh himself called, in repeated and emphatic affirmation, 'my servant', stands out conspicuously in this tradition. It was under his leadership that the nation was formed and its course charted. There were also the great prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea and, closer to Second Isaiah's own time, Ezechiel, who had interpreted Israel's history in terms of wholehearted service.

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[1] Lev 25, 42 and 55.

The catastrophe of 587 B.C., which appeared to many to ring down the curtain on Israel's history, was a thing of the past when Second Isaiah uttered his prophecies. Its lesson, however, would need to be repeated for many generations even though God's spokesmen knew that catastrophe was not God's final word to his people. Second Isaiah, then, was the heir to all that had transpired in Israel's stormy encounter with Yahweh, but his gaze was not fixed unalterably on the past. For he had received a magnificent vision of the future, a vision undoubtedly too vast even for his own comprehension. The past told a story of repeated divine interventions, to save or chastise this people; and even if the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian Captivity seemed to be the end of an age and the destruction of the old order, men like Second Isaiah believed that all history was permeated with the divine purpose and that no human power could stand in the way of God's designs. But not many of the prophet's contemporaries shared that faith; crushed by the havoc which had been wreaked on their people, they voiced their despair in the words of Sion: 'Yahweh has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me'.[1] The prophet, with his deeper understanding of the relation between Yahweh and Israel, answered this complaint by picturing that relation in the most human and tender way possible – under the imagery of mother and child, bride and groom.

> Can a mother forget her infant, show no mercy to the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you. See, I have written your name on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me. Your builders outdo your destroyers, and those who laid you waste go forth from you. As I live, says Yahweh, you shall put all of them on as adornments, like a bride you shall fasten them on.[2]

Yahweh was about to make a fresh beginning; even at this moment he was preparing another great act of deliverance, a second exodus from servitude. The conquering Cyrus had appeared in the East and within a few years he would capture Babylon and release the exiles. Although he did not know it, Cyrus was really the instrument of Yahweh who would now pass judgment on the wicked city. The return of the exiles was portrayed by Second Isaiah as a new exodus, with Yahweh himself at the head of the returning

[1] Isai 49, 14. [2] Isai 49, 15–18.

exiles. It is characteristic of the prophets to see in an imminent divine intervention a repetition of that first and most wonderful act of deliverance. The exodus thus became the gauge by which to measure and describe the salvific acts of God. In the New Testament as well the same theme of a new exodus would run through the account of Christ's redemption of man from sin. The Christian mystery is, above all else, a paschal mystery. In the solemn celebration of the Christian Pasch we participate in the new exodus, the passage from death to life, from sin to grace, from the transient things of this world to the eternal realities of heaven.

Within this context of hopeful expectation of a new and even greater deliverance by Yahweh, expressed in the incandescent language of Second Isaiah, it is necessary to situate the Songs of the Suffering Servant. As it was at the time of the first exodus, so now liberation is granted in order that the people of God may again render service. For this is the deeper meaning of Israel's history, as we have already indicated. Because of her unique relationship to the Holy One, Israel has a vocation to be his servant. Her blindness and obstinacy, reaching to the point of apostasy, were evasions of this vocation, and because of them Israel had often felt the heavy hand of divine judgment. But the purposes of Yahweh could not be frustrated; her whole sacred past, as we have noted, is resumed at this decisive moment of Israel's history. This includes the call of Abraham, Moses and the exodus, David, to whose house had been granted a special election and covenant promises, prophets like Jeremiah whose vocation and suffering form an underlying motif in the description of the servant. All of them had, at one time, been called 'servants of Yahweh', and they are all made present in the Second Isaiah's vision of a new intervention of Yahweh in the history of his people. We do not mean to assert that all the implications of this vision, which is really that of a world dominated by the will of God, were understood by the prophet. That would not be possible until the role of the servant was lived in its transcendent fullness by Christ. But it is as a witness to an order in history which is governed by a wise and loving God rather than by blind physical force that the message of this great prophet has relevance to us as well as to his contemporaries.

