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## «By His Wounds you have been healed»: A Christological portrait in 1Pe 2:18-25

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### ABSTRACT

The First Peter speaks of wounded people in a Christian community living in the situation of suffering. The metaphor “a trial by fire” (1Pe 4:12) allows the reader to guess how distressed this situation is. The author draws the passion of Christ from Isaiah’s Suffering Servant song (vv. 21-22; see Isa 53:9). This portrait underlines that the salvific purpose of Jesus Christ’s historical journey gives meaning to his disciples’ sufferings and constitutes for them the foundation of their hope. Peter’s most profound Christological statement, with terms of which are not found elsewhere in Scripture, comes in Peter’s address to slaves (1Pe 2:22-25). Nonetheless, the reader today must take up this striking message, in his own context. Some questions emerge from the passage: How does Christ’s example of self-gift on the cross speak to wounded people today? How does the call to imitate Christ offer reassurance and hope to wounded people? To answer them, this article aims to provide some elements, which are also valuable to deepen the dimensions of “atoning death, vicarious and substitutionary suffering” and “exemplarity” that the Christological portrait in the First Letter of Peter reveals.

*Keywords:* Christology; First Peter; Christ Passion; Isaiah 53; Suffering Servant; Exemplarity; Atonement; Oblation; Self-offering; Endurance

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## «Gracias a sus heridas han sido sanados»: Un retrato cristológico en 1Pe 2,18-25

### RESUMEN

La Primera Carta de Pedro habla de las heridas en una comunidad cristiana que vive en el sufrimiento. La metáfora que describe esa “prueba de fuego” (1Pe 4:12) permite al lector adivinar lo angustioso de la situación. El autor esboza la pasión de Cristo evocando el cuarto cántico del Siervo Sufriente de Isaías (vv. 21-22; ver Isaías 53:9). Este retrato cristológico recalca que el propósito salvífico del camino histórico de Jesucristo da sentido a los sufrimientos de sus discípulos y constituye para ellos el fundamento de su esperanza. La afirmación cristológica de la Carta, conteniendo términos no se encuentran en ninguna otra parte de las Escrituras, sobreviene en el discurso de Pedro a los esclavos (1 Pe 2:22-25). Sin embargo, el lector de hoy debe retomar el mensaje, en su propio contexto. Algunas preguntas emergen del pasaje: ¿Cómo el ejemplo de Cristo, quien se entrega a sí mismo en la cruz, habla hoy a las personas heridas? ¿De qué manera la llamada a imitar a Cristo les ofrece consuelo y esperanza? Para responderlas, este artículo pretende aportar algunos elementos, los cuales también son valiosos para profundizar en las dimensiones de “expiación, muerte vicaria, sufrimiento sustitución” y “ejemplaridad” que el retrato cristológico de la Primera Carta de Pedro pone de manifiesto.

*Palabras clave:* Cristología; Primera Carta de Pedro; Isaías 53; Pasión de Cristo; Siervo sufriente; Ejemplaridad; Expiación; Oblación; Perseverancia

## 1. Introduction

Scripture reveals that an important angle of Jesus’ humanity consists in his suffering, especially during the crucifixion. First Peter speaks of wounded people in a Christian community living in the situation of suffering. The metaphor «fiery trial” (1Pe 4:12) allows the reader to guess how pressured this situation is. Commentators agreed that «with the exception of Job, no biblical book deals so often and so extensively in relationship to its length with a situation of suffering as First Peter does».<sup>1</sup> The whole letter is an encouraging book with bold message for Christians who are facing human struggles and trials.<sup>2</sup> The circumstances of the letter makes

1 Reinhard Feldmeier, *The First Letter of Peter. A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Translated from the German by Peter H. Davids (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2008), 2.

2 The believers in these regions were under severe pressure, acute enough to cause suffering. Their Christian commitment was leading to slander, estrangement, and abuse. The sanction for this was not only social alienation but included economic consequences as well – loss of jobs

its message apposite to the present time: then and now Christians are «outsiders and foreigners in the dispersion», as it is stressed at the beginning of the letter (1:1, 17) and repeated in 2:11. They are sketched as outsiders, “foreigner”, “aliens” and “sojourners” in their own county or abroad, suffering alienations in the midst of a pagan, consumerist, and egocentric culture.<sup>3</sup> Nowadays, people’s wounds can be manifested in many ways. As the biblical passage from First Peter suggests, people’s burden and sufferings can be originated because of culture, religious traditions, punitive society, and inter religious and intercultural conflict, among others.

In the passage of 1Pe 2:18-25, the author sketches the Passion of Christ in his appeal to Isaiah’s Suffering Servant (Isa 52:13-53:12) but also using his own unique statements, of which were not found elsewhere in the Scripture.<sup>4</sup> The background of Isaiah 53 is used to express that Christ’s unconditional self-gift on the cross reveals God’s redemptive love and constitutes and exemplary path for Christ’s disciples.

This paper aims to discuss and deepen on Peter’s most profound Christological statement. The principal question to answer is how does Christ’s example speaks to people who are wounded today? In other words, in what way can Jesus’ suffering provide reassurance and hope to the wounded people who are called to give themselves so generously following Jesus’ example (cf. 1Pe 2:18-25)? And, how Christians should behave in the world while injustices occur (e.g., abortion, slavery, abuse of women and children, abuse of political power, environmental problems, etc.)? Though the Christological statement comes in Peter’s address to slaves, the reader today must take up this outstanding appeal in his own context.

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and opportunities in the unjust society. (Harrington, *1 Peter, Jude, and 2 Peter* [Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008], 13).

