

THE UNDERSTANDING OF ISAIAH 53:7-8 IN ACTS 8:32-33

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Usually a discussion of the use of the Fourth Servant Song of Isaiah in the New Testament concentrates on the question of the vicarious suffering and death of the Servant as an atonement for the sins of the many. Any use of this passage which does not pay attention to the atoning vicarious death has often been considered as missing the central point, as being interested merely in peripheral aspects. For Christian theology the atoning vicarious death has become the central point of this Song. We have to ask ourselves whether this was also the case for the New Testament communities. A look at the direct quotations from the Fourth Servant Song in the New Testament shows that none of them deals with the question of the atoning value of Jesus' death.¹⁾ Four out of the six are not even applied to Jesus' death. Of course, in order to obtain a complete and accurate picture of the New Testament understanding of Isaiah 53 we would also have to consider the many allusions. However, the direct quotations are a sufficient warning against reducing the importance of Isaiah 53 to the idea of atoning vicarious suffering.

1.2 Luke was not the first to interpret this passage; many generations of Jews interpreted it before him and the indications are that Luke was acquainted with these midrashic techniques and traditions.²⁾ It will be important to have these interpretations in mind in order to be better attuned to Luke's understanding of Isaiah 53.

1.3 For Luke the true meaning of the Scriptures is only made clear by the Christ event. The Scriptures speak in obscure terms about Jesus; now that Jesus has come, died, and been glorified the meaning of the texts becomes clear. The fulfilment enlightens the promise. It is by seeing what was *referred to* by the text that we really understand it. This explains the importance given to the *reference* of the text: for example Acts 8:34f.: *peri tinos*; also: Luke 24:27,44. However, seeing Jesus as the Christ spoken of in the Scriptures is an act of faith; it is the fruit of preaching and teaching. Jesus' disciples have to be led from ignorance to understanding: for example: Luke 18:31-4; 24:25-7, 44-8. The Christian preachers try to make the Jews aware of their ignorance

of the Scriptures; not recognizing Jesus as the Christ is ignorance of the Scriptures (e.g. Ac 13:27-9). Therefore to preach Jesus as the promised one is to explain the ultimate meaning of Scripture; the two are inextricably linked. This means that understanding an Old Testament quotation in Luke-Acts is to understand how this text could be seen as being fulfilled in Christ. From observing Luke's way of handling quotations it appears that whatever he quotes is of importance to him, so that we have to pay attention to each and every line he quotes.³⁾

2 ISAIAH 53:7f. IN ACTS 8:32f.: OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS

The quotation corresponds exactly to the text as it is found in the Septuagint (A,B^C). The meaning is obscure and hence different interpretations and translations have been put forward. Does the text speak only about humiliation and death, or about humiliation and vindication? Every line of Isaiah 53:8 has its difficulties. In the first line, *hē krisis autoū ērthē* can be understood, as 'he has no redress' (cf. *NEB*, *JB*, *RSV*; Bruce 1956; Hooker 1959:113f. and Dillon & Fitzmyer 1968), or as a reversal of his sentence (cf. Loisy 1920; Haenchen 1961; Stählin 1962 and Conzelmann 1963). In the second line the meaning of *geneā* is problematic; various translations have been proposed: posterity (*NEB*); disciples (Loisy 1920); fate, in the sense of death and resurrection (Stählin 1962: *ad loc*); origin (Euler 1934:26). The third line can either be read as a reference to Jesus' death (*NEB*), or to his ascension.⁴⁾

Another disputed question is Luke's reason for omitting the final line of verse 8: *apò tōn anomion tou laou mou ēchthē eis thánaton*. Many hold that Luke omitted this line because he wanted to avoid statements about the atoning value of Jesus' death (e.g. Rese 1969: 98f.).

The immediate literary context does not help us to find an answer to these questions. Philip's answer is summarized in a disappointingly short way, '... starting from this passage he told them the good news about Jesus' (v.35). Philip could have taken his starting-point from any other passage; the *content* of the quotation does not seem to be all that important in the context of Acts 8: 26-40. Nevertheless, Luke must have chosen this text because it expressed something about Jesus which was of importance to him. Since the literary context does not help us at this stage, we will have to turn to Luke's *theology* as the context (semantic context) which might help us to find an answer to the questions raised by this quotation.

3 THE FOURTH SERVANT SONG AND THE JEWISH INTERPRETATION

3.1 The Masoretic Text

The Masoretic Text speaks about the sufferings of the innocent Servant, his death,⁵⁾ and his exaltation (a resurrection or some form of vindication beyond death). The description of the exaltation forms as it were the frame around the description of the suffering. In the eyes of men the Servant is a sinner (53:4c,12d) and he is treated as a sinner (53:9ab), but in fact he is taking upon him the punishment of the community (53:4,5,6,8,10,11,12). The vicarious quality of the Servant's suffering is based on the old principle of the collective responsibility: the solidarity of the innocent Servant with his sinful community (McKenzie 1968:134f.). His suffering is seen as a sacrifice for sin (53:10). Isaiah 53:7f. is part of the description of the suffering and death of the Servant.⁶⁾

3.2 The Targum⁷⁾

The Servant is understood as the Messiah, who disperses and humiliates the foreign nations and restores the people to righteousness. The righteous will be numerous (53:2a,10b), the sins of the people will be forgiven (53:4-6,10a...), they will submit to the Torah (53:11b). Koch (1972) points out how the Targum stresses the Servant's role as intercessor before God on behalf of his people (53:4,7,11,12), while the pagans are burdened with the punishment for Israel's sins (53:8d; vicarious suffering!).

Only the final verse leaves open the possibility of the Servant's death as a result of a conflict with the wicked, but eventually they too will submit to the Torah and be forgiven.