Not all are agreed on the division of the four Songs and the question may well arise whether, perhaps, other passages in Second Isaiah are also songs of the servant or fragments of them. Of one thing we can be certain; the servant theology of Second Isaiah is

not confined to the Servant Songs but is a recurrent theme throughout the oracles of this prophet. Aware that other divisions are possible, we shall delimit the four Songs of the Servant in the following manner: 42/1-7; 49/1-6; 50/4-9; 52/13-53/12.

THE FIRST SONG

'Behold, my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight, upon whom I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations, he will not cry out nor shout, nor make his voice heard in the street. A bruised reed he shall not break, and a flickering wick he shall not quench, until he establishes justice on the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching. I am Yahweh, I have called you in justice, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open eyes that are blind, to bring out captives from the dungeon, and from prison those who dwell in darkness'.[1]

The Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) reads in the first verse 'Jacob my servant' and 'Israel my chosen', very likely following the explicit identification of the servant in the previous chapter.[2] In both passages the great Judean prophet is consoling his people with the promise that God will restore his people after their period of chastisement has ended. If there are expressions in the first Song which suggest an individual as the servant, this may be because the poet does not conceive the nation Israel as a simple aggregate of individuals but as a unity, formed by God at the time of the exodus, endowed with special privileges and responsibilities and now about to be shown another mark of his affection, deliverance from exile in Babylon. The prophet wishes to emphasize the personal character of the Yahweh-Israel relation and to bring out the closeness of bond and the uniquely intimate quality of the relationship. In reading all of these Songs it will be necessary constantly to bear in mind the principle of 'corporate personality' mentioned above. However alien it may seem to the modern Western mind, this trait of Hebrew psychology will help us to understand the fluidity in Second Isaiah's portrait of the servant. To impose on ancient Semitic poetry our own thought processes, which neatly 'compart-mentalize' the group and the

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[1] Isai 42, 1–7.

[2] Isai 41, 8. The same equation is found in Jer 30, 10 and twice in Jer 46, 27–28.

individual, would only aggravate the difficulties we already have in understanding these Songs.

The mission of the servant, centring on the thrice-repeated word 'justice' *(mishpat)*, is described as a task of bringing the knowledge of the one true God to the nations. Endowed with the gift of the Spirit, the servant, silently and unostentatiously, will manifest the divine will to the people groping in their idolatry. After indicating the servant's quiet ministry of enlightenment, an oracle of Yahweh repeats the call of the servant in whom God's purpose for all men is to be worked out. Israel is to be the light shining in the darkness of a pagan world, the light which brings liberation from spiritual bondage; her vocation does not come from her own inner qualities but from her relation to Yahweh. It is only because of His election that Israel is a depository of divine truth. In dispensing *mishpat* and *torah* (instruction) to the nations, the servant resumes the traditional and principal work of king *(mishpat)* and priest *(torah)* in the course of Israelite history. The servant combines and transcends the leaders of the past while he extends their work to all men. The mission is a universal one, as far as that can be expressed by the resources of the prophet's language.

THE SECOND SONG

'Hearken to me, O coastlands, listen, O peoples from afar. Yahweh called me from the womb, from my mother's womb he named me. He made my mouth a sharp-edged sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me. He made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he concealed me. And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified". But I said, "In vain have I laboured, for emptiness and wasted breath have I spent my strength, yet surely my right is with Yahweh, my recompense is with my God. For now Yahweh has spoken who formed me from the womb as his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him: for I am honoured in the sight of Yahweh, and my God has become my strength." The he said, "It is too light a thing for you to be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and restore the survivors of Israel. I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth"'.[1]

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[1] Isai 49, 1–6.