<sup>3</sup> John H. Elliott asserts that slaves’ condition presented in 1Peter illustrates the social and psychological predicament of the Christian community, e.g., they are uprooted from home, they lack group support, they are exposed to the impulses and abuse of their superiors, together with their suffering even when doing what is right typified the entire community’s vulnerability in a hostile society (*1 Peter*, AB 37B [New York: Doubleday, 2000], 540-541).

<sup>4</sup> Reinhard Feldmeier, *The First Letter of Peter*, 167.

## 2. First Peter 2:21-25 and Isaiah 52:13-53:12 in context

### 2.1. *The context of 1Peter*

The First Letter of Peter was written in the last part of the first century by a disciple of Peter. There is probably a social and economic hostility directed toward Christian communities of Asia Minor. Indeed, the recipients' beliefs and practices are the focus of the suffering addressed in the letter.<sup>5</sup> In effect, the author addresses them as "foreigner", "aliens" and "sojourners" (1:1, 17; 2:11), indicating that they were alienated from the surrounding pagan culture and subject to mistreatment and misunderstanding.

Curiously, the author assures his audience of the heritage and blessings Christ's redemption has won for them; however, the letter is one of encouragement, urging them to carry out a life that reflects the richness of this legacy but does not separate them from the world of suffering. Christians are called to live their life confidently in situations of injustice, eager to undergo suffering for the sake of the good, following the example of Jesus who has given them the freedom to respond in righteousness even while facing trials (1Pe 2:18-21; 3:8-22). This message is supported by the letter's incorporation of the Christological portrait in 2:22-25, drawn from the fourth suffering servant song in Isaiah 53.

Paying attention to the letter's structure it is noted that, after the apostolic address (1,1-2), the body of the letter flows through an exhortation for hope and strength to Christians in challenge and conflict (1:3-5,11). Christ is the model for the faithful who are living in hostile society. This distinctive Christology is based upon the portrait of Christ as the fulfilment of God's promises to Israel and the church as its heir.<sup>6</sup> The introductory exhortation closes with a

<sup>5</sup> Patricia A. Scharbaugh, «Acquainted with Grief: A Hymn of Redemptive Love in 1Peter», *BibToday* 51 (2013), 159-164, 161.

<sup>6</sup> Sherri Brown, «1 Peter» in: John J. Collins & Others, editors. *The Jerome Biblical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century* (London: T & T Clark, 2022), 1811-1820, here, 1812.

comprehensive reference about salvation history and the unity of the old and new covenants, as vv. 10-12 read:

«Concerning this salvation, prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and investigated it, [11] investigating the time and circumstances that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the glories to follow them. [12] It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you with regard to the things that have now been announced to you by those who preached the good news to you [through] the holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels longed to look». (1Pe 1:10-12 NAB)<sup>7</sup>

The “salvation” experience by the Christian community is not some timeless dream, rather, it is the grace granted to all people through Christ’s death and resurrection. It is about a salvation witnessed by Israel’s prophets as God’s saving purpose (v. 11). To focus on unjust suffering, Peter appeals twice to Isaiah’s Suffering Servant in order to express its most profound Christological statement: 2,19-20; see Isa 53,9 and at vv. 23-25; see 53:4-12. Before the analysis of our passage, 1Peter 2:21-25, we are aware that theological exegesis both sees and hears Jesus Christ in both Testaments. Hence, we present some observations about how some commentaries deal with Isaiah 52:13-53:12, «the most contested chapter in the Old Testament».<sup>8</sup> The passage has been a core theme in a debate on contemporary hermeneutics.<sup>9</sup>

## 2.2. What does Isaiah 52:13-53:12 speak of Christ?

Scholars see the passage of Isaiah basically structured into five stanzas: 52:13-15; 53:1-3, 4-6, 7-9, 10-12.<sup>10</sup> The servant here re-

<sup>7</sup> Unless it is noted, English biblical quotations are taken from the *New American Bible* 2011 Edition.

<sup>8</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001), 410.

<sup>9</sup> Craig A. Carter takes Isaiah 53 as a text proof to asserts that there is a «gulf between academic hermeneutics and church preaching» (*Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition. Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* [Grand Rapid: Baker Academic, 2018], 3).

<sup>10</sup> See: Richard J. Clifford, SJ, «Second Isaiah», in: John J. Collins & Others, editors. *The Jerome Biblical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century* (London: T & T Clark, 2022), 845-861, here, 859; Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary*, 410; John Goldingay and David Payne, *Isaiah 40-55*:

mains silent, like the first Servant (Isa 49:1-13). The confession uttered by a group (not identified in the text), “We” in 53:1-11 is framed by two divine pronouncements, 52:13-15 and 53,11b-12. It is possible to see the passage as a chiasm, in which the reason for the Servant’s suffering is situated at the center: 53:4-6:

«Yet it was our pain that he bore, our sufferings he endured. We thought of him as stricken, struck down by God and afflicted, [5] But he was pierced for our sins, crushed for our iniquity. He bore the punishment that makes us whole, by his wounds we were healed. [6] We had all gone astray like sheep, all following our own way; But the LORD laid upon him the guilt of us all”. (Isa 53:4-6 NAB)

The Servant suffering and (possible) death have saved them from punishment due their sin (see: Isa 53:1-11b). Throughout the ages biblical commentators have discussed who the Servant is. In the text what we see is a description of this Suffering Servant of the Lord. In Carter’s words, «He both is the Lord and is a being separate from the Lord». <sup>11</sup> There is not explanation for how this can be, the tension is not resolved in the text. It is clear that the Servant’s purpose is to deal with the sin-problem of the people. In fact, this is the main obstacle to divine-human fellowship and peace: «the problem of sin, it is this problem that Isaiah 53 deals with». <sup>12</sup>

The description of Isaiah 53 is of vicarious and substitutionary suffering. However, there is a tension not resolved in the text: the idea that the servant was a human prophet is in tension with the idea that it was the Lord come in person (cf. Isa 52:6). According to Childs, there is an ontological link between Isaiah 53 and the proclamation of Christ in the NT, but the scholar is determined saying that this link is not to be understood as prophecy and NT fulfilment. <sup>13</sup>

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*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2006), 277; J. Alec Motyer, *Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993), 423.