Two points may be of importance for our understanding of Acts 8:33: first of all, the fact that Isaiah 53:8a is read in a positive sense as '*release from punishment ...*'; secondly, the stress on the restoration of the people may shed some light on *geneá* (Is 53:8b).

3.3 The Septuagint

In the Septuagint version of Isaiah 53 the Servant is understood as an individual, possibly as the Messiah (Zimmerli 1967:676), who suffers and dies for the sins of the people, but who will be vindicated by God. While in the Masoretic Text the description of the vindication starts again with verse 10c, in the Septuagint it seems to begin already with verse 8. In the first part of verse 10 'to bruise' has been replaced by 'to cleanse'; the second part has

become an invitation to repent. Verse 9ab, which in the Masoretic Text is a description of the suffering and death of the Servant, becomes in the Septuagint a judgment on the wicked and the rich, a punishment for their treatment of the Servant. Verse 9cd gives the *ground* for the vindication of the Servant. We find the same structure in verse 8 (and also in v.12): verse 8ab describes the vindication, while verse 8cd, introduced by *hotl*, indicates the ground for this vindication. The arguments for this are not compelling, but they make it at least plausible. While the Masoretic Text reads for verse 8a '*... he was taken away*', the Septuagint has '*... his judgment was taken away*'. Verse 8b is more ambiguous, but *gened* can be understood as descendants, people, which would be a parallel to the blessing of the repentant in verse 10b: (*spérma makróbion*;⁸) cf. v.12a: *kléronomēsei polloús*). Verse 8c also differs from the Masoretic Text: '*... he was cut off from the world of living men*' has become '*... his life is taken from the earth*'. Taken by itself this line could easily be understood as speaking about an assumption into heaven, but because of the line which follows and which probably stands in parallelism with this one, it seems preferable to read it as a statement about the Servant's death. Because, as we will see, Luke interpreted this line as referring to Jesus' ascension, the parallelism was broken and this could be one of the reasons why he had to drop verse 8d (similarly: Wolff 1950:91).

3.4 Isaiah 53 and the Jewish tradition of the vindication/exaltation of the suffering just/wise man

It is also important to see how Isaiah 53 was interpreted in Jewish theology as a whole and not to limit ourselves to the expectations of a Messiah. According to Nickelsburg (1972:81),

'At some time between the writing of the second Isaiah and the time of Antiochus civil persecution of (the religious leaders of) the Jews fostered an interpretation of Is 52-53 as a scene of a post-mortem exaltation of the persecuted ones and an impending judgment of their persecutors'.

We find this illustrated in the following texts: Daniel 12:3 with its use of Isaiah 53:11 (Nickelsburg 1972:11-27); Wisdom 2:12-5:23;⁹) Ethiopic Enoch 46,62,63, and also 48,55 (cf. Jeremias 1967:688; Nickelsburg 1972:70-5). To these texts we may also add the pre-Markan passion narrative (cf. Maurer 1953; Ruppert 1972a: 52-6) and the pre-Pauline source of Philippians 2:6-11 (cf. Georgi 1964; Murphy-O'Connor 1976); these two early Christian texts were influenced by a tradition based on Isaiah 53 similar to that of Wisdom 2-5, if not by the Book of Wisdom itself.

What is common to all these texts is a specific soteriology; they express the conviction that God will exalt the suffering, just and wise man to a heavenly life. In Sirach 11:13, which makes use of Isaiah 52:15, we have *traditional* wisdom with its this-worldly perspective, while in the texts mentioned above we find a form of *apocalyptic* wisdom, with its insistence on the present misery of the just and wise man and its hope for a salvation beyond death. The tradition of interpreting Isaiah 53 in this specific way has also influenced a number of early Christian texts, and also Luke-Acts, as we will see. It is important to note here that the idea of vicarious atoning suffering is absent from this tradition, a tendency which can also be observed in Luke-Acts.

4 LUKE'S UNDERSTANDING OF ISAIAH 53:7f. IN ACTS 8:32f.

4.1 *Tapeinōsis* and the interpretation of Acts 8:33a

4.1.1 Introducing the question

If the core of the Fourth Servant Song consists of the idea of vicarious atoning suffering, then Luke has made a poor selection; if, however, it consists - for Luke - of the humiliation and exaltation of God's faithful one, then his choice becomes intelligible, especially if we accept that in the Septuagint the description of the Servant's vindication starts already with verse 8.

Tapeinōsis is probably the key to the understanding of this passage. The image of the sheep led to the slaughter (Ac 8:32) illustrates and emphasizes the humiliation. How did Luke understand *tapeinōsis*? Grundmann (1972) sees two aspects in the word: maltreatment and submission to God in obedience. Leivestad (1966) and Légasse (1969:223f.) have objected to the inclusion of the second aspect; they stress that *tapeinōsis* means physical lowering, reduction to weakness or misery, and humiliation, but that it does not have the moral nuance of humility. *Tapeinós*, *tapeinōō*, *tapeinōsis* can obtain the connotation of humility only as a result of certain additions (*pneūma*, *kardia*, *psuchē*)¹⁰ or, in the case of the verb, when it is used in the passive mood or with the reflexive pronoun.¹¹ However, they admit that there are cases in which this group of words means humility and is associated with repentance and righteousness.¹² We are warned, therefore, against the danger of spiritualizing or moralizing these words too easily and of reading our own connotations into them. An examination of the semantic field (cf. Berger 1977:137-59; also Nida 1975:127-49; Via 1975: 1-38) within which this group of words is used, is aimed at warding off these dangers.