This has proven to be the most difficult of the Songs for the interpreter, and it must be said candidly that no final solution to the problem has been found. The poem is a dramatically conceived presentation of the servant proclaiming his origin and the purpose for which God called him. If we, with the majority of commentators, identify the servant of this Song with Israel, as the third verse would seem to demand, we are still faced with the difficulty that subsequent verses seem to distinguish between the servant, on the one hand, and Israel/Jacob on the other. The problem can be put more bluntly by asking how the servant, supposedly Israel, can have a mission to Israel. Solutions with varying degrees of probability seek a way out of the difficulty. Some suggest that Israel as the servant must in some way be qualified as the faithful remnant or the true Israel, as distinct from empirical Israel, or some defining element which distinguishes the servant from Israel as a totality. Others point out that the restoration of Israel, clearly promised in this passage, is not the work of the servant but, as always, the work of Yahweh. It is Yahweh, not his servant, who restores Israel. In any solution the distinction, not found in the first Song, between the servant and Israel/Jacob, and their relation to one another, challenges the ingenuity of the interpreter.

In the form of a spiritual autobiography the servant describes his vocation[1] and his hidden life as a form of divine protection until the time appointed for his service. What seemed to be a futile service, especially during the harassments of exile, makes the servant momentarily question the value of his service. But faith replaces discouragement, and the servant is led to estimate his life as guided constantly by divine providence no matter how many frustrations he may seem to encounter. In St. Paul we find the same affirmation of faith transposed into a Christian key.[2] Yahweh now reveals to him a new responsibility, to be 'a light to the nations'. The mission is to those other than his brethren, and it means that the servant's task is to bring to all mankind knowledge of the true God. Israel may never again harbour the thought that her only duty is her own salvation. And Yahweh promises, though the exact point of time is not defined, that a glorious future awaits an Israel now disdained and abhorred. This is the homage of the nations.[3]

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[1] Cf. Jer 1, 5. [2] 1 Cor 4, 1–5. [3] Cf. Isai 49, 7.

THE THIRD SONG

'The Lord Yahweh has given me a well-trained tongue, that I should know how to speak a word to the weary. Morning after morning he wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord Yahweh has opened my ear, and I rebelled not, and did not turn back. My back I gave to smiters, my cheeks to those who plucked (my beard). My face I hid not from shame and spitting. The Lord Yahweh is my help, therefore I am not disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know I shall not be put to shame. My vindicator is near, who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary? Let him draw near to me. Behold, the Lord Yahweh is my help, who can put me in the wrong? Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment, the moth will consume them'.[1]

The literary form of the Song is, for the most part, the individual lament. In autobiographical style, the servant describes the endowments given him to carry out his mission of sustaining the weary. The precise time of that mission and its object escape us. Most probably the mission is to the whole world as the universalism of the preceding Song has already indicated. But the emphasis in this poem is on the suffering and ignominy endured rather than on the range of the mission undertaken. What remains obscure is the relation of this Song to the two which preceded. Do we have a description of the servant after Israel has been restored to her land and has already begun her mission to the nations? It is next to impossible, on the basis of the text, to answer these questions definitively. Better to insist on the clear and positive teaching of the passage. Whatever and whenever the servant has suffered was the consequence of a loyalty to Yahweh which could not be broken down. He is sustained by Yahweh's strength as were Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezechiel and other great prophets.

C. R. North has described this Song as the Gethsemane of the servant, the outpouring of a heart which has known rejection and contempt in the pursuit of his mission. With the same sensitivity of spirit as the great prophet Jeremiah before him, the servant gives expression to the loneliness and rejection which were the lot of many a prophet. Since the collective idea, Israel as the nation, persists in some degree here as in the rest of the Songs, the prophet

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[1] Is 50, 4–9.

continues to see his people, in their suffering and response, repeating the experiences of the great leaders of the past. Their vocation had always brought with it the demand to stand fast in suffering and to use it as a means of closer union with him whose love is the ultimate reason why he punishes.

The text of the Song provides no basis for determining more exactly the nature of the suffering, the enemies, or the time of persecution. Who would wish to say that the prophet himself grasped all the implications of his profound theme? What is unmistakable in this third Song, however, is the servant's resolute trust in Yahweh and his assurance that no adversary can prevent the ultimate triumph of God's cause.