<sup>11</sup> Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*, 241.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 236.

<sup>13</sup> Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary*, 423.

Nonetheless, with Carter and others, the best explanation of the nature of the ontological link is that of prophecy and fulfilment.<sup>14</sup>

### 2.3. *First Peter 2:21-25 and the Christian reflections on Isaiah 52:13-53:12*

In the NT, several passages from the Gospels, the Acts of Apostles and the Letters of Paul and 1Peter are quotes from Isaiah 52:13-53:12. In general, the NT authors made use of Isa 52:13-53:12, especially Isa 53:4, 9 to express «a statement of faith that saw in the person of Christ the fulfilment of the One who was to suffer for the salvation of the many».<sup>15</sup>

Referring to the significance of Jesus' compassion and the meaning of Jesus' passion and cross, the prophetic passage is quoted by the evangelists (see Matt 8:17; cf. Isa 53:4; Mark 15:28; Luke 22:37; cf. Isa 53:12; and John 12:38; cf. Isa 53:1). Probably the best-known NT passage citing from Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is the story mentioned in Acts 8:32-33 about the Ethiopian eunuch requesting guidance from Philip to understand a reading from the prophet Isaiah, which is from verses 7 and 8 of Isaiah 53. The perspective of Luke here is that of OT prophecy and fulfilment in Christ. In his letter to the Romans, Paul draws first from Isaiah 53:1 to highlight the unbelief of the Jews in Romans 10:16; and second, from Isaiah 52:15, in Romans 15:20-21, to express his determination to proclaim the gospel without limit.<sup>16</sup>

In this perspective, the next step is to elucidate that in 1Peter 2:21-25, the passage of Isaiah 53 highlights that the suffering of

<sup>14</sup> Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*, 237.

<sup>15</sup> Roberto Conrado O. Guevara, *On the Recovery of the 'sense of Exile': The Contribution of the Jewish Interpretation of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 to the Christian Understanding and Witness* (Quezon City: Doctoral Dissertation, Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo the Manila University, 2011), 96.

<sup>16</sup> Delio Ruiz, *Minister of Christ Jesus: A Study of Cultic Language in Romans 15:14-21 in the Context of Paul's Missionary Framework*. (Quezon City: Doctoral Dissertation, Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University, 2018), 231-232.

Jesus on the cross reveals the power of redemptive love. This power is available to those who follow Jesus's steps and, like him, hand themselves over to God. As Patricia Scharbaugh asserts,

«Mistreated slaves and wives are not to be burdened with the additional weight of accepting suffering for the sake of the more powerful, nor are they singled out from other Christians uniquely called to suffer. Instead, they are recognized as those who are very close to Jesus. Like Jesus, they are acquainted with grief, and this acquaintance forges a kinship that inspires hope and is lived out by following Jesus in their daily lives».<sup>17</sup>

The author of 1Peter exhorts slaves to submit themselves to their masters and bear with endurance unjust suffering; he recalls the example of Christ's suffering as the example to follow. There are two aspects of the cross that are foundational for the Christian disciples who constitute the 1Peter's audience, namely, the cross as the divinely appointed means of redemption from sin, and the cross as assurance for the disciples that they share in Christ's victory. Suffering is a major theme of the 1Peter. The Greek words for, "to suffer", and "suffering", appear twelve times in the letter, and Jesus is the subject of the verb "to suffer" eight of those times. If we compare Paul with 1Peter, Jesus is associated with suffering only twice in the letters of Paul. While Paul stresses that Jesus died for our sins, the letter of Peter emphasizes that he suffered for our sins. The verb "to suffer", "to endure" (πάσχω) is a quasi-technical term in 1Peter referring both to Christ suffering (2:21, 23; 3:18; 4:1) and to the Christians' sufferings (2:19, 20; 3:14, 17; 4:16, 19; 5:10).<sup>18</sup> This author's emphasis is on Jesus' suffering as a pastoral response to his recipients.

The significance of 1Pe 2:18-25 was demonstrated remarkably by interpreters throughout the last three decades.<sup>19</sup> John H. Elliott claims that the passage is noteworthy in several respects.

<sup>17</sup> Patricia A. Scharbaugh, «Acquainted with Grief: A Hymn of Redemptive Love in 1Peter», *BibToday* 51 (2013): 159-164, here, 164.

<sup>18</sup> Donald P. Senior, *1Peter*. SP 15 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008), 75.

<sup>19</sup> José Cervantes Gabarrón, *Las cartas de Pedro*. Reseña Bíblica 32. Estella (Navarra), 2001.