4.1.2 The semantic field of *tapeinōsis*

There are three other passages in Luke-Acts in which the *tapeinōs* group occurs: Luke 1:46-55 (vv.48,52), 14:7-11 (v.11) and 18:9-14 (v.14). In the extra-Lukan material there are quite a few such passages and they show a number of similarities with these three Lukan texts; I have selected three: Philippians 2:1-11; James 4:1-10; 1 Peter 5:1-11. Besides these there are two Lukan texts where the *tapeinōs* group does not occur, but which are clearly related to the six already mentioned: Luke 6:20-6; 22:24-30.

a. Reversal

The most striking common feature between these texts is the idea of a reversal brought about by God: the lowly will be exalted, the exalted will be brought low. This is expressed clearly in the following verses: Luke 1:52f.; 6:21-3,5; 14:9-11; 18:14; 22:26-30; 13) Philippians 2:7-11; James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6.

b. The opposites lowly-exalted

The second common feature is the occurrence of the opposites lowly-exalted (Lk 14:11; 18:14; Phlp 2:8f.; Ja 4:10; 1 Pt 5:6) and of various related opposites. These opposites belong to different realms: (i) *basic material needs* (e.g.: hungry-satisfied: Lk 6:21, 25); (ii) *status or condition* (e.g.: poor-rich in Lk 6:20-4; humble-monarchs in Lk 1:52; servant-chief in Lk 22:26; servant-God in Phlp 2:6f.; lowest place - place of honour in Lk 14:7-10; sufferings-glory in 1 Pt 5:1,10; trials-kingdom in Lk 22:28-30; shame-glory in Lk 14:9f.); (iii) *feelings* accompanying (i) and (ii) (e.g.: weeping/mourning-laughing in Lk 6:25 and Ja 4:9); (iv) *moral attitude* (e.g.: humility-arrogance in Ja 4:6 and 1 Pt 5:5; fearing God - arrogant of heart and mind, in Lk 1:50f.; Tax collector - Pharisee in Lk 18:9-11).

Power and arrogance, poverty and humility are seen as closely related. Leivestad and L gasse are right in stressing the material and social meaning of *tapeinōs*; however, they have underestimated the moral dimension; they have failed to see the correspondence between the two dimensions.

c. The opposites God-self

Thirdly, in these texts we find the opposites God-Self(man) within the following pattern:

He who exalts himself (C1)¹⁴⁾ will be humbled by God (C2);
He who humbles himself (C3) will be exalted by God (C4).

Luke 14:7-14: C1,2,3,4 in verse 11, which is illustrated in verses 7-11.

In verses 12-4 we find a variation of the pattern:

Do not invite the rich (C1) - they (not God) will reward you
(C2);
but invite the poor (C3) - God will reward you (C4).

Luke 18:9-14: C1,2,3,4 in verse 14b, which is illustrated in verses 9-14a:

Those who trust themselves - they are not justified by God:
that they are just: verse 14a (C2)
9cf. verses 11f. (C1)
Tax collector: 'have mercy on me, a sinner': verse 13
14a (C4)
(C3)

Luke 22:24-30: C1 in verses 24f.; C2 in verses 26f.; C3 in verse 28; C4 in verses 29f.

Philippians 2:1-11: C3 in verses 7f.; C4 in verses 9-11.

James 4:1-10: C3 and 4 in verse 10, while verses 7-9 articulate *how* one should humble oneself.

1 Peter 5:1-11: C3 and 4 in verse 6; the whole section is an exhortation to humble oneself; verses 1b,4 and 10f. draw the attention to the exaltation as a future sharing in the glory of Christ.

The last two texts quote Proverbs 3:34, where we find elements C2 and 4 of the pattern. We find these same elements also in Luke 1:46-55 and Luke 6:20-6. Although C1 and 3 are not explicitly mentioned in these texts, it is nevertheless most likely that they are implied. 'Those who fear the Lord' (Lk 1:51) are those who humble *themselves*; the 'arrogant' (Lk 1:51) are those who exalt *themselves*. Similarly, the 'monarchs' (Lk 1:52) are those who exalt *themselves*, the 'lowly' (Lk 1:52) are those who humble *themselves*.

What counts within this pattern is not the mere *state* of lowliness, but the act of lowering oneself; similarly, it is not merely being rich that matters, but the *act* of exalting oneself by relying on riches rather than on God.

d. Humbling oneself as a commitment to God, to Christ, or to man

Fourthly, in these texts humbling oneself is not something for its own sake (some kind of mere asceticism), but for the sake either of *God* (obedience, conversion), or of *Christ* (suffering with/for/like

him), or of one's *fellow man* (service, love, respect).

(i) For the sake of God: conversion, service, reliance on God

Luke 1:46-55: the words *doulē* (v.48) and *paîs* (v.54) probably refer not only to a lowly condition in the world, but especially to a dedication to God (cf. v.50: 'those who fear him').

Luke 18:9-14: The self-exaltation of the Pharisee makes reliance on God superfluous; the self-humiliation of the tax collector is a recognition of his need for God's mercy; it is an act of repentance.

1 Peter 5:1-11: Note here the parallelism in verses 6f.: humble ... exalt / cast your cares on him ... he cares for you; humbling oneself means here to entrust oneself to God (like the tax collector). Furthermore, 'humbling oneself under God's mighty hand' (v.6) corresponds to resisting the devil (v.8), as in James 4:7.

James 4:1-10: Humbling oneself is submitting oneself to God and resisting the devil (v.7). In verse 4 the opposites world-God make clear why conversion to God and repentance (v.8) demand mourning and weeping, as a turning away from the world (v.9). Note the parallelism between verse 8a and verse 10: 'Come near to God ...' and 'Humble yourselves ...'

Philippians 2:1-11: Humbling oneself is here clearly seen as becoming obedient unto death (v.8).

