

JUSTIN AND ISAIAH 53*

BY

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In 1942 H. W. Wolff presented Justin's use of Isaiah 53 under the rubrics of Christ's mysterious generation, Christ's lowliness, the Lordship of Christ, and Christ as the agent of salvation.¹ M. Fédou (1984) discussed the themes of cross, glory, the conversion of the nations according to the New Covenant, the contrast between Jewish and Christian cleansing, the ignominy of the passion, and the mysterious generation.² These themes are all picked up in what comes below. But the present treatment attempts to present a more comprehensive role for Isaiah 53 in Justin's community.

Oscar Skarsaune has provided an extensive analysis of Justin's prooftext tradition. He argues adequately for Justin's use of a testimony collection. However, in all but one case (Isa 53:12 in *1 Apol.* 50.2), Justin uses the LXX to refer to Isaiah 53.³ The majority of Justin's references occur in the *Dialogue with Trypho* (ca. 160 CE) and therefore, although the writing of the *First Apology* predates it (ca. 151-55 CE), I have treated it first. Justin's use of Isaiah 53 is confined to these two works.

For *1 Clement* (16.1-14), Isaiah 53 is a passage which teaches humility in the community exemplified in Christ's humility.⁴ As we explore Justin's use a generation or so later, we will see how the passage expands dramatically in implication. The text is still crucial to the community's function.

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¹ H. W. Wolff, *Jesaja im Urchristentum* (Giessen: Brunnen Verlag, 1984), 131-35. The book has seen three editions.

² M. Fédou, "La vision de la Croix dans l'oeuvre de saint Justin 'philosophe et martyr,'" *Recherches Augustiniennes* 19 (1984): 48-55.

³ Skarsaune, *The Proof from Prophecy*, *SupNovT*, no. 56 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), 62; cf. P. Katz, "Justin's Old Testament Quotations and the Greek Dodekapropheton Scroll," *Studia Patristica* 1 (1957) [TU 63]: 348.

⁴ Cf. D. A. Hagner, *The Use of the Old and New Testaments in Clement of Rome*, *SupNovT*, no. 34 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), 49-51.

But, now, it holds a dramatic picture of the Christian Christology, and of the pathway from conversion to communion.

Isaiah 53 in Justin's Dialogue

Baptismal Cleansing by Repentance and Faith in the Blood of the Paschal Lamb

In *Dialogue* 13 Justin develops a contrast between Jewish baths and Christian baptism. Built off of an allusion to Isaiah 1:15-16 (along with Heb 9:12-14; Isa 1:11-13)⁵ Justin argues that Isaiah did not teach a ceremonial cleansing, but repentance and faith at baptism through Christ's blood:

If anyone has unclean hands, let that person wash them and be pure. For Isaiah did not send you to the bath to wash away murder and other sins which all the water in the sea could not cleanse; but, as expected, it was the ancient bath of salvation which he spoke about and which was for the repentant, who no longer are purified by the blood of goats and sheep, or by the ashes of a heifer or by the offerings of fine flour (cf. Heb 9:12-14; Isa 1:11-14), but by faith through the blood and death of Christ who died for this very reason. . . . (*Dial.* 12.3-13.1 [M, 90]).

Immediately after his words, "for this very reason," he presents a quotation of Isaiah 52:10-54:6 introduced with "As Isaiah himself says" (*Dial.* 13.2-5 [M, 90-92]). The citation of Isaiah 53:1-12 comes directly from the LXX (as does its occurrence in *1 Apol.* 50-51).⁶ This is one of Justin's long LXX quotations, as opposed to his short, non-LXX quotations which seem to derive from some type of testimony collection.⁷

Following the full quotation of Isaiah 53 (and 52:10-15; 54:1-6) Justin provides the following comment:

Therefore, it is that we have believed through the bath of repentance and knowledge of God, which was ordained for the iniquities of the peoples of God, as Isaiah proclaims, and we know that the same baptism which he

⁵ Cf. *Dial.* 12.3 (M, 90); 27.2 (M, 113). Critical editions noted in the text by "M," refer to M. Marcovich's editions of *Dialogus cum Tryphone* (PTS 47) and *Apologiae pro Christianis* (PTS 38) (Berlin: DeGruyter, 1997, 1994). Cf. Skarsaune, 168-69, 173; Marcovich, *Dialogus*, 90; P. Prigent, *Justin et l'Ancien Testament*, Etudes Bibliques (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1964), 248. See *1 Clem.* 8.4 for an earlier usage of Isa 1:16-20 to promote Christian repentance.