It starts with a commandment to obedience, which is followed by an extended line of argument «assuming their rational competence, moral responsibility, and Christian commitment»<sup>20</sup>. **This makes this passage relevant not only to the situation of the “household servants” but to the entire community.**

### 3. Exegesis of 1Peter 2:18-25

The passage of 1Pe 2:18-25

«Slaves be subject to your masters with all reverence, not only to those who are good and equitable but also to those who are perverse. [19] For whenever anyone bears the pain of unjust suffering because of consciousness of God, that is a grace. [20] But what credit is there if you are patient when beaten for doing wrong? But if you are patient when you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God. [21] For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps. [22] ‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.’ [23] When he was insulted, he returned no insult; when he suffered, he did not threaten; instead, he handed himself over to the one who judges justly. [24] He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. [25] For you had gone astray like sheep, but you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls». (1Pe 2:18-25 NAB)

#### 3.1. *The patient endurance of undeserved suffering is called a “grace” (1Pe 2:18-20)*

The household servants are to be subordinate to their masters “with all reverence” (lit. fear, φόβος). Christian servants already experience the fear of the Lord and they have freedom in Christ so that they can freely submit themselves to their masters, «not only to those who are good and equitable but also to those who are perverse». When the author tells his readers to “fear God” (1:17; 2:17)

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<sup>20</sup> John H. Elliott, *1 Peter*, AB 37B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 540-541.

he is directing them to reverence and to obey God as their ultimate authority and judge.<sup>21</sup>

Why does God allow people to suffer? 1 Peter specifies which suffering becomes a grace with God. There is a condition. The author is not saying that unjust sufferings is commendable and creditable, but it is when the Christian disciples endure this unwearingly and patiently that they are commended, and that grace is granted.<sup>22</sup> It must be noted, in the Greek text, the conditional particle “if” with the indicative (1Pe 2:20) or with the optative tense (1Pe 3:14, 17). The only suffering that is “grace” is the suffering that affects the “doer of good” and this is not because of lapses for which he or she is to blame, but «if, however, you -suffering as a doer of good- tolerate it, that is grace with God» (1Pe 2:20).<sup>23</sup> There is a difference between guilty and innocent suffering (that will be repeated several more times in the further course of the letter (3:17; 4:15f.) with the intention to make clear that only the suffering that affects Christians because of their faith (cf. 4:15), due to righteousness (3:14), being a Christian (4:16), and doing God’s will (4:19), is included in this grace. The call is to constantly do what is good (2:20), resisting evil and enduring sufferings, which is an opportunity – in these circumstances – to share in Christ’s redemptive love as one who endured pain while suffering unjustly. Through such enduring of trial and persecution any believer who is so outwardly powerless can give a significant contribution to the Christian mission.

T.B. Williams explores the social dynamic of the ancient system of reciprocity that helps interpreters to define the use of “grace” (χάρις) in the present context of the letter.<sup>24</sup> According to him, post-Reformation perspectives on the “grace of God” lead commentators to posit meanings which are not present in the first century (a view that has problems of anachronism and that lacks

21 Daniel Keating, *First and Second Peter, Jude*. CCSS (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 63.

22 Idem, 66.

23 Feldmeier, *The First Letter of Peter*, 172.

24 T.B. Williams, *Reciprocity and Suffering*, 423.

acceptable explanatory merit).<sup>25</sup> The real problem is that χάρις is defined in these verses as a human action, not a divine provision. The focus should be on what God has done or will do in providing for God's people during their trial. The author of 1Peter teaches that χάρις involves the patient endurance of undeserved suffering.

The use of the term in the Hellenistic world, leads to understand χάρις as a human action which secures a favorable response from God.<sup>26</sup> The passage is thought to convey that the endurance of unjust suffering is pleasing in God's sight. Therefore, the word is translated in various ways, e.g., "commendable", "acceptable", or "credit".<sup>27</sup> The term would be described as a human act which garners divine approval.

As result of Williams's investigation, if the word χάρις is employed within the social context of reciprocity, its meaning often extends beyond mere "thanks" (although the idea is present) to describe the social-obligatory return of previously granted favors.<sup>28</sup> More specifically, the term refers to the human reciprocation of God's benevolence. In the same way that an ancient Hellenistic community might fulfill its obligation toward a benefactor through a public ceremony of recognition for the gifts it has received, the author of the epistle defines the endurance of unjust suffering as the appropriate reciprocal response to the favor bestowed by God upon the readers.<sup>29</sup>

Throughout the five brief chapters of his epistle, the author employs χάρις (or some cognate) eleven times (1:2,10,13; 2:19,20; 3:7; 4:10 bis; 5:5,10,12).<sup>30</sup> The term is consistently employed to

25 See M.E. Boring, *1Peter* (ANTC; Nashville 1999), 119.

26 T.B. Williams, *Reciprocity and Suffering*, 424.

27 See: P.H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter* (NICNT; Grand Rapids 1990), 107-108; P.J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter. A Commentary on First Peter* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, 1996) 196; J.H. Elliott, *1 Peter* (AB 37B; New York: Doubleday, 2000) 518; D.P. Senior, *1 Peter* (Sacra Pagina 15; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003), 75, 78.

28 T.B. Williams, *Reciprocity and Suffering*, 429.

29 Id., 432.

30 In the NT aside from the Pauline (and deuteron-Pauline) literature only 1Peter has such a concentrated use of the term.

represent God's munificence towards the people of God. According to Williams, «this established pattern is an important clue for diagnosing the meaning of the term in 1Pe 2:19-20».<sup>31</sup> The same form appears at the end of the epistle. In 1Pe 5:12, summarizing and highlighting his arguments the author says, «I have written his brief letter exhorting you and testifying that this (ταύτην, pronoun demonstrative from οὗτος) is the true beneficence of God in which you must stand firm».<sup>32</sup>

It is clearer when one considers the use of χάρις in 1Pe 2:19-20 that the focus has shifted from divine provision to human action, namely, the readers' response to suffering. This indicates that χάρις is not merely an action which is pleasing to God ("this is commendable before God"), but one which is an appropriate reciprocation of God's favor or beneficence. The prepositional phrase "this is grace before God" conveys the meaning that God himself is the one who evaluates endurance in the midst of unjust suffering as "grace".