(ii) For the sake of Christ: with him, after his example, for him

Luke 22:24-30: In verse 27 Jesus points to himself as the example: '... here am I among you as a servant'. In verse 28 the disciples are praised for having persevered with Jesus in his trials, they will therefore have a share in the kingdom (vv.29f.).¹⁵⁾

Luke 6:20-6: Blessed are those who are suffering because of the Son of Man (v.22).

1 Peter 5:1-11: In verses 1-4 serving the community with devotion, without lording it over them, is a way of sharing in Christ's suffering, which will lead to glory.¹⁶⁾ In verses 9-11 struggle against the world is seen as another way of sharing in the sufferings of Christ in order to share in the glory of Christ. Here, as in Luke 22:24-30, humility is associated with service and suffering.

Philippians 2:1-11: 'Have that bearing towards one another which was also found in Christ Jesus' (v.5).

(iii) For the sake of man: love, service, respect

Luke 14:7-14: As we have seen (4.1.2c), in verses 12-4 inviting the rich corresponds to exalting oneself, while 'inviting the poor' corresponds to 'humbling oneself'.

Luke 18:9-14: In verse 9 'exalting oneself' is connected with 'despising others'.

Luke 22:24-30: Become servants to each other! (v.26).

1 Peter 5:1-11: According to verses 2f. genuine service of the community is a form of humbling oneself; this is confirmed by verse 5, where humility and service are beautifully connected in the expression, 'put on the loincloth of humility' (cf. Grundmann 1972:23).

Philippians 2:1-11: Paul appeals to the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus in order to inspire the faithful to remain united in love. 'Humbly reckoning others better than yourselves' (v.3) does not mean feeling inferior to others, but being willing to be at the service of others (compare v.4: 'Look to each other's interests and not merely to your own').

4.1.3 A further reflection on important features of this semantic field

a. The opposites God-Self

The New Testament strongly contrasts salvation from God with man-made salvation. The view of man expressed by these opposites is that every man is placed before a radical choice: either to try (in vain) to save himself, or to abandon himself to God.¹⁷⁾ A man-made salvation (cf. Mk 14:58; 2 Cor 5:1) is mere appearance ('before men'); it will not stand the test of God's judgment.¹⁸⁾ Man must abandon his self-reliance, particularly his reliance on riches, power, status; he must rely on God alone. The rich, the powerful, the 'just' find it very difficult to be humbly open to God; they are full of confidence in their own treasures (=securities).¹⁹⁾ Exalting oneself is a form of self-reliance as opposed to humble reliance on God.²⁰⁾ This makes clear why being rich, prosperous, satisfied almost naturally implies being arrogant, proud, godless.

b. Lowly - lowering oneself - service

Tapeinós clearly refer in most cases to a lowly condition (poor, hungry, needy, mortal, cf. *supra*, 4.1.2.b).²¹⁾ In the texts about the exaltation of the lowly, it is obvious that mere material lowliness is not sufficient. What counts is 'fear of God' (Lk 1:50); 'persecution for the sake of the Son of Man' (Lk 6:22). It is not

simply a question of passively finding oneself in a state of lowliness,²²⁾ but of actively opting for such a state as a form of commitment to God, Christ, or one's fellow man (cf. *supra*, 4.1.2.c and d). What this means is best illustrated by the image of the servant or the slave. In fact, servant/slave, ... is regularly associated with the *tapeinōs* group: Luke 1:48,54; Acts 20:19;²³⁾ 1 Peter 5:5. Servant unites the idea of lowliness (the lowly condition of servants) and the idea of serving or committing oneself to someone. Merely being in a lowly position is not sufficient to be acceptable to God. There must be an acknowledgement of one's lowly condition (e.g. Lk 18:13: sinfulness; Lk 12:15,25f.: incapacity to save one's life by means of money or anxious caring; cf. Lk 9:24) and a commitment of self to God. This commitment to God is described as a 'servant' relationship in Luke 1:48,54; Philippians 2:7; Luke 16:13. This last text makes clear that service of God (as opposed to service of Mammon) means reliance on God, casting one's cares on God (1 Pt 5:7), entrusting oneself to him in obedience (Ja 4:7f.; Phlp 2:8), rather than to the world (Ja 4:4,9).

There is a close connection between humbling oneself before God and humble service of one's fellow man, as can be seen from Luke 18:9, 11, where the Pharisee who exalts himself is also the one who despises others. Humbling oneself is to become a servant of others: Luke 14:12; 22:26f. (also Mt 20:20-8; Mk 10:35-45); 1 Peter 5:2f., 5; Philippians 2:3f.; John 13:1-16. In Acts 20:19 Paul says that, '... he *served* the Lord (Jesus) in all *humility*'. Luke 22:27; Philippians 2:5 and 1 Peter 5:1-4 exhort the Christian to serve others after the *example* of Christ. It is important to bear in mind that Jesus' death was seen as an act of service; he became a servant: Luke 22:24-30 and parallels Mark 10:35-45; Matthew 20:20-8; also John 13:1-16. In these texts Jesus' service is put forward as an example to the disciples. Jesus' death was seen not merely as a disaster that fell upon him, but above all as a personal act: he lowered himself to become a servant of his disciples. This has important consequences for our understanding of *tapeinōsis* in Acts 8:33.²⁴⁾

c. The Reversal

Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, those who humble themselves will be exalted (Lk 14:11; 18:14). This and related texts (cf. *supra*, 4.1.2.c) speak of a *judgment*²⁵⁾ by which God brings salvation to his friends and his servants, and condemnation for the friends of the world²⁶⁾ and the *servants* of Mammon (Ja 4:4; Lk 16:13). The *apparent* security and joy of the friends of this world and of the servants of Mammon will not hold on the day of judgment. The only *real* security is the one based on friendship with God and service of God: to be a servant of man and of God after the example of Christ and with Christ. Why are the friends of God lowly, poor,

weeping? First of all because this is seen to be the *reality* of the human condition, which the friends of the world are merely trying to cover up: man is mortal (Ja 1:10f.), his condition precarious (Lk 12:15,25f.,33ff.); he is a sinner in the eyes of God (Lk 18:13; cf. 17:10). Furthermore, the apocalyptic emphasis on the wickedness of the present situation also seems to have influenced Luke-Acts (and other New Testament passages): sinners reject God's law and oppress the righteous.²⁷⁾ God's judgment is seen as a reversal from two different points of view:

