

The suffering Servant

ABSTRACT

Many commentators have searched for the illusive servant of the Lord in the Fourth Servant Song in Isaiah 52:13-53:12. This article points out this problem, but focuses primarily on the question of what the servant did. The proposition is that this can be done only when the work of the servant and the work of Christ mutually inform each other. The idea of place-taking in Isaiah 53 is critically discussed. The exclusive and inclusive elements in place-taking are related to Christological and Pneumatological perspectives. From a Christological perspective, the exclusive elements in place-taking disqualify it as a mere anthropological category, while the Pneumatological perspective allows for inclusive elements in place-taking. Finally, Dostoyevski and Noordmans supply clarifying illustrations and perspectives to explain the inclusive, Pneumatological elements in place-taking, which confronts all humanity with a strange responsibility amidst crime and suffering.

INTRODUCTION

Crime in South Africa calls to question the issue of responsibility and punishment. In our analysis of crime, we often tend to work with the dualism of the guilty criminal and the suffering perpetrator. Isaiah 53 confuses these categories by showing how the rightful punishment of a guilty person was later adjudged to have brought the condemners salvation and to have been something that was done for their guilt. Relating the work of the Servant to the work of Christ radically impacts on our perspective on crime and suffering.

This article will discuss some theories on who the person of the Servant was, but then focus on the work of the Servant in relation to Christ's work for us. This will be followed by a discussion of the idea of *Stellvertretung* and end with a critical appraisal of contributions to the topic by Dostoyevski and Noordmans.

WHO IS THE SERVANT?

Many commentators have speculated on the problem of who the person of the suffering servant is in the Fourth Servant Song in Isaiah 52:13-53:12¹. Some commentators have proposed kingly elements in the servant, while others have found prophetic characteristics in this passage. There are a great variety of interpretations concerning the person of the servant.

Clements says the fate of Judah's last king (Jehoiachin) in the Babylonian prison influenced the idea of the Servant (1998:45). Watts thinks the servant could refer to Israel, Cyrus or Darius, while the sufferer in the Fourth Song cannot be identified with the servant. He places the Fourth Song in the time of Darius (Ezra 3-6; Hag; Zech 1-8) where he is the servant and Zerubbabel, the leader in Jerusalem, is the sufferer due to a confrontation with the local governor (1985:228).

1 Further referred to as Isa. 53 for expediency.

Hermisson regards the universality of the message in the Fourth Servant Song as an indication that it transcends the previous conceptions of a prophet. He contends that there is a cooperation between two servants; namely, the prophet that preach and Israel that receives the message (1996:2, 3). Janowski distinguishes between the references to the servant outside the four Servant Songs and the servant inside the Songs. Outside the four Servant Songs, Isaiah speaks of the servant Jacob/Israel and of the servant Deutero-Isaiah. The prophetic servant in the first three Songs² is identical to the servant outside the Servant Songs. The servant in the first three Songs prophetically calls Jacob/Israel to turn back to God. Since Israel refuses their role as servant, the prophetic servant represents “true Israel” from the First Song through to the Fourth Song (1996:34,35).

Views on the relation between the Fourth Song and Christ also differ greatly. Hermisson does not see the Fourth Song as a prophecy of Christ, but still does not consider it harmful to read the text in this light (1996:24). Melugin does not want to diminish the meaning of the text to its original meaning and therefore sees the Fourth Song as an elaborate pre-figuration of Christ (1998:59). Hofius is of the view that no New Testament passage takes the Fourth Servant Song in its original sense. He contends that Isaiah 53 is explained by Christ and not vice versa (1996:127).

The question remains whether the Fourth Servant Song refers to Christ. The difficulties encountered with this question are mostly either the result of a misunderstanding about what the servant did or a misconception about what Christ did. Maybe one cannot hope to find the answer by looking at who exactly the person of the servant was. Therefore this article will look at what the servant did. At the same time it is necessary to come to terms with what Jesus Christ did in the New Testament. In this way one could by way of reciprocity allow the text on the servant and the texts on Christ to interpret each other.

THE SERVANT’S WORK FOR US

In the Fourth Song the question concerning the deeds of the servant revolves around the interpretation of the notion “for us”. Reventlow proposes that the “for us” of Isaiah 53 (LXX διὰ, περί) is not equivalent to the ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν in the New Testament³ (1998:28). Hofius, on the other hand, illustrates that περί and ὑπὲρ are used interchangeably in the New Testament in speaking about atonement for sins⁴. He considers Romans 4:25 as a summary of the Fourth Song, where the παρεδόθη διὰ τὰ παραπτώματα ἡμῶν is very close to the διὰ τὰς ἁμαρτίας αὐτῶν παρεδόθη in Isaiah. 53:12 (LXX) (1996:120,121).