On the theological level, attention has been paid on the call for joy in suffering, on the believer's imitation of Christ's afflictions. The author's theological concept is undeniable; however, Williams' claim is that the «the obligatory nature of suffering in connection with popular social conventions is a key feature that has been consistently overlooked».<sup>33</sup> From the viewpoint of the ancient system of reciprocity, 1 Peter portrays unjust suffering as a binding responsibility which has been placed on the readers in view of the generous benevolence which God (as the divine benefactor) has bestowed upon them.

Hence, the letter portrays the readers as recipients within the system of ancient gift-exchange, but instead of asking his audience to reciprocate God's bounty through traditional means, the

31 T.B. Williams, *Reciprocity and Suffering*, 433.

32 "This" (ταύτην) means «the general contents and worldview of the letter, e.g., its affirmations regarding the Christian message and ethics» (Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 352).

33 T.B. Williams, *Reciprocity and Suffering*, 438.

author shifts the normative categories by defining the appropriate response as non-retaliatory endurance. Indeed, Christian identification with suffering, i.e., «patient endurance during times of trial, is not simply a means of achieving divine favor; it has become the very definition of how Christian relates to God».<sup>34</sup>

### 3.2. *The example of Jesus' Oblation: enduring innocent suffering (1Pe 2:21-25)*

[21] «For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps». (1Pe 2:20-21)

The Greek word that translates “example” is found only here in the Bible. Jesus has gone before us and showed out the way with his own steps so that the disciples can follow him.<sup>35</sup> The author draws the passion of Christ from Isaiah's Suffering Servant (vv. 21-22; see Isa 53:9) to underline that Christians are marked by Jesus' journey through suffering in three aspects: (1) His innocence, since Jesus becomes the one who committed no sin; (2) His silent endurance and uprightness; (3) and His abandonment in God's hands.<sup>36</sup>

v. [22] «He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. [23] When he was insulted, he returned no insult; when he suffered, he did not threaten; instead, he handed himself over to the one who judges justly». (1Pe 2:22-23)<sup>37</sup>

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34 Ibid.

35 It is the discipleship language, see: Matt 16:24-26; Mark 8:34-35.

36 See: M.D. Hooker, «Did the Use of Isaiah 53 to Interpret His Mission Begins with Jesus? » in: W. H. Bellinger, Jr and W. R. Farmer (Eds.): *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and the Christian Origins* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1998): 88-103, here, 92.

37 Carter, recently, have challenged scholars with his question: «who is the suffering servant?». Though it is widely agreed that the early church interpreted Isaiah 53 in Christological and messianic terms (cf. Act 8:30-35), Carter's question is «whether this meaning inheres in the text or is read into the text by later readers» (*Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*, 7; see also 165, 181, 227-251).

### 3.2.1. *Jesus did not sin:*

«He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth» (1Pe 2:22).

These words are the only direct quotation in the hymn, quoted from the Forth Suffering Servant song in Isaiah (Isa 53:9). Like the servant who would suffer to redeem Israel, Jesus was innocent; he did not deserve punishment, he did nothing to deserve suffering, yet he suffered anyway. Jesus suffered insults with physical punishment and death because more powerful people in society insulted and slandered him. In this way Jesus becomes «the model of one who neither abuse nor threatened, but entrusts himself to the One who judges justly».<sup>38</sup> The exhortation does not justify cruel slave masters, neither it does not acclaim those who crucified Christ. Nevertheless, taking up this reason in our own context, the message «is directed to those who, like Jesus, suffer physical and emotional harm from injustice even though they are innocent».<sup>39</sup>

### 3.2.2. *Jesus returned no insult*

«No deceit was found in his mouth. When he was insulted, he returned no insult; when he suffered, he did not threaten». (1Pe 2:22b-23a).

One of the distinctive characteristics of the passion narratives is that from the time of his arrest until his death Jesus speaks very little. Before he is arrested, Jesus performs miracles, teaches, and his words and actions dominate the gospel narratives. Once he is arrested, Jesus speaks only few times; his silence recalls the suffering servant who faces unjust accusations and just keeps silence (cf. Is 53:7). What is the meaning of his silence? (2:23b).

<sup>38</sup> Sherri Brown, «1 Peter», 1811-1820, spec. 1816.

<sup>39</sup> Scharbaugh, «Acquainted with Grief: A Hymn of Redemptive Love in 1Peter», 162.

### 3.2.3. *Jesus persisted in handing himself over to God.*

«Instead, he handed himself over to the one who judges justly» (1Pe 2:23b).

Jesus' silence is directly tied to handing himself over to God. Both movements, silence and abandonment, go together, interpret each another, and evoke the images from the passion narratives in the gospels.<sup>40</sup> What is the meaning of Jesus' handing himself over? The Greek verb used to describe Jesus' action of handing himself over to God is the same verb that describes the action one can do to Jesus, «being delivered» (*παραδίδωμαι*) into human hands (Mark 9:31a; 14:41c; Luke 24:7; cf. Isa 53:12).<sup>41</sup> The verb also describes the action initiated by Jesus, the offering of Jesus himself. Hence, in one sense Christ "handed himself over" to his human enemies, but, in a more profound sense he gave himself into the hands of the Father, as Luke 23:46, reads, «Father, into your hands I commend my spirit. This is his own oblation to the Father made for our salvation. Furthermore, the use of the same verb referring to two different actions highlights Jesus' understanding of his arrest and trial and the understanding of those who oppose him. Jesus is handed over to sinners by Judas but Jesus hands himself over to God.