⁶ Cf. Skarsaune, 124.

⁷ For an orientation to the state of research into the question of Justin's OT quotations and their sources see Skarsaune.

announced, and which alone can purify those who have repented, is the water of life. The wells which you have dug for yourselves are broken and useless (cf. Jer. 2:13). For what is the use of that baptism which cleanses only the flesh and body? Baptize your soul from anger, from covetousness, from envy, and from hatred; then the whole body will be pure (*Dial.* 14.1-2 [M, 92-93]).

On the basis of what precedes and follows the quotation of the prophet it appears that Isaiah 53 functions on three different levels. First, it presents Christ's blood as the true source of purification from sins over and against the blood of animals or other offerings. This is seen in the contrast between the denunciation of purification by means of "the blood of goats (τράγος) and sheep (πρόβατον)" and the description of the man of Isaiah 53 as one "brought as a sheep (πρόβατον) to the slaughter and as a lamb (ἀμνός). . . ." For Justin, according to Isaiah 53:7, Christ is the true paschal lamb. His blood, through sacrificial slaughter, delivers believers.⁸

Isaiah 53:7 suggests an ignominious nature to Christ's death and Justin develops it. The lamb led to the slaughter becomes Christ who was seized on Passover by the Jews and crucified. This is a reprehensible manner of death, cursed for the Jew by the Law (cf. Deut 21:23; *Dial.* 90.1; 96.1) and is prophesied by (Pseudo) Ezra. There the Jews say, in a portion where he expounds the law of the Passover, "we are about to humiliate him on the cross" (*Dial.* 72.1; M, 194).⁹ Furthermore, for Justin, Isaiah 53:7 read together with Jeremiah 11:19 indicates that Christ was the guileless (ἄκακος) paschal lamb (*Dial.* 72.2-3; M, 194-95). This reading of the lamb's innocence is strengthened by Isaiah 53:9. In *Dialogue* 102.6 (M, 245) in an attempt to emphasize the necessity of dependence upon God for salvation, apart from hope in wealth or fame, he stresses the Son's dependence upon the Father (Isa 50:4; Ps 21(22):5, 9). In *Dialogue* 102.7, then, he makes the point that if the Son *who was sinless* had to depend upon the Father, how much more anyone else. The proof for Jesus' sinlessness is Isaiah 53:9: "for Isaiah said that he did not even sin in speech ('for he committed no iniquity, nor was deceit in his mouth')." Justin is satisfied in his one explicit usage of this passage to leave it there. But it seems to me important that he does see Christ's sinlessness in the Isaiah passage which overall is a

⁸ *Dial.* 111.3 (M, 261). Cf. *Dial.* 114.1-2 and 10.1 (M, 265, 136).

⁹ Jer 11:19 and the Ps-Ezra saying occur in *Dial.* 72 along with a saying from Ps-Jeremiah. These suggest that Justin is drawing on a testimony source which develops through this group a parallelism between Passover and Passion (Skarsaune, 42; Prigent, 212). He is accusing the Jews of removing certain passages from the LXX in order to justify their rejection of Jesus.

testimony regarding the paschal lamb. The typology which he draws in *Dialogue* 40 between Christ and the lamb is very easily extended to include the lamb which was without blemish (Exodus 12:5) and Christ who is without sin.¹⁰

Christian tradition, then, as Justin knew it read Isaiah 53:7 within a particular conceptual context. This context expected the humiliating death of an innocent victim which found its fulfillment precisely in Christ's crucifixion. This tradition is a distinctive component of the Christian belief which to the Jews is a stumbling block.