Janowski, in agreement with Jüngel, points out how the technical term *Stellvertretung*,

2 The first three Songs are found in Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9

3 1 Corinthians 15:3 ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν; 1 Peter 3:18 δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων

4 Hofius proposes that the περί in 1 John 2:2 (καὶ αὐτὸς ἱλασμός ἐστι περί τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν) and 1 John 4:10 (ἱλασμόν περί τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν) and the ὑπὲρ in Hebrews 5:1 (θυσίας ὑπὲρ ἁμαρτιῶν); Hebrews 7:27 (πρότερον ὑπὲρ τῶν ἰδίων ἁμαρτιῶν θυσίας ἀναφέρειν) and Hebrews 9:7 (ὃ προσφέρει ὑπὲρ ἑαυτοῦ) are used in the same sense. This is not convincing since the περί refers to Christ’s work in opposition to the ὑπὲρ, which refers to the work of a priest in all the Hebrew texts except 10:12 (αὐτὸς δὲ μίαν ὑπὲρ ἁμαρτιῶν προσενέγκας θυσίαν). Galatians 1:4, which has a variant reading that suggests that περί and ὑπὲρ could be used interchangeably (τοῦ δόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ/περί τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν). Hofius is aware of the scanty evidence and therefore points out the fact that the textual context also plays an important part in pointing out the idea of atonement (1996:120).

which has taken a specific shape in German theology, has a verbal structure in the Bible⁵. Verbs qualified by the prepositions ἀντί, διά, περί and ὑπέρ or prepositional compounds like ἀντάλλαγμα, ἀντίλυτρον, περικάθαρμα⁶ point towards the idea of *Stellvertretung*. According to Janowski, these terms refer to a situation where a person has done or suffered something “in the place of” another or “to the advantage of” another. The Old Testament uses either a preposition with a verb תחת (נתן) in Isaiah 43:4 or verbs like לשא/לבש (Is 53:4, 11) to express this place-taking (1996:30).

Jungel points out the key texts in the New Testament referring to *Stellvertretung*, Mark 10:45⁷, Galatians 3:13⁸, 2 Corinthians 5:14⁹ and 2 Corinthians 5:21¹⁰. They are used to express place-taking for the benefit of others (1990:251). McLean adds some Biblical and extra-Biblical references to the substitutionary use of ὑπέρ. In Isaiah 43:3, 4 God gives Ethiopia and Seba in place of Israel (ὑπὲρ σοῦ). Clement of Rome writes: “... Jesus Christ has given ... his flesh in place of our flesh (ὑπὲρ τῆς σαρκὸς) and his life instead of our lives (ὑπὲρ τῶν ψυχῶν ἡμῶν) (Clem.R.49.6). In John 11:50 the High Priest says that it is expedient that one man should die in the place of the people (ἀποθάνῃ ὑπὲρ τοῦ λαοῦ) (McLean 1996:111).

Bailey discusses the use of this term and proposes ways of translating this term into English. He chooses to translate the German word *Stellvertretung* with place-taking rather than with the Latinate English “substitution”, in trying to keep the idea of a “place”, “position” or “situation” that is taken up by another person¹¹. He also steers clear of using the terms “substitution” and “representation”, because he agrees with N.T. Wright that they are theologically loaded terms (1998a:225, 231)¹². It is, however, necessary to look at the way this term has been used by theologians to come to a clearer understanding of the problems posed by the question as to what the “for us” means.

Galatians 3:13 says that Christ has “become a curse for us” (γενόμενος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν κατάρα). Bengel says it would be blasphemy to speak of Christ in this way if the apostle did not lead the way (1971:355). Betz connects the “curse” in Galatians 3:13 to 2 Corinthians 5:21, which states that Christ “was made sin for us” (ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν) and sees this as a reference to Isaiah 53:9 where the servant was buried with the wicked even if he knew no sin. He proposes that the unconverted Paul saw the church’s proclamation of such a cursed Christ as blasphemy and that his conversion on the road to Damascus was equivalent to the changing of

5 Luther also did not use this technical term to refer to the work of Christ. In one of his hymns he says “Jhesus Christus Gottes son, an unser stat ist komen” (WA 35:443, 21 original spelling) (Quoted by Jungel 1990:251 and Janowski 1996:30).