- (i) Those who recognize their misery before God and expect their salvation from him, are saved; those who try to cover up their misery by relying on their treasures, are shown the uselessness of these treasures and are confronted with their real misery.
- (ii) The oppressed righteous are rewarded; the sinners, their oppressors, are punished.

The great majority of the texts sees this reversal clearly as a *future* event²⁸⁾ or as a present reality which is still hidden and will be made manifest in the future (e.g. Lk 6:20,23; cf. Collins 1974:35-7). In the Magnificat, however, the reversal is spoken of as something that has already happened.²⁹⁾ Brown (1977:362f.) holds that the aorists refer to a definite action in the past, namely the reversal which God has brought about in the exaltation of Jesus. There can be no doubt that for the early Christian community the death and resurrection of Jesus became the prototype of this reversal, of this humbling oneself and being exalted by God (cf. *supra*, 4.1.2.d(ii)).

d. The reversal realized in Jesus for all

It is precisely this reversal which comes to the fore in Acts 2: 22-36; 3:13-5; 4:10f. (with its use of Ps 118:22); 5:30f.; 10:39f.; 13:27-30. According to these texts, Jesus is rejected by men, but exalted by God. (It is not surprising then to find in these passages use of Is 53: e.g. in Ac 3:12-26; 4:23-31). In Luke 24:26 and Acts 14:22, however, we do not so much find an opposition between suffering and glory; rather the two are seen as lying on a single continuum; there is one movement leading through suffering to glory. Such a way of looking at the suffering reveals a perspective close to that of apocalyptic wisdom, which is able to see through the phenomenal world, with its oppression and injustice, and see the hidden mystery (note Lk 24:25!)³⁰⁾ In spite of all appearances to the contrary Jesus was on the way to glory, and so are those whom Paul *heartens* and *encourages* (Ac 14:22; cf. 2 Cor 4:16-8). Jesus' way is the hidden mystery which is revealed to the believers:

to share in Jesus' humiliation is the way to share in his exaltation (cf. *supra*, 4.1.2.d (ii); Lk 9:23f.; in the Pauline literature: Rm 8:17 in the context of vv.18-23; Phlp 3:21; 2 Tm 2:11-2a):

e. Conclusion

What we have in this semantic field within which *tapeînōsis* belongs and from where it gets its meaning, is basically a soteriology, which includes an anthropology. Two perspectives have merged here. The first one sees man as radically weak, but he tries to cover it up by finding his security in wealth, power, status. However, this deception will be unmasked by God's act of judgment. The true way to salvation is to recognize one's weakness before God and to find one's security in God. This has to take the concrete form of obedient service of God and caring service of neighbour. The second perspective sees the faithful man as oppressed and persecuted by wicked men. The reversal then takes on the added significance of a vindication of the just before their oppressors. As we have seen, in Jewish apocalyptic-sapiential literature, vindication of the persecuted just man was articulated by means of Isaiah 53 (cf. *supra*, 3.4). In the semantic field to which *tapeînōsis* belongs this reversal has been realized by God in Jesus. It has been accomplished in *one* for the *many*. Man is invited to share in Jesus' humiliation - service, so as to share in his exaltation. Christology must be understood here in the light of the soteriology and anthropology.

4.1.4 Interpretation of Isaiah 53:8a in Acts 8:33

It is most probable that *tapeînōsis* does not merely mean lowliness and misery, but also willing *acceptance* of this misery as an act of *service* (cf. *supra*, 4.1.3.b and c). Verse 8a is most probably understood as a *reversal* of Jesus' humiliation (cf. *supra*, 4.1.3.c and d). This understanding is not all that foreign to the Hebrew text and the Jewish interpretation of this Servant Song. We should bear in mind:

- (1) that the fourth Servant Song is a text about the *exaltation* of the *humiliated* Servant.
- (2) that the Song was used in the Jewish tradition of the vindication/exaltation of the suffering just/wise man.
- (3) that the Targum, and probably also the Septuagint, understood verse 8a as a reversal of the judgment.

4.2 Interpretation of Isaiah 53:8bc in Acts 8:33

If verse 8a is to be understood in a positive sense, the same will

be true for verse 8bc.