In *Dialogue* 89-90 Trypho, the Jew, is shown expressing this concern. He doubts "whether Christ should be so shamefully (ἄτιμος) crucified" (*Dial.* 89.2; M, 224-25) and die "so disgraceful (αἰσχρός) and shameful (ἄτιμος) a death" (*Dial.* 90.1; M, 225). He concedes that the Scriptures teach the Christ's suffering, but finds the curse of the cross unbelievable. To his incredulity, Justin replies with references to Isaiah 50:6;¹¹ 53:3, 7, 8, 12 (*Dial.* 89.3; M, 225). For Justin, these prophecies settle the issue of the crucifixion and its ignominy. There is no other way of reading the prophet. The cross, though not explicit in Isaiah 53, is inherently there by means of the theme of shameful, innocent suffering.¹²

Apparently, early Christians did not find such a linkage odd. One can see the themes of innocent suffering, shame and cross explicitly in 1 Peter 2:22-25 and Hebrews 12:2. These connections may be seen as incredible by those outside the community, but they form the warp and woof of Christian faith. This draws us into our second theme from Justin's reading of Isaiah 53. We move from the crucified paschal lamb to the theme of Christians as those Gentiles who have believed the incredible.

Isaiah 53 begins, as Justin cited it in *Dialogue* 13.3, with the question, "Lord who has believed (πίστεύω) our report?" (M, 91). Prior to citing the passage, which in his mind thoroughly develops the shameful crucifixion of the paschal lamb, he stated that purification came not by Jewish ceremonial

¹⁰ See G. Strecker, *The Johannine Letters*, trans. L. M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 95-96 and A. W. Argyle, "1 John iii.4f," *The Expository Times* 65 (1953-54): 62-63 who provide an argument that 1 John 3:5 may be an earlier reading of the Isaiah passage.

¹¹ Justin puts Isa 50:6-8 in a group of quotations probably finding its source in a collection of testimonies in *1 Apol.* 38 (cf. Skarsaune, 80, 129, 158). A similar sequence with Isa 50:6 is seen in *Barn.* 5.14.

¹² Cf. further his references to Isa 53:2-3. These refer to the first coming of suffering and shame (*Dial.* 36.6 [M, 131]; 49.2 [M, 150]; 85.1 [M, 216]; 100.2 [M, 241]; 110.2 [M, 258]).

washing, but “by faith (πίστις) through the blood and death of Christ who died for this reason” (*Dial.* 13.1; M, 90). And then after he cites Isaiah 53, he writes concerning the Christian response to Isaiah’s testimony about the “bath of repentance” which was “ordained for the iniquities of the people of God” (Isa 53:8). The response “is that we have believed (πιστεύω)” (*Dial.* 14.1; M, 92).

Justin reads the question of Isaiah 53:1 as being answered by the Gentile Church which now comprises the nations of Isaiah 52:15 which are startled at the Servant of YHWH. They are startled, yes, for his innocent suffering is unexpected. But they see, contemplate (Isa 52:15), and believe (53:1). They move past astonishment to faith. The Christian community of faith has accomplished Isaiah’s prophecy.¹¹ It embraces the shame of the cross rather than remaining perplexed. He further expresses the Christian attitude towards the cross on the basis of Isaiah 53 in *Dialogue* 89.3. Following the portion in *Dialogue* 89.2 where he recounts elements of Isaiah 53:3, 7, 8, 12, he writes:

But if these things are characteristics which mark him out to all, how can we do anything else than confidently believe (πιστεύω) in him? And all who have understood the writings of the prophets, as soon as they hear that he was crucified, will affirm that he is the one and no other (*Dial.* 89.3; M, 225).

The distinctive identity of the Gentile Christians as those who have believed Isaiah’s report in accordance with Isaiah 52:15-53:1 is seen clearly in *Dialogue* 118.3 (M, 273-74). They have heard the prophet, understood, and believed (πιστεύω). However, the language of Isaiah 53:1-2 declares a skepticism about belief (“who shall believe?”; cf. John 10:38; Rom 10:16) and confidence in God’s power (“the arm of the Lord”). Justin is careful to note that the Gentiles are convinced not by rhetoric, but by God’s power (*Dial.* 42.1-2; M, 139). And, furthermore, they, in their common faith, form one body, the Church. This is indicated for Justin in a surprising interpretation of Isaiah 53:2. The reference to a single “child” indicates one body of servant-like believers: the many in the one body (*Dial.* 42.3; M, 139).¹¹ At this point one can see in his citation the role of Isaiah 54:1-6. The concepts of recovery from barrenness and enlargement of the tent and descendants, all of which bring joy, address for him the theme of New Covenant Gentile salvation.¹⁵

¹¹ Cf. Fédou, 54

¹¹ Cf. 1 Cor 12:12; Skarsaune, 116.