6 The words ἀντίλυτρον and περικάθαρμα occurs only once each in the New Testament (1 Titus 2:6 and 1Cor. 4:13 respectively) and ἀντάλλαγμα occurs only twice (Mt. 16:26; Mk 8:37). Only ἀντίλυτρον refers to Jesus Christ’s giving himself as a ransom for all, while in περικάθαρμα in 1 Corinthians 4:13 does not refer directly to substitution.

7 λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν

8 γενόμενος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν κατάρα

9 εἶς ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀπέθανεν

10 ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν

11 This article follows Bailey in the use of the word “place-taking” for *Stellvertretung*.

12 He also points out that *Repräsentation* and *Substitution* also exist in German in distinction from *Stellvertretung*.

opinion of the “we” in Isa 53 from seeing the servant as someone who suffered for his own guilt¹³ to someone that suffered for the salvation of the many. This is a conversion from regarding Jesus according to the flesh to regarding him according to the Spirit (1998:77)¹⁴.

From the earlier perspective of the “we”, one could say Paul was “converted” in a sense from orthodoxy to blasphemy. This perspective gives a different dimension to many other passages in Scriptures. Judas’ betrayal does not seem to be such an obvious trespass, the people choosing Jesus Barabbas in the place of Jesus Christ (Matthew 27:17-21) are not as obviously malicious and the accusations of blasphemy against Jesus by the High Priest would seem justified (Matthew 26:65).

These examples illustrate how the servant Song and the New Testament proclamation of the work of Christ could mutually inform each other. Not only does the Servant Song help to point out the difficult passages in Galatians 3:13 and 2 Corinthians 5:21, but it also enriches one’s understanding of the passage in Philippians 2:6-11¹⁵. The work of the servant teaches us more of the work of Christ. Jesus Christ did not only humiliate himself to become a man and then humiliate himself further to become a servant, but his humiliation on the cross included that he became a sinner in our eyes and one that all considered to be damned and rightly punished by God - for our salvation.

PLACE-TAKING

Whybray is convinced that the terms נשא/כַּבֵּל are used interchangeably and do not refer to vicarious suffering. The servant did not suffer in place of the exiles, because they still suffered the consequences of their guilt. He only shared in their suffering (1978:29-46). Therefore, Isaiah 53 is not a case of vicarious suffering, but of representation.

Hooker is of the opinion that this idea of representation is equivalent to the German term *inkludierende Stellvertretung*. She contends that Isaiah 53 does not speak about the servant that suffered in the place of the guilty ones whereby they would go scot-free. She is convinced that this passage does not refer to “substitutionary” suffering, but rather to shared suffering, which she calls “inclusive place-taking” or “representation”. For her this passage neither refers to “exclusive place-taking” nor to its equivalents “substitutionary suffering” or “vicarious suffering” (1998:95-97).

Hofius questions the possibility of one person taking on him/her the guilt of another person¹⁶. He asks whether the *Existenzstellvertretung*, as described in Isaiah 53, is at all possible.

13 Wentsel points out that the Gospels emphasise Christ’s innocence, Judas (Mt. 27:4) Pilate and his wife (Mt. 27:19, 23) and the murderer (Lk 23:41) (1973:64). Interestingly it is mostly the betrayers and murderers who understands his innocence rather than the law-abiding priests and the people. Concerning the murderers next to Christ on the cross, one could say that only the one saw that Christ took his place.

14 See also how Betz describes this change in Paul from seeing Christ as blasphemer to saviour (1990:215,6).

15 Betz states that the Christ hymn in Philippians 2:6-11 has also been shaped by the structure of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 (1998:78).

16 Friedrich contends, “Die Schuld ist immer die eigene, weil sie dem Ich anhaftet und keiner dem andern sein Ich abtreten kann” (1982:150,151). Janowski is aware of this view that Isa. 53 might well be incomprehensible. He, like Hofius, sees the problem with the interpretation of Isa. 53 in the interpreter’s view on guilt and proposes that “Bevor wir diese subjektzentrierte Schuldtheorie, die den Sünder erbarmungslos gegen sich selbst und blind für den ihm entgegenkommenden “Anderen” macht, kritiklos nachsprechen und den Stellvertretungsgedanken etwa mit G. Friedrich in die theologische Bedeutungslosigkeit verabschieden,

In attempting to show that it is not possible, he distinguishes between the *Exkludierende* and *Inkludierende Stellvertretung*. The Fourth Servant Song would be an example of *Exkludierende Stellvertretung* if it is interpreted within a deed-consequence framework as an example of one person bearing the sins (as wrongful actions) of others without their involvement by any means. A more profound view on sin as the fundamental direction of a person's being in relationship to God, would make *Exkludierende Stellvertretung* humanly impossible or at least theologically incomprehensible. Christ, however, in bearing our sin (condition of sin) is an example of *Inkludierende Stellvertretung*, whereby he takes our place, without excluding us by this place-taking. *Stellvertretung* is therefore not a human possibility and can only be done in the way that Jesus Christ took our place. This place-taking is therefore not a question of taking on the consequences of peoples' deeds, but the bearing of their whole sinful existence. This would result in a new creative act where the human person becomes a new creation (καὶνὴ κτίσις). Only Jesus Christ, the Son of God can do this (1996:112-123).