THE FOURTH SONG

'Behold, my servant shall prosper, he shall be greatly exalted, lifted up and set on high. As many were appalled at (him) ... I have so altered his aspect from the rest of men, his form from that of the sons of men. So shall he startle many nations, kings shall stand aghast at him. For things untold shall they have seen, and things unheard shall they have understood. Who has believed our report? To whom has the arm of Yahweh been revealed? As a young plant he grew up before Him, like a root out of a thirsty soil. He had neither form nor comeliness that we should look upon him, nor beauty that we should delight in him. He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of pains and acquainted with wounds, as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised and we esteemed him not. Truly he bore our wounds, our pains he made his burden, and we esteemed him as one smitten, struck down by God and afflicted. Yet he was wounded for our sins, crushed by our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we were healed. All of us had gone astray like sheep, each had followed his own way, but Yahweh fastened upon him the iniquity of us all. Though oppressed he submitted and opened not his mouth, like a lamb led to the slaughter, like a sheep dumb before his shearers, for he opened not his mouth. By a coerced sentence he was taken away, and who concerned himself with his lot? For he was cut off from the land of the living, smitten (to death) by the sin of my people. With the wicked they buried him, his tomb was with the corrupt, though violence he had not committed, nor was deceit on his lips. But Yahweh was pleased to crush him with suffering; truly he offered his life as a guilt-offering. He shall see a posterity, he shall

enjoy length of days, the good pleasure of Yahweh shall prosper at his hand. After life's sorrow he shall see light and be satisfied. By his knowledge shall my servant justify many, and their sins he shall bear. Therefore I shall apportion him many, the multitudes he shall receive as booty. Because he poured out his soul in death and with sinners was he numbered; since he bore the sin of many, and for sinners he made entreaty'.[1]

The last Song represents one of the peaks of Old Testament thought, the portrait of an innocent sufferer, whose self-oblation brings redemption to all. The voluntary offering of the sufferer's life as an expiatory sacrifice is made explicit by representing the servant's death as an '*asham*', a technical term in the Israelite cult to denote a substitute who gives his life to save others and who, by his sacrifice, expiates guilt. This sublime poem opens and closes with Yahweh speaking and moves between the poles of utter abasement and triumphant vindication. As we noted at the beginning of this essay Christians have unanimously seen in this great hymn of innocent suffering a foreshadowing, in one way or another, of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. Let us insist at once that neither the historical community of Israel nor any individual before or after Christ could be said to realize the description of the humble servant whose suffering is the road to redemption and exaltation. On this point almost everyone will agree; but there the agreement stops.

Is it not possible, however, to interpret this magnificent vision in terms of Hebrew thought-patterns discussed earlier? If this psychological trait of merging the group and the individual who may represent the group is applicable in the first three Songs there is no reason to abandon it here in our effort at understanding. It seems probable, therefore, that we have here a certain compenetration between the nation Israel and him who is the perfect representative of that nation and who is the perfect embodiment of Israel's gifts, mission and destiny. The thought in the Song does not move in a linear direction, from community to individual, but simultaneously combines the two.

The servant is, in a real sense, both Israel and Christ. In the atoning death of Jesus and his resurrection, which underlined in his flesh the great paradox of his teaching that only by dying do we live, the Son of God fulfilled as he transformed the destiny of

[1] Isai 52, 13. – 53, 12.

His people. For this reason we may speak of him as the fullness of Israel, and in him Israel achieves the goal of its divinely-appointed mission. The whole history of Israel has a forward thrust, it points ahead to a last and decisive salvific intervention of God, and in the Incarnation that final chapter in the story of Israel's encounter with God has been written. Through him who brings to completion her destiny in the drama of salvation Israel may be said to live eternally.

We may conclude by briefly noting how the principle we have used in discussing the Songs of the servant is applicable to an important theme in New Testament theology. The same psychology which is able to grasp in a totality the group and its individual representative is at work also in St. Paul's doctrine of the Church as the Body of Christ. Head and members form a community, the New Israel, which inherits Israel's mission to bring salvation. As members of that body we share in the mission of the Servant and our participation will be only as vital as is our union with Him who is the Head of this new community. May we not learn from meditation upon these Songs, especially the last, that suffering does not mean that we have been excluded from His love but rather that we have been called to serve Him in the task of establishing His reign in the world?