¹⁵ Cf. *Dial.* 11.3-5; Fédou, 52.

Justin reads Isaiah 53:1 within a pattern established by other networks of texts on faith. In particular, we may note Romans 4:9-16, and Deuteronomy 32:20 in *Dialogue* 119.6 (M, 76). Within this pattern, one can almost hear a whisper of Hebrews:

But we are not among those who shrink back and are lost, but among those who have faith and so are saved (Heb 10:39).

Another text from Hebrews which embraces this centrality of faith seems to set the stage for our third theme from Justin's reading of Isaiah 53. We have already seen his allusion to Hebrews 9:12-14. Now we look to Hebrews 10:19-22 where confidence to enter the sanctuary is based on "the blood of Jesus" and an approach to the sanctuary is founded on "a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled (ῥαντίζω) clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed (λούω) with pure water." From faith we now turn to Isaiah 53's contribution to Justin's view of Christian baptism.

In *Dialogue* 40.1 Justin links his ideas of faith and the blood of the paschal lamb with Christian anointing, a parallel to the Hebrews' anointing of their houses at the Passover. With the blood of Christ's sacrifice, "believers, in proportion to their faith, anoint (χρίω) their houses, that is themselves." This anointing with Jesus' blood looks back to the context in which the full quotation of Isaiah 52:10-54:6 occurs, *Dialogue* 13.1-14.2. There we find that Justin contrasts the Jewish ceremonial bath with "that ancient bath (λουτρόν) of salvation" to which impure humanity is really called, the washing through faith in the blood of Christ (*Dial.* 13.1).

The language to this point has been that of anointing and bathing, but following the citation of Isaiah (*Dial.* 14.1-2), it becomes the language of baptism. He begins by referring to Christians as those who "have believed through the bath (λουτρόν) of repentance and knowledge of God," a bath ordained by God and proclaimed by Isaiah as needful for the iniquities of God's people. He then refers to it as the "same baptism (βάπτισμα)" announced by Isaiah, a baptism which alone can purify the repentant. Finally, in contrast to the dry wells of Israel (Jer 2:13), and a baptism (βάπτισμα) which cleanses only the outside, he commands the reader to "baptize (βαπτίζω) your soul" from various sins, promising that the whole body will be pure. Just a few chapters later in *Dialogue* 18.2 (M, 99) and 19.2 (M, 100) we encounter similar statements with reference to Isaiah 1:16 and Jeremiah 2:13.

Justin is reading Isaiah 52-54 in connection with these two other prophetic texts and he forms a network which produces a preoccupation with baptismal

cleansing through the blood of the crucified paschal lamb. *Barnabas* 11.1-2 had already anticipated such a network. He too wrote of Christian baptism in contrast to the wells of Jeremiah 2:13.

Our apologist, however, has gone to the trouble to quote an immense part of Isaiah 52-54 in this connection. What is it about the material in this context that stirs his baptismal thinking? One, on first reading, may be somewhat surprised that Justin's mind goes in that direction. Pierre Prigent certainly found it hard to believe that this passage was central to Justin's development of Christian baptism. He thought that the Isaiah 52-54 citation in *Dialogue* 13 interrupts Justin's treatment of baptism from Isaiah 1:16. Furthermore, he held that the comments which begin *Dialogue* 14 refer back only to that prophetic text alluded to in *Dialogue* 12, not to Isaiah 52-54.¹⁶ It was, for him, much more appropriate to see Isaiah 1:16 as the central passage.¹⁷

But, upon observation of the citation, one can see three ways in which it contributes centrally to the argument in complement to Isaiah 1:16 (*and* Jer 2:13). First, Justin makes explicit (*Dial.* 13.1; 14.1) that the "ancient bath of salvation" for "the repentant (μεταγινώσκω)," was the "bath of repentance (μετάνοια)," and is the baptism which alone can purify "those who have repented (μετανοέω)." The theme of repentance present in Isaiah 1:16 is also in Isaiah 52:11: "Depart, depart, depart,¹⁸ go out from there and touch no unclean thing ('Απόστητε, ἀπόστητε, [ἀπόστητε] ἐξέλθετε ἐκεῖθεν καὶ ἀκαθάρτου μὴ ἄψησθε)." Justin reads this verse as an exhortation to the nations to repent of wickedness *and* the impotent washings and cracked cisterns of Judaism by turning to bathe in the blood of the paschal lamb.¹⁹ It continues: "Go out (ἐξέρχουμαι) from the midst of her, be separate (ἀφορίζω), you that bear the vessels of the Lord."