Hooker maintains that what Hofius finds in the New Testament, she has already found in the Old Testament namely: inclusive place-taking. From the discussion it is obvious that she does not understand this term in the same way as Hofius does. For her the inclusiveness refers to representation or the sharing of suffering and sin, while for Hofius it refers to the way Christ includes the sinner by bearing the whole sinful existence of the sinner. Hofius' view on sin would also make Hooker's view of inclusive place-taking impossible, since only Christ is able to take on the sinful existence of a sinner.

Sölle works with a scheme where our identity is formed between the poles of dependence and responsibility (freedom) (1956:56-61). She distinguishes between *Stellvertretung* and *Ersetzung*, where *Stellvertretung* has the preconditions of personality and temporality, while *Ersetzung* is an almost mechanical spatial taking of another's place, which demands no relationship and does not allow for the proper relation between dependence and responsibility. She strongly opposes the exclusive nature of *Ersetzung*, because she sees Christ as our representative who does not take away our freedom, but in taking our place temporarily, makes it possible for us to find our own identity in our *unersetzliche* person-hood (1965:114-116). She positively portrays Ritschl's inclusive place-taking, where the congregation must find their own place in relation to what Christ, as representative of the congregation, has done in their place.

Although it is within the framework of identity and freedom, her view on *Stellvertretung* is in line with inclusive place-taking¹⁷ in the sense of Hooker, while she opposes exclusive place-taking in the sense of *Ersetzung*.

Bonhoeffer emphasises that *Stellvertretung* is a theological and not an ethical term in his earlier work *Sanctorum Communio*¹⁸. Sölle says that in his later works *Stellvertretung* tends to become an anthropological category for the church, where taking one another's place and service to others almost biologically trickles down from God to Christ to the life of persons in

sollten wir intensiver über alternative Verstehensmöglichkeiten nachdenken." (Janowski 1996:29).

17 She also believes that Luther did not distinction between imputed righteousness and effective righteousness, but rather distinguished them both from self-righteousness. This she sees as an indication that also Luther held an inclusive view on place-taking. (1965:94-98). Her view of Luther's anthropology is, however, doubtful (1965:84).

18 "Die Idee der Stellvertretung...ist keine ethische Möglichkeit oder Norm, sondern allein die Realität der göttlichen Liebe zur Gemeinde, sie ist kein ethischer, sondern ein theologischer Begriff" (1969:107).

the congregation (Sölle 1965:106)¹⁹. For Bonhoeffer Christ's place-taking for us qualitatively differ from human place-taking since the " qualitative difference between the acts of Jesus and our own, between the essential sinlessness of Jesus, whereby Jesus takes guilt on himself, and the essential original sin, which pollutes all humanly responsible action, remains..." and that "...[i]n the sinless guilt of Jesus Christ, all responsible place-taking action has its origin"²⁰.

He does not use the terms *Exkludierende* and *Inkludierende Stellvertretung*, but it would seem that it is no natural possibility in mankind outside of the place-taking action of Jesus Christ. The inclusive element for him is in the fact that we partake in what Christ did, but not for our own sin and suffering, but for others.

Jüngel emphasises the Christological character of *Stellvertretung* by pointing out that *Stellvertretung* is a work of God²¹ and that this perspective radically criticises Bonhoeffer²² and Sölle²³ for their anthropological and ecclesiological reduction of this term. (1990:246).

Barth refers to Galatians 3:13 to show the exclusiveness of Christ's place-taking by being made a curse for us to free us from the curse – this is done for us, but without us²⁴. This exempts us from having to bear or partially bear the curse. Its meaning is not dependent on anything we have to do on the basis of this event (1961:231).

Whybray, Hooker and Sölle do not allow for any exclusive element in place-taking. Bonhoeffer sees place-taking as something exclusively done by Christ, but which to some extent includes the responsibility of the believer and the congregation. Jungel and Barth emphasises the fact that place-taking as a work of God is exclusive to the extent that it was done and is sufficient without any contribution from us.