Jesus suffers injustice at the hands of those who are powerful of this world, he does not submit himself to their accusations and judgements, but instead offers himself to God. In a situation of overwhelming injustice, Jesus' actions are entrenched in complete freedom. Jesus does not participate in the injustice that surrounds him. He knows that his life belongs to God, «this knowledge allows him to act freely in a situation in which there seems to be little, if any, freedom available».<sup>42</sup> And, because of this freedom his silence is his only response.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Elliott, *1Peter*, 545.

<sup>42</sup> Scharbaugh, «Acquainted with Grief: A Hymn of Redemptive Love in 1Peter», 163.

There is a pastoral teaching in the passage in the choice of the verbal tense. The three main verbs in 2:23 are in imperfect tense, which indicate repeated or continual action in the past.<sup>43</sup> Every time Christ was insulted or beaten, he did not return insult and did not claim retaliation (ἀντιλοιδορέω). When he suffered, he did not threaten (ἀπειλέω). Instead, he persisted in handing himself over (παραδίδωμι) to the Father throughout the course of his suffering. Thus, the message for us is this: «if we are to walk in Christ's steps, we have to persevere through trials and insults –a single grand effort is not enough».<sup>44</sup> Likewise, it implies an attitude of continual oblation to God.

### 3.3. *Jesus' vicarious suffering (vv. 21, 24), consequences for Christian's life*

«For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you” (v. 21). “He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed». (v. 21).

The terminology employed in vv. 21, 24a is derived primarily from Isa 53.<sup>45</sup> The opening phrase, «He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross», does not quote directly the prophetic text; it seems a combination of phrases from several distinct verses, e.g., Isa 53:4-5; 53:11-12; and Dt 21:23).

This second appeal to Isaiah Suffering Servant highlights that Jesus's self-gift on the cross by his vicarious suffering is unconditional.<sup>46</sup> The prophet depicts people who «wandered like sheep each on his way» (Isa 53:6). Here, the author of 1Peter tells all Christ's disciples that «one who gave himself so generously continues to journey with all people as the shepherd and guardian

43 Keating, *First and Second Peter, Jude*, 68.

44 Keating, *First and Second Peter, Jude*, 71.

45 Elliott, *1Peter*, 549.

46 See: Sherri Brown, «1 Peter», 1816.



of souls (vv. 23-25; see Isa 53:4-12) ».47 In Otfried Hofius, words, «Christ takes the place of the sinners in such a way that he does not displace them but rather encompasses them as persons and affects them in the very being».48 The use of the verb “bring up, offer” in connection with “upon the tree” is commonly understood in a way similar to the interpretation of the phrase «to offer spiritual sacrifices» (ἀνενέγκαι πνευματικὰς θυσίας, 1Pe 2:5).49

Interpreters observe that linguistically, «to bring up» (ἀναφέρω) is also to be constructed as «to offer up (as) a sacrifice».50 This suggests two things (1) the setting aside of sins, which Christ has taken with Him to the cross (ἐπὶ τὸ ξύλον, “upon the tree”), and (2) the self-offering of Christ (ἐν τῷ σώματι αὐτοῦ, “in his body”) for our sins. While the combination of these two ideas is normal in Hebrews (see: Heb 7:27; 9:26, 28); however, this Christology is absent from 1Peter.

Osborne suggests that the verb is to be interpreted in relation with ὑποφέρω, “to endure”, to bear the pain of unjust suffering (1Pe 2:19).51 On the cross, Jesus bore our sins “in his flesh”. What the author of the epistle emphasizes is the vicarious nature of Christ sufferings. The allusion to Deuteronomy depicts that the suffering was indeed physical “in his body” and “the tree” (Dt 21:23) here is equivalent to “the cross”. The context of Dt 21:23 is significant because it refers to the regulations concerning the body of one who committed a sin which deserves the judgement of death, and to be hung on a tree. Thus, the horrendous suffering of Jesus is indicated with this image of “being hung on the tree” publicly, the physical pain and the social reprobation which accompanies it are also highlighted.

47 *Ibid.*

48 Otfried Hofius, «The Fourth Servant Song in the New Testament Letters», in: Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher (Eds.), *The Suffering Servant. Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 163-188, here, 173.

49 Osborne, «Guide Lines for Christian Suffering», 399. Elsewhere in the NT the passage of Dt 21:23 is alluded to in Gal 3:13; Act 5:30; 10:39; 13:29).

50 Konrad Weiss, «φέρω, κτλ. » *TDNT* 9, 56-87, 61; Osborne, «Guide Lines for Christian Suffering», 399.

51 Osborne, «Guide Lines for Christian Suffering», 399.

It is important to note that Jesus did not endure sufferings for his own sins. The allusion to Isaiah 53 sheds light to the significance of this humiliating death. Since Jesus was innocent, he did not suffer for his own sins, rather «he himself bore our sins” (1Pe 2:24; cf. Isa 53:4). Elliott rightly explains that the passage from Isaiah offers a scriptural portrait of, «not only a suffering servant who nevertheless remains obedient to God, but one who in general was dishonored, despised, and shamed among humankind (52:14-15; 53:2-4, 7-9) but nevertheless vindicated by God (52:13; 53:10-12) ». <sup>52</sup> In this regard, Elliott asserts that it provides an appropriate biblical text because it does two things: «not only elaborating on the suffering and death of Jesus but also linking this innocent suffering with the suffering of servants/slaves as well as the suffering of the entire community». <sup>53</sup>

The last part of 1Pe 2:24 has some similarities with the baptismal exhortation in Romans 6. For Paul, living with Christ implies dying to sin, «you too must think of yourselves as [being] dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus» (Rom 6:11). In the subsequent section (Rom 6:15-23), another opposition is presented, «Freed from sin, you have become slaves of righteousness» (v. 18), or «For when you were slaves of sin, you were free from righteousness” (v. 20). However, there are also significant differences. Besides some distinctive wording, the expression that Christians are free from sin, so that they «might live for righteousness» (τῆ δικαιοσύνη ζήσωμεν) (1Pe 2:24), appears only in 1Peter, it does not occur in Paul not in the rest of the NT.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the theological message of the Christian’s union with Christ through baptism in Romans 6 is not present in 1Peter. In the latter, the fundamental point is rather the ethical imperative of a life of righteousness, which corresponds to “doing what is good” (ἀγαθοποιέω, 1Pe 2:20).