Students of Paul will recognize Isaiah 52:11 from its occurrence in 2 Corinthians 6:17.²⁰ In the prophet, it orders the Jews, in their new exodus,

¹⁶ Prigent, 248.

¹⁷ Prigent, 247.

¹⁸ Justin is so fixated upon the notion of repentance and separation he adds the command a third time; LXX has it only twice.

¹⁹ For the important place of repentance as a prerequisite to baptism in Justin see A. Benoit, *Le baptême chrétien au second siècle: la théologie des Pères* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1953), 158-63.

²⁰ Isa 52:11a and 52:11b are apparently cited in reverse order (cf. V. P. Furnish, *II Corinthians*, Anchor Bible no. 32A [Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1984], 364), the differences with the LXX, then, are basically clausal (cf. E. E. Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 150, n. 2, 152).

to leave Babylon, separate themselves from its paganism, and to restore the sacred vessels to the Temple. In Paul, it exhorts the Corinthian Christians to holy living in a manner distinct from the unbeliever. After a list of rhetorical questions exhorting separation to purity and citation of the Isaiah text in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, Paul writes (2 Cor 7:1):

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse [καθαρίζω] ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God (RSV, 2d ed.).

Paul, along with Justin, however, finding more than repentance in the verse, reads Isaiah 52:11 as a prophetic exhortation which teaches Christian cleansing of the whole person, both body and spirit. Justin even emphasizes the total cleansing which takes place through the separate Christian form of bathing (*Dial.* 14.2):

For what is the use of that baptism which cleanses only the flesh and body? Baptize your soul from anger, from covetousness, from envy, and from hatred; then the whole body will be pure [clean] (καθαρός).

Second, therefore, we see that the separation language of the passage birthed a common tradition which related Isaiah 52:11 to Christian purification (cleansing). But Justin extends the prophet's meaning in a manner not present in Paul. For our apologist, the separation is not from "unbelievers," but specifically from Jewish ceremonial cleansing unto baptism in Christ's blood. This emphasis is consistent with the *Dialogue's* audience.²¹ Isaiah 52-54 also provides the notion of cleansing present in Isaiah 1:16. But the former text surpasses the latter with one prime feature.

Third, for Justin, it seems that the "ancient bath of salvation" and the "bath of repentance" are filled not with water, nor the blood of goats or sheep, but with the blood of Jesus, the paschal lamb. This bath, or baptism, is unlike "all the water of the sea" (*Dial.* 13.1) which is insufficient to cleanse from iniquity. Such water cleanses only "the flesh and body" (*Dial.* 14.2). One needs to be washed, baptized with "the water of life" (*Dial.* 14.2), which is Jesus' blood, or what the letter to the Hebrews calls "pure water" (10:22). This ancient bath of repentance was, he says, alluding to Isaiah 53:8, "on account of the iniquities of God's people," and it is this bath, this "very baptism which he [Isaiah] announced" (*Dial.* 14.1).

²¹ See Marcovich, *PTS* 47: vii and J. Nilson, "To whom is Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* Addressed?" *Theological Studies* 38 (1977): 538-46.

The allusion to Isaiah 53:8 puts many things into perspective. In part that passage reads:

His life is taken away from the earth. Because of the iniquity of my people he came to death (Isa 53:8).

Earlier in *Dialogue* 13.1 he had faintly anticipated its quotation when he said just prior to the citation that no longer were the repentant purified by the blood of animals, but “by faith through the blood and death of Christ who died for this very reason, as Isaiah himself says. . . .” The words “for this very reason,” refer to the “because of” of the citation and are echoed in the words “on account of” in *Dialogue* 14.1. The death (blood) of Christ fills the laver because of the necessity of sacrificial blood to purify sins (cf. Heb 9:22).