4.2.1 Verse 8b: 'Who will describe his people?'

This should probably be understood as an expression of admiration for the marvellous growth of the Christian community, the people of Jesus. *Geneá* does not merely mean contemporaries, a generation, it can also refer to a race, family, people (Voss 1965:144-5). In Luke 11:50-1 it refers to a people with a history of opposition against God. The idea of disobedience, rebelliousness, ... is often connected with this word: Luke 7:31; 9:41; 11:29-32; ... Therefore, Peter can appeal to the Jews of Jerusalem in Acts 2:40: 'Save yourselves ... from this crooked race' (= *geneá*; *NEB*: 'age'). Race or people is more appropriate as a translation, since the salvation which Peter offers takes the concrete form of being gathered together as a renewed people (vv.41 and 47b), whose way of life is described in verses 42-47a, in contrast to that of this crooked race. This contrast between the two peoples is common in the New Testament: the sons of Satan are opposed to the sons of Abraham (of God): Luke 3:7-9; John 8:33,37,39-47; Matthew 13:38f.; 23:15. We never find the expression 'sons of Christ, Jesus, ...' but it is clear that it is man's attitude towards *Jesus* which determines to which people he belongs. It is in Jesus that the blessing promised to Abraham (to become the father of many nations) is fulfilled (Ac 3:25): whoever does not listen to Jesus will be eradicated from the people (Ac 3:22f.); whoever believes in him is a son of God, a son of Abraham (cf. Gl 3:16,26-9). Although Jesus is not explicitly called the ancestor of all believers, this is implied in the Adam typology (Rm 5:12-9,45-9) and in the *archēgós* texts (Ac 3:15; Heb 2:10; 12:2).

In the Adam texts we find very clearly the contrast between the two kinds of people (the men of dust *versus* the heavenly ones, in 1 Cor 15:48). In these texts Jesus is the one *through* whom and *in* whom the alternative people comes about, the ancestor of a new people. The Adam typology is probably also present in Luke-Acts: Luke 3:38 (Jeremias 1964:141); in *archēgós* (cf. Delling 1964:487; Geiselmann 1951:115; Voss 1965:52-4) and perhaps in Acts 13:33-9 (cf. 'incorruptibility' in the light of 1 Cor 15:45-9).

The *archēgós* texts point to Jesus as the head of the new people, and more specifically as the leader of the people on the way to life, through suffering to glory (cf. Lk 24:26 and Ac 14:22). It is important to note how *archēgós* is used in the context of transition from death to resurrection, from suffering to glory: Acts 3:15; Hebrews 2:9f.; 12:2f. The texts about Jesus as the first-born from the dead are of importance here (Ac 26:23; Rm 8:29; Col 1:18; Rv 1:5). Jesus is the first member of the new people through

his resurrection; he is the exemplary model,³¹⁾ who has already gone before us, whom we are called to follow, and who still leads us.³²⁾

We have to remember here too how Luke sees the church as the Way (Ac 9:2; 19:9,23; 24:22; 18:25f.). Luke envisages the church as a community in which the *Way of Jesus*,³³⁾ through death to glory, is re-enacted through the Spirit (MacRae 1973:163-5). It is a 'movement' of which Jesus is the origin and the core. In that sense the Church can be seen as the people of Jesus.

We find in Acts an enthusiasm and an admiration for the Way, which was spreading so marvellously throughout the world, unhindered (cf. last word of Acts). In this context we can understand the rhetorical question, 'Who will describe his people?'

4.2.2 Verse 8c: '... because his life was taken away from the earth'

Some scholars interpret this line as a reference to Jesus' *death* (cf. Jacquier 1926; Jeremias 1964:185); others to his *resurrection* (Rese 1969:98), and many see here a reference to the ascension (exaltation) (cf. Haenchen 1961; Stählin 1962; Conzelmann 1963; Grundmann 1972:11,20; George 1973:197, 215). A reference to the resurrection would fit in perfectly. Jesus, as we have seen, is the new Adam, the *archēgōs*, the first of the new people, precisely because of his resurrection.³⁴⁾ However, it is hard to see in verse 8c a reference to the resurrection. 'Taken away' could be seen very easily as referring either to Jesus' death, or to his ascension, or to both.³⁵⁾ Luke has indeed a few passages where he sees the new people as the result of the blood of Jesus: Acts 20:28; Luke 22:20: '... the new covenant in my blood ...' Luke does not exclude the salvific value of Jesus' death, but he does not emphasize it (George 1973). It is more probable, therefore, that the emphasis lies on the ascension.

In order to see the relationship between the ascension, the foundation of the new people, and Jesus' leadership role in this new people, we have to bear in mind that the early Christian tradition did not clearly distinguish between the resurrection and the exaltation/glorification. Luke, however, has separated the exaltation/florification from the resurrection and he has presented this transcendent, invisible event as a visible ascension witnessed by the disciples (Lohfink 1971:244). Hence, in Luke's writings part of the function of the resurrection is now transferred to the ascension. Exalted at God's right hand Jesus has become the source of blessing for man: Acts 2:33 (the gift of the Spirit); Acts 5:31 (the gift of conversion and forgiveness of sins).³⁶⁾ Pentecost,

the beginning of the gathering of the Church, is the immediate fruit of the ascension. As the exalted, Jesus pours out his Spirit over Israel and all the nations; as he offers them the gift of conversion and forgiveness of sins, the restoration of Israel begins and the Gentiles are being drawn into the renewed people of God (Ac 15: 16f.; cf. Lohfink 1975:88f.).³⁷⁾

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 In this quotation the attention is focused, not on the vicarious suffering of the Servant, but on his humiliation and exaltation; more precisely, on his humbling of himself and his exaltation by God. In Jesus, the Servant, God's way of salvation, through suffering to glory, is revealed and offered to man.

5.2 This interpretation of Isaiah 53 continues a Jewish apocalyptic-sapiential tradition, which reflected on the fate of the persecuted just/wise man. Within this tradition Isaiah 53 was used to elaborate a soteriology and an anthropology: the suffering one will be exalted to a heavenly life.

5.3 This shows that there is a danger in limiting our interest too narrowly to the so-called messianic texts or to the Jewish messianic interpretation of texts. New Testament Christology cannot be understood exclusively in the light of the Jewish messianology; This messianology must be seen together with the Jewish anthropology and soteriology. In Jewish wisdom and apocalyptic the proper *understanding of man* reveals the way to *salvation*.³⁸⁾ Jesus, the man, through his life, death, and exaltation reveals the truth about man and thus reveals and opens for him the way to salvation.