The point here is on the fundamental decision of the Christian to convert from their former way of life to a life of righteousness, a theme emphasized earlier in the letter (1Pe 1:14, 22, 23). For Paul’s

<sup>52</sup> Elliott, *1Peter*, 547.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> For more discussion on the point see Osborne, «Guide Lines for Christian Suffering», 401.

righteousness is primarily «a gift of God» (e.g., Rom 6:1-12), whereas in 1Peter it refers to good deeds (cf. 2:15, 20; 3:6, 11, 17; 4:19).<sup>55</sup> Donald Senior asserts that «in the context of 1Peter 'living in righteousness' refers to the kind of behavior and exemplary witness that is enjoined on the household slaves and, beyond them, on all Christians».<sup>56</sup>

By his wounds you have been healed (1Pe 2:24b). In verse 24, another imagery taken from Isaiah 53, reaffirms the same conviction, «By his wounds you have been healed».<sup>57</sup> Matthew (8:16-17, citing Isa 53:4) depicts Jesus' healing ministry as fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy. Matt 8:17 reads, «to fulfill what had been said by Isaiah the prophet: He took away our infirmities and bore our diseases».

Two elements portray the vicarious character of Christ's suffering: he carried our sins to the cross, and he was wounded so we could be healed. This image reaffirms the conviction that the power of Jesus' suffering on the cross and his redemptive mercy have implication for all Christian disciples. Throughout the letter, the author speaks of the transformation that grace effects in the Christian's life: who has been born anew and has ceased from sin, lives no longer by human passions but by the will of God (see 1:3, 14-15, 18-19, 22-33; 2:1-3, 9-10; 3:18, 21; 4:1-2).<sup>58</sup>

### 3.4. *The continual return to the Good Shepherd and Guardian (1Pe 2:25)*

«For you had gone astray like sheep, but you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls». (1Pe 2:25)

The final verse also draws on the image of straying sheep of Isaiah 53:6 and the hopeless past of the addressees who «had gone

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<sup>55</sup> Elliott, *1Peter*, 535-536.

<sup>56</sup> Senior, *1Peter*, 76.

<sup>57</sup> This is a direct citation from the Septuagint of Isa 53:5, but there is a change in the text, "we" (have been healed) to "you" so that the author adapts the quotation to the context of the exhortation in 2:24.

<sup>58</sup> Senior, *1Peter*, 80.

astray” (1Pe 1:18; 2:9).<sup>59</sup> The pastoral imagery describes the pre-conversion stage of the Christian disciples in their new situation, as they «returned to the shepherd and guardian”. By “shepherd” Jesus, not God, is meant (against some interpreters).<sup>60</sup> The title for Jesus, «the great Shepherd of the sheep”, appears also in Heb 13:20 (cf. also Rev 7:17).<sup>61</sup> The double description “shepherd” and “overseer/bishop” express two related things: the authority of Christ as “Lord” (1:3; 3:15) who is to be obeyed, but then also the care for the believers, a care which is perfected in sacrifice, in substitutionary suffering (2:21; 3:18).<sup>62</sup>

The salvific purpose of Jesus Christ’s historical journey gives meaning to his disciples’ sufferings and constitutes the foundation of their hope. The sufferings endured in the name of Christ, and lived according to his example (2:21), configure the disciples with the Passion of Christ. Thus, the saving power of the Risen Christ, shepherd and guardian of life, gives strength and hope to those who suffer (2:25).<sup>63</sup>

## 4. Conclusion

4.1. How does Christ’s example speak to the situation of the wounded people today? How we should understand the Christian call to give himself so generously following Jesus’ example? (1Pe 2:18-25)?

59 The image of the shepherd is applied to God in the OT, e.g., Psalm 23, and Ezequiel 34, describing God as the compassionate and faithful shepherd. In the NT drawing from the OT tradition, especially from Ezekiel 34, the image applies to Jesus (cf. Matt 18:10-14; 25:32; 26:31; Mark 14:27; Luke 15:1-7; John 10:2-16).

60 This interpretation is in line with Senior, *1Peter*, 80; Keating, *First and Second Peter, Jude*, 70; Feldmeier, *The First Letter of Peter*, 176. Against this interpretation, Sargent noted that the previous use of ἐπισκοπή (overseer) in 1Pe 2:12, the term refers to God’s eschatological visitation (Benjamin Sargent, *Written to Serve. The use of Scripture in 1Peter* (New York: T&T Clark, 2018), 128-129). Osborne also maintains that the «shepherd and guardian of your souls» refers God the Father rather than to Christ (Osborne, «Guidelines for Christian Suffering», 405).

61 This implies that, in Jesus Christ, the promise spoken through Ezekiel has now been fulfilled: «I will deliver them from every place where they were scattered on the day of dark clouds. I will lead them out from among the peoples and gather them from the lands» (Ezek. 34:12-13).