But there may be in Isaiah 53 one other particular portion which informs his view of Christian baptism as a bath in the blood of the paschal lamb: verses 5 and 7. We find a remarkable parallel in *Barnabas* 5.2:

For it was for this reason that the Lord submitted to the deliverance of his flesh to destruction, that we might be cleansed by the forgiveness of sins, that is, by his sprinkled blood. For the Scripture concerning him relates partly to Israel and partly to us, and says this: “He was wounded for our transgressions, and has been afflicted for our iniquities: by his wounds we were healed (53:5). He was led like a sheep to slaughter, and like a lamb he was silent before his shearer (53:7).”²²

Justin reveals his own reading of Isaiah 53:5 with a view to purification enabled by the wounds (blood) of Christ. In a statement reminiscent of Hebrews 10:19 (“. . . we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus. . .”), he remarks that the wounds of Jesus heal all those who approach the Father through him (*Dial.* 17.1; M, 97; cf. *Dial.* 137.1; M, 306). But what is it about Christ’s blood that makes it efficacious? Certainly, as already seen, it is its innocence. Yet, for Justin, it is also its origin. He appeals to Isaiah 53:8 for warrant. For Justin, Christ’s mysterious generation spoken of in Isaiah 53:8 (“who will declare his generation [γεγενῆς]? For his life is taken away from the earth; because of the iniquity of my people he came to death”) cannot be declared by humanity. Furthermore, he specifies, it is the generation of the one who dies for humanity’s purification that is mysterious. In such specification he connects Isaiah 53:8

²² *Die Apostolischen Vater*, ed. A. Lindemann and H. Paulsen (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1992), 34.22-28.

to 53:5; 7:14 and Genesis 49:11 (*Dial.* 43.3-8; 63.2; 68.4; 54.1-2; 76.1-2 [M, 140-42; 178-79; 188; 158-59; 201]). These texts treat Christ's origin by setting forth his preexistence, his birth from a virgin, and the divine source of his blood.²³ The blood of Christ is efficacious and supersedes the blood of sheep and goats because it originates from God, not humanity. Finally, although Justin mainly sets forth the passion of Christ as the basis of redemption,²⁴ he does tie the resurrection to the true circumcision from sin (*Dial.* 41.4; M, 138). We are, then, to understand that the cleansing is made effectual also by virtue of his being raised from the dead. The resurrection, taught also in Isaiah 53, is in unity with the cleansing passion of the lamb. It occurs in verse 9 (*Dial.* 97.2 [M, 237]):

And Isaiah himself said that he would rise again: "His burial has been taken from the midst," and: "I will give the rich instead of his death."

This rendering differs somewhat from his quotation of the passage in *Dialogue* 13.6:

And I will give the wicked for his grave, and the rich instead of his death. . . .

The explanation rests in the fact that Justin has woven two Isaiah texts together:

57:2 b, c: Ἡ ταφή αὐτοῦ ἦρται ἐκ τοῦ μέσου

His burial has been taken from the midst

53:9 a, c: Δώσω τοὺς πλουσίους ἀντὶ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ

I will give the rich instead of his death

Most translations render ἀντί as "for." But this misses, I think, the idea of replacement which Justin has in mind. To capture the fullness of his thought in relation to Isaiah 53:9 (a, c) I suggest the following:

I, the Lord, will give him the richness of his life (the rich [life]) instead of the poverty of his death.

Although Isaiah 52-54 is more complete theologically than Isaiah 1:16-20, when Justin cites an Isaiah text in *1 Apology* 61.1-8 (in which he explains the baptismal rite), it is the latter passage. Justin writes, following the Old Testament quotation of Isaiah 1:16-20, "And we have learned from the

²³ Cf. Fédou, 54.

²⁴ Cf., e.g., J. Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), 157-66.

Apostles this reason for this [rite].” C. I. K. Strong gives what I think is an accurate paraphrase: “From the Apostles we learned that this passage in Isaiah 1:16-20 is a word that has to do with baptism.”²⁵ This is an important passage on baptism in Justin’s mind. But, Isaiah 52-54 is a testimony which for Justin complements and explains theologically the point made succinctly in Isaiah 1:16-20. It, too, is a prophetic word on baptism, where to the Christian mind, ἀκαθάρτου μὴ ἄψησθε (“touch no unclean thing”), ἐξέλθετε (“go out”), and ἀφορίσθητε (“be separate”), become βαπτίσθητε (“baptize”).²⁶ But it goes beyond Isaiah 1:16-20 by linking the blood of the sacrificed servant to the cleansing which takes place in baptism. Isaiah 53 explains how scarlet sins are made white. Contrary to Prigent, one should see a baptismal reading of Isaiah 52-54 as central to Justin’s community, one which completes the summary of Isaiah 1:16-20.²⁷ The exhortation to baptism-repentance in Isaiah 52:11 leads into the explication of cleansing through the blood of the crucified paschal lamb of Isaiah 53. Between the two is the pivotal passage on coming to faith beyond astonishment in Isaiah 53:13-15. Only after hearing and believing the community’s teaching is one brought to the washing in water (*I Apol.* 61.2-3). The theological explanation gives meaning to the sacramental act. I could very easily see this prophetic passage in its connection to other biblical texts being taught in pre-baptismal instruction.²⁸