5.4 If our interpretation of *geneá* as the church, understood as a movement through suffering to glory, a movement of which Jesus is the core, is correct, then there is a close correspondence between line a and line b of Isaiah 53:8: the way of Jesus (v.8a) is embodied, continued, and offered to all men through his people (v.8b).

5.5 At first sight there is no particular correspondence between the quotation and Acts 8:26-40 as a whole. If, however, the *idea* of the way is important in the quotation, then there is a remarkable correspondence between the narrative and the quotation. In fact, the idea of the way is a predominant theme in the narrative. The Eunuch is *on the way* throughout the whole narrative. Philip leads (*hodēgeō*: v.31) him from ignorance to understanding, possibly

symbolized by the opposites *ērēmos-hudōr* (v.26 and vv.36,38f.). After his baptism the Eunuch continues his way rejoicing (v.39).³⁹⁾

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Isaiah 52:15 is quoted in Romans 15:21 and is applied to the preaching activity of the church; Isaiah 53:1 in Romans 10:16 is applied to the preaching of the church and the unbelief of the listeners; the same text is quoted in John 12:38 and is applied to Jesus' ministry (the signs) and to man's response (unbelief); Isaiah 53:4, in Matthew 8:7, is applied to Jesus' ministry (healings); the only two quotations which are applied to Jesus' death are found in Luke-Acts: Isaiah 53:7f. in Acts 8:32f. and Isaiah 53:12 in Luke 22:37.
- 2 Cf. Crocket (1966:363); Franklin (1975:177-9); Luke's use of Isaiah 66:1f. in Acts 7:49f. is a good illustration of this; on this last text, cf. Thornton (1974:432-4).
- 3 Whatever is unimportant to him, Luke leaves out: for example omission of Isaiah 40:5a in Luke 3:6; omission of Isaiah 61:1d 'to heal the brokenhearted' and insertion of the final phrase of Isaiah 58:6 in Luke 4:18; omission of the final phrase of Isaiah 53:8 in Acts 8:33.
- 4 See Euler (1934:26); Stählin (1962); George (1973:197f.); Conzelmann (1963) (with some hesitation); according to Rese (1969:98) it refers to the resurrection.
- 5 Although some scholars have denied this; most recently: Soggin (1975). For a survey of opinions, cf. North (1956:148f.).
- 6 Orłinski (1964) rejects the idea of vicarious suffering; he sees no difference between the suffering of the Servant and that of the prophets, '... when their wounds were healed, it was only because the prophet had come and suffered to bring them God's message of rebuke and repentance' (26).
- 7 Here I follow Koch (1972); he holds that most of the Targum of the Prophets reaches back to pre-Christian times.
- 8 In Isaiah 61:3 *fūteuma* and *geneā* are used parallel and refer to the righteous people; in Isaiah 17:10 we have a parallel use of *fūteuma* - *spérma*.
- 9 Cf. Jeremias 1967:684; Suggs 1957; Nickelsburg 1972:11-25, 62-81; Ruppert 1972a:23f.,27f.; Ruppert 1972b:70-105. Ruppert considers Wisdom of Solomon 2:12-20 as a Palestinian apocalyptic diptych, which, like Daniel 12:1-3, is an actualizing interpretation of the Fourth Servant Song.
- 10 *Tapeinófrōn*, *tapeinofroneîn*, *tapeinofrosúnē* are late

formations patterned on these expressions and on the use of the verb with reflexive pronoun (Leivestad 1966:44).

- 11 However, even in these cases L gasse (1969:224) is reluctant to accept a moral connotation. In Matthew 18:4, '... let a man humble himself till he is like this child ...', does not mean to imitate the humility of a child, but to become small like a child, to take on a lowly position in the community (L gasse 1969:229).
- 12 E.g. Leviticus 16:29,31; Psalm 17:28; Psalm 34:13f.; Proverbs 3:34 (quoted in Ja 4:6 and 1 Pt 5:5); Isaiah 66:2; Test Gad 5:3; Test Jud 19:2; Test Jos 10:2; 17:8; 18:3 (cf. Leivestad 1966:43-5; L gasse 1969:226).
- 13 The idea expressed in this passage is very closely related to 14:11b and 18:14b. *Humbling oneself* corresponds to becoming the youngest, the servant (v.26), and to remaining with Jesus in his trials (v.28); in verse 27 becoming a servant most probably refers not only to Jesus' service at table, but beyond this to his death as a service. *Being exalted* corresponds to the gift of the kingdom (eating and drinking, judging).
- 14 I number the different elements of the pattern for the sake of easy reference.
- 15 Cf. Grundmann (1971:402), 'Der Dienende wird von Gott erh ht'.
- 16 Note the similarity between these verses and Luke 22:24-30: Luke 22:25 uses the verb *kurie o*; 1 Peter 5:3 has *katakurie o*.
- 17 Besides the texts mentioned above we should also bear in mind the following passages:

Luke 16:15:

'... justify yourselves before men ...' (=appearance)	-	'... but God knows your hearts' (=reality)
'... what is exalted among men ...' (=appearance)	-	'... an abomination in the sight of God' (=reality)

Note the connection justify-exalt, as in Luke 18:9-14.

Luke 12:21:

'... who lays up treasure for himself ...'	-	'... but is not rich before God'
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Luke 9:24

'Whoever would save his life (C1)	-	will lose it, (C2)
and whoever loses his life for my sake, (C3)	-	he will save it' (C4).

The account of Jesus' death shows how he refused to save himself, but abandoned himself to God: cf. the threefold taunt to save himself (Lk 23:35,37,39) and his self-abandonment in verse 46: 'Into your hands ...'