62 Feldmeier, *The First Letter of Peter*, 176.

63 See: *Biblia de la Iglesia en América* (Buenos Aires – Bogotá: Ediciones PPC – CELAM, 2019), Notes, 2090.

The Christological portrait in 2:22-25, drawn from the fourth suffering servant song in Isaiah 53, provides the foundation for the Christian to respond to the call to imitate Jesus. Their observance consists in doing good constantly (1Pe 2:20), resisting evil and enduring suffering if it is necessary. Following the example of Jesus of Christ as he suffered on the cross is a grace, and God himself is the one who evaluates the disciple's ways of enduring suffering that comes from unjust situation.

In 1Peter chapters 3 and 4, the author develops his teachings about suffering for the sake of Christ. The address "beloved" in 1Pe 4:12 recalls 2:11, but he does not introduce a new topic, but he reaffirms what began in 2:11 and emphasized in 3:13, that is, the readiness to suffer as Christ's disciples for doing good with the assurance «to rejoice at the revelation of his glory».<sup>64</sup> God is not delighted to see his children suffering, but if they endure this patiently, they are commended, and grace is granted (1Pe 2:20). Nobody can harm if the believers are zealous for good (3:13), if they are resisting evil, enduring sufferings, and sharing in Christ's redemptive love who endured pain while suffering unjustly. Through such enduring of trial and persecution any believer who is so outwardly powerless can give a significant contribution to the Christian mission.

4.2. 1 Peter is a practical deepening and actualization of Matthew's beatitudes.

1Peter's exhortation is a compressed form of Matthews' Sermon on the Mount: «If you are insulted for the name of Christ, blessed are you", for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let no one among you be made to suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as an intriguer (cf. 1Pe 3:14-15). The persistent message is to do always what is good (cf. 2:11; 3:13, 17).

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<sup>64</sup> The Gentiles are surprised that Christians no longer join them (1Pe 4:4), but Christians should not be surprised that the Gentiles abuse them in return. As 1Jn 3:13 reads, «Do not be surprised, brothers, if the world hates you».

Matthew 5:11, reads «Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me». The so-called Matthew's antithesis, Jesus commands the disciples «offer no resistance to one who is evil» (5:39), «But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you» (5:44), «For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have» (5:46).

In line with the gospel, 1Peter's exhortation is that Christians' suffering is a beatitude: «if you should suffer because of righteousness, blessed are you" (1Pe 3:14), that they «always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope" (3:15). The Christian vocation is not alienation from the world. They are «outsiders and foreigners in the dispersion», as it was stressed at the beginning of the letter (1:17) and repeated in 2:11. This somewhat unusual address expresses the situation of the Christians, sketched as outsiders, alien elements. This situation should not be considered in the light of various world escaping false interpretations. It must be carefully distinguished that in 1Peter, the alienation of the Christians from the world around them does not mean negation of the world but it is interpreted as the they belong to God.<sup>65</sup> The address as "foreigner" is determined by the societal conflict situation; the foreignness of the believers is not in its essence derived from a protest against society (cf. 1Pe 2:13). This self-description of the Christians as foreigners does not lead to a sectarian break with reality, but rather it opens a new access to the surrounding world. Because Christ's death has opened access to God (3:18), far from being a "wondering sheep", the believers who follow the example of Christ have (already) «returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls" (2:25).

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<sup>65</sup> That they belong to God is stressed in the whole letter, in 1:1; 2:4, 9 by mean of the concept of the election as integration into the God's people, in 1:3, 23; 2:2 by means of the idea of rebirth as an eschatological renewal of existence.

4.3. In a more personal level, how do you endure your own sufferings? And, in what ways the suffering of Jesus, according to 1Peter, provides reassurance and hope to your present situation?

Jesus' way of responding to the challenge of suffering is his enduring oblation of himself to God. The example of Jesus to follow is very practical and clear. The use of past perfect tense in the three main verbs in 1Pe 2:23 has a pastoral teaching: Jesus did not return evil with evil, at any time he suffered he did not threaten, but he persisted to offer himself to God. The tense of the verb highlights that Jesus endured innocent suffering with his incessant oblation, that is an "enduring disposition" as he entrusted himself to God's will. persevere living out according to the new identity in Christ (1Peter). Thus, to walk in Christ's steps implies to persevere in doing what is good, we must persevere through the sufferings that come to our life, a single grand effort is not enough.

4.4. What are the Christian ways to respond to the provocative invitation of 1Peter 2:18-25? We unite ourselves to Christ through the Spirit, for the service of the Kingdom. The suffering that results from conflict with the society is not an expression of being abandoned by God, but, on the contrary, it confirms belonging to him as a chosen people and holy nation (1Pe 2:9), who receive the Spirit of glory (1Pe 4:14). The weakest members are most defenselessly exposed to the arbitrariness and hostility of the world around them. As disciples, we are also «called to these very things», to live his «way of life among the nations well» (2:12; 3:1) in the spirit of obedience to God's will, and finally we placed in an immediate relationship to the suffering Christ, who gives an example to follow (1Pe 2:21ff.).

In sum, 1Pe 2:22-23 refers to the exemplary manner of Jesus' suffering; and vv. 24-25 highlight the transformative power of that suffering. Jesus Christ is the servant of God, who made the oblation of himself to God through his vicarious suffering and death, so that believers are freed from wrongdoing and from sin, and to be able

to live rightly, to endure suffering «doing what is good» (1Pe 2:20). The freedom of Christ becomes the freedom of any believer who is burdened and wounded amid situations of injustice and in places where they seem to have the least freedom. The portrait of Jesus offered in 1Peter 2:18-25 shows the path the believers should follow. Eventually, as they are supported and guided by the shepherd and guardian of their lives, they need to constantly return to him and so that to be transformed into an unconditional oblation to God's saving purpose.

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