In summary of his reading of Isaiah 53 as we find it in the *Dialogue*, we can see an appreciation for the text in its contribution to the community’s understanding of Christian baptism. It richly expands the theological beliefs involved in the community’s idea of cleansing through Christ in distinction from the shadow of Jewish ceremonial cleansing and sacrifice. It more fully delineates the community’s belief concisely confessed in Isaiah 1:16-20. It

²⁵ C. I. K. Story, “Justin’s Apology I. 62-64: Its Importance for the Author’s Treatment of Christian Baptism,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 16 (1962): 174.

²⁶ Cf. Story, on Isa 1:16-20 in *I Apol.* 61: “Baptism is the prophetic divine imperative λούσασθε which finds fulfillment in the Christian λουτήριον,” 174.

²⁷ Benoit, 142, understandably, is hesitant to see in *Dial.* 14.1-2 a precise reference to the ceremony of Christian initiation because of the passages’ emphasis upon the transformation of the convert’s interior: repentance and separation from evil. I am sympathetic to this hesitancy, but believe, that in light of the presence of Isa 1:16-20 in the baptismal passage of *I Apol.* 61 which is a ceremonial reference, that both Isa 1 and 52-54 function on two levels: the baptism of interior transformation and the baptism in water. The two are in tandem.

²⁸ Cf. Wolff, 135, who associates Justin’s reading of Isa 53 with the community’s Eucharistic feast.

specifically gives the baptized and the baptismal candidate a perspective of the community's distinctiveness as the "believers," and the "repentant." It provides the candidate with the pattern of entrance into the community: repentance, then baptism in the blood of the paschal lamb through faith. It orients the community to the essential features of its Christology: incarnation, of divine origin, the bloody death of crucifixion for the cleansing of sinners and the resurrection from the dead for the cleansing of sinners. Such a reading shows itself in continuity with earlier Christian readings of the same material, and with earlier Christian themes drawn from elsewhere.

Isaiah 53 in Justin's First Apology
The Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, and Return of Christ:
The Apostles' Old Testament Interpretation

In *1 Apology* 50, Justin cites Isaiah 52:13-53:8, 12 (M, 101) in support of the community's Christological faith. Two elements are highlighted: his incarnate, expiatory suffering and his second advent. The citation comes in the order: Isaiah 53:12; 52:13-53:8. From this citation, in which Isaiah 53:12 occurs in a non-LXX version prefixed to a larger portion of the chapter which accords with the LXX, Skarsaune rightly concludes that this is evidence of a testimony source. It appears to be a "Christian reworking of the LXX" with a parallel to Luke 22:37,²⁹ and with some distinctive modifications. The text reads:

Because they delivered His soul to death, and He was counted with the wicked, He has borne the sins of many, and will make propitiation for the wicked (*1 Apol.* 50.2; M, 101).³⁰

The important modifications are: (1) the change from the LXX's passive *παρεδόθη*, "was delivered," to the active *παρέδωκαν*, "they delivered"; and (2) the switch from the LXX's *καὶ διὰ τὰς ἀνομίας αὐτῶν αὐτὸς παρεδόθη*, "and because of their wickedness he was delivered up," to *καὶ τοῖς ἀνόμοις ἐξιλάσεται*, "and he will make propitiation for the wicked." P. Katz compliments Justin for properly capturing the meaning of the MT with its *וְיָצַח*, "he made entreaty, intercession," which he believes the LXX did

²⁹ LXX, *καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἀνόμοις ἐλογίσθη*, becomes with Luke 22:37, *καὶ μετὰ τῶν ἀνόμων ἐλογίσθη*, though *τῶν* does not appear in Luke. The meaning is not changed. Cf. Skarsaune, 63.