- 18 The insecurity of riches is expressed by means of various images: *withering away* (Ja 1:10ff.; as opposed to God's gift, which does not wither: 1 Pt 1:4; 5:4); *being eaten by the moth* (Lk 12:33; Mt 6:19f.); *being stolen* (Mt 6:20; Lk 12:33).
- 19 Note the parallelism between the Rich Fool (Lk 12:13-21) and the Pharisee (Lk 18:10-4).
- 20 A number of Lukan passages illustrates these two possibilities for man by contrasting two people: Simon and the sinful woman (Lk 7:36-50); the Pharisee and the tax collector (Lk 18:9-14); the Rich Ruler and Zacchaeus (Lk 18:18-23 and Lk 19:1-10; cf. Nickelsburg 1979:339f.); the Astute Steward and Dives (Lk 16; cf. Feuillet 1979); the Rich Fool (Lk 12:13-21) and the Astute Steward (Lk 16:1-9; cf. Nickelsburg 1979:337).
- 21 Besides the passages studied above, also: Philippians 4:12f.; James 1:9f. In James 1:10f. and Philippians 3:21 *ταπεινώσις* refers to man's ultimate misery and weakness, his subjection to death (cf. Grundmann 1972:21).
- 22 Luke 16:19-31 is more a warning addressed to the rich than a consolation to the poor (cf. Feuillet 1979). As Nickelsburg (1979:341, 343f.) points out, Luke does not consider the rich as hopeless cases; he appeals to them and shows them the way: give alms and you will have a treasure in heaven, that is *serve* your brother with what you have.
- 23 In 2 Corinthians 11:7f. Paul explains how he, like Jesus according to Philippians 2, has renounced his privilege; he has refused to accept money from the Corinthians, although he has a right to it. This he sees as humbling of himself for their sake (*diakonia*!). The same topic also appears in 1 Corinthians 9:19, but there instead of speaking of a humbling of himself, he sees it as reducing himself to the condition of a slave. Paul is a free man, who has a right to his wages, but for the sake of the Corinthians he has made himself like a slave, who has to work for nothing.
- 24 Cf. Matthew 18:3-4, where we find parallel use of *turn - become like children - humble oneself like this child ...*; cf. *supra*, note 11.
- 25 Cf. Luke 14:14 (resurrection of the just); 1 Peter 5:4 (the appearance of the Head Shepherd); Luke 18:8 (the coming of the Son of Man; note that the theme of verses 1-8 is the vindication of the just who are oppressed); in Luke 6:20-6 the idea of judgment is implied in the 'Woes'.

- 26 Note how friendship with the world is described in terms of pleasures and desires connected with riches and abundance (Ja 4:1-3).
- 27 Cf. Luke 6:22f.; also Luke 18:1-8, where the widow, a type of the oppressed poor, cries out for justice; cf. Nickelsburg (1977); Nickelsburg (1979).
- 28 On the resurrection of the just (Lk 14:14); when the Son of Man comes (Lk 9:26); or at the moment of death (Lk 16:22f.; 23:43).
- 29 On the various explanations of these aorists, cf. Plummer (1922:33).
- 30 The necessity of suffering for Jesus (Lk 9:22; 17:25; 24:7,26, 44ff.; Ac 17:3) and for the followers of Jesus (Ac 9:16; 14:22) should probably be understood against the background of apocalyptic, which was very deeply aware of the suffering of the just man, but was equally convinced that the evil powers were included and encompassed by the divine plan (*deî*). This *deî* cannot be considered as an expression of divine *law* (as for instance in Lk 11:42), but rather as an expression of the divine *plan*. We find it regularly in apocalyptic texts: Daniel 2:28,29,45; Revelation 1:1; 4:1; 17:10; 20:3; 22:6; Matthew 24:6 and par Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9; also Mark 13:10. These synoptic texts are taken from the Synoptic Apocalypse; it is important to note how the coming *trials* are accompanied by an exhortation not to be *worried* (cf. Mt 24:6 and par; also Lk 21:15,18). Cf. Bennett (1975); Hooker (1959:159-63). The so-called apocalyptic pessimism is encompassed by the apocalyptic optimism.
- 31 On the importance of Jesus as example in Luke's Christology, cf. Voss (1965:118-30), especially 126; Sehnle (1969:443f.).
- 32 Conzelmann (1962:191f.) understands *archēgōs* in Luke-Acts in the light of Acts 26:23; Jesus is the first to rise from the dead merely in a chronological sense, without intrinsic causal connection between his resurrection and that of the believers. Jesus' resurrection is merely a proof that there will be a resurrection.
- 33 Cf. Luke 24:26; the journey narrative in Luke's Gospel shows the way of Jesus through suffering to glory; it is a way on which his disciples are called to follow him. Cf. Blinzler (1953:20-53); Schneider (1953:207-29); Conzelmann (1962:53-66); Brown (1969:131-5).
- 34 According to Acts 4:10f. and 13:33-9 the new people has its origin in the resurrection.
- 35 Feuillet (1968) sees in the 'taking away' of the bridegroom in Mark 2:18-20 and par. a reference to both the cross and the ascension.

- 36 According to Acts 3:26 the gift of conversion is the fruit of the *resurrection*.
- 37 Note the importance of the conversion and forgiveness of sins for the restoration of the people in Tg Is 53 (cf. Koch 1972).
- 38 According to Collins (1977:142), Jewish wisdom and apocalyptic 'share a "cosmological conviction" by which the way to salvation lies in understanding the structure of the universe and adapting to it'.
- 39 On Acts 8:26-40, cf. Minguez (1976). There is also a correspondence between humiliation-exaltation (quotation) and *katabainō-anabainō* (vv.38f.).

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