³⁰ Trans. L. W. Barnard, *St. Justin Martyr: The First and Second Apologies*, ACW, no. 56 (New York: Paulist, 1997), 57.

not understand.³¹ Justin emphasizes the intercessory, propitiatory, expiatory suffering of Christ.³²

This peculiar alteration of Isaiah 53:12, along with the LXX citation of 52:13-53:8, contributes well to his purpose for citing it. This scriptural proof shows that:

... having become man for us he endured suffering and dishonor and shall come again in glory....

Justin, through his adoption of the form of Isaiah 53:12 in the testimony source, strengthened the "for us" by insinuating that the Jews delivered him up. Expiation is only found in a compliant, innocent victim, a point made in *Dialogue* 111.3 in discussion of Isaiah 53.7. This emphasis serves to provide expiatory significance to the other "for us" and "for our" language throughout the prophecy.

Justin also sees a specific reference to the glorious second advent. This derives from Isaiah 52:13 where it is said of the servant that he "... will understand and be exalted and will be greatly glorified." And it is taken from Isaiah 52:14-15 where it is said that his glory (in the incarnation) was hidden, but eventually kings will "close their mouths."

The end of *1 Apology* 50 has Justin describing the Apostles' desertion of Jesus after his death, but their return to him in belief after his Christological teaching from the prophets and his ascension. The Apostles are the archetypes of those who, on the basis of Isaiah 52-54, move past the perplexing death of Messiah to faith in him in answer to Isaiah 53:1.³³

We now focus on the citation (LXX) of Isaiah 53: 8b-12 in *1 Apol.* 51.1-5 (M, 103). He introduces it with the comment that the Spirit of prophecy declares that "he who suffers these things [of Isa 53:1-8] has an indescribable generation and rules over his enemies." His generation as we saw above is addressed in Isaiah 53:8. His reign over his foes is seen by Justin in the reference to his resurrection (Isa 53:9), in references to the Lord delivering his "soul from sorrow" (53:11), in his inheriting many, and in his dividing the strong's spoil (53:12).³⁴

³¹ P. Katz, 348.

³² Cf. Skarsaune, 63.

³³ Contrary to Fédou, Justin's closing comments do not seem to connect the drama of Isa 52-53 to the story of the fall and recovery of Christ's witnesses (51). Rather, Justin is announcing the power of the prophecy to interpret the Christ event.

³⁴ Wolff (132) believes that the indescribable *γένος* refers to the great following of

As in the *Dialogue*, the *First Apology* orients the reader towards a Christological understanding of Isaiah 53 which encompasses the events of Christ's past and future. This was what the Spirit signified in the prophet, this is the church's reading. The saving efficacy of his death is here as well, as is the distinctiveness of the community. All of this informs the candidate and the community of the eucharist of their baptismal faith. Isaiah 53, which was read by Justin and his community only within the broader context of 52:10-15 and 54:1-6, provides a convenient scriptural paradigm of essential Christian identity confessed in baptism and celebrated in the life of the baptized. Justin's usage of the Isaiah text in this manner reflects the evangelist Luke's connection between the same biblical text and the sacrament (Acts 8:26-40).¹⁵ When the Ethiopian eunuch receives teaching from Isaiah 53 he immediately asks, "See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized?" (Acts 8:36; RSV, 2d. ed.). Philip subsequently baptizes him. Already, in the New Testament, Justin's central baptismal reading of Isaiah 53 is anticipated.

J. F. A. Sawyer provides in his book, *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity*,¹⁶ a helpful orientation to the Christian reading of that prophet. Early on and throughout he notes the Christian fascination with Isaiah as an evangelist who before Christ preached Christ. Our study of Justin has presented further evidence of that fascination. To the office of evangelist, however, Justin, early on, has introduced Isaiah as apologist, catechist, teacher of the sacrament, liturgist, and even celebrant.

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believers Christ gathers from every nation due to the occurrence of *ἕνεος* in *I Apol.* 50.12. I think the earlier occurrence is coincidental.

¹⁵ See further J. Guillet, S. J., "The Role of the Bible in the Birth of the Church," in *The Bible in Greek Christian Antiquity*, ed. and trans. P. M. Blowers, *The Bible Through the Ages*, vol. 1 (Notre Dame, IA: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 44 and 44, n. 15.

¹⁶ Cambridge: University Press, 1996.



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