Hofius convincingly points out the inclusive nature of the suffering of Christ "for us". This inclusive nature, however, does not refer to representation where humans have to partake in the suffering, but where they are included in what Christ did by faith. However, he too quickly

19 Sölle warns that this structure of place-taking as service can become a refined form of holding power over and patronising people since they are the objects whose places must be taken and this takes away their identity and responsibility (1965:107).

20 "... qualitative Unterschied zwischen dem Handeln Jesu und unserem Handeln, zwischen der wesenhaften Sündlosigkeit, in der Jesus Schuld auf sich nimmt, und der wesenhaften erbsündigkeit, von der alles menschliche verantwortliche Handeln vergiftet ist, bleibt bestehen..." and that "In dem sündlos schuldigen Jesus Christus hat nun jedes stellvertretend verantwortliche Handeln seinen Ursprung" (1966:469).

21 Jungel praises Heinrich Vogel that he attempted to respect the mystery of the place-taking of Christ (1990:247).

22 Dahill agrees when she says that Bonhoeffer's "interest is in developing the implications for Christians of their own vocation to Christlike action in the world. This is obviously in no way unbiblical; yet by his great emphasis on Jesus as essentially "for others," making us "persons for others" as well, he tends to overlook Jesus as, crucially, for me. The pro me-ity of Lutheran christological spirituality is not entirely absent from Bonhoeffer's thinking, but it clearly takes a back seat" (2007:4). She further emphasises that this outlook results in women accepting their abuse in trying to follow Christ. With Bonhoeffer *Stellvertretung* does run the risk of becoming something anthropological when he says that after what Christ has done, "Das Gesetz der Stellvertretung gilt von nun an über seine ganze Gemeinde" (1965:213).

23 Fleischer says about Sölle, "dass sie die Entwicklung der Frage nach Identität und die Fragen der Religion in einem Zusammenhang sieht, so als würde die gleiche Frage hier und dort in verschiedenen Sprachen behandelt.

24 Sölle criticises Barth for his objectivist exclusive view that place-taking was done for us, without us (1965:94-98).

disregards the disturbing, yet poignant facet of the exclusiveness of the suffering of the servant. What about the fact that Isaiah 53 refers to the bearing of the sickness of others - Isaiah 53:3 reads: “he bore our sickness”²⁵. *Existenzstellvertretung* is even more incomprehensible with regard to the disease of persons than the taking on of their sin. One could possibly imagine someone taking on the consequences of the deeds of another, but bearing someone else’s sickness would seem impossible. Even saying that Christ bore our sins is more comprehensible than saying he took our place in suffering disease.

This exclusive nature of the work of the servant with regard to the sins and the sickness of others forms a great part of the devastating truth of place-taking.

Janowski provides some help to understand the problem of the inclusive and exclusive nature of place-taking. He is intrigued by the fact that the servant took the place of others while they were completely unaware that this was the case. He makes the distinction between the way the “we” saw the servant in the past and the way they look at him in the present. Previously, within their deed-consequence view on guilt and punishment, they saw the servant as one punished by God for his own sin and that is why they ostracised him. Within their present understanding they realised that he actually bore their guilt and not his own. The fascinating point is that the “we” saw the servant as one who was punished by God and not only punished, but rightly punished²⁶ (1996:40, 41). The fact that the on-lookers were filled with disgust at the sight of the servant highlights the exclusive nature of the place-taking²⁷. In the turning away of their faces from the servant, they physically showed that they had no responsibility towards the servant, which correlates with the fact that they saw the servant as one punished by God and considered him to be a criminal (Isa 53:12).

Jesus Christ has too easily been portrayed as someone with whom one has compassion on the cross. The “we” did not see him as a victim, but as one justly punished by God for his own blasphemy (Mt. 26:65, 66). Only through the eyes of faith did a few see him taking their place – not only their sinful deeds, but their sinful existence, which includes their sickness²⁸.

The dramatic turn from seeing the servant as a failure punished by God to seeing the servant as bearing the suffering of many, is of pivotal importance. It is the fundamental turn from the exclusiveness to the inclusiveness of the suffering. It is because the “we” saw the punishment of the servant as God’s rightful punishment that Isaiah 53 is “exclusive”.

25 The word כָּלַח mostly refer to physical problems in the Old Testament (e.g. 1 Kgs 17:17, 2 Kgs 1:2).

26 Janowski shows that this punishment of God forms part of the *Stellvertretung* by the Servant. Isaiah 53:6 says that God laid (נָשָׂא) our iniquities on him and Isaiah 53:10 states the offensive truth that God planned (צָוָה) to place the punishment on the Servant (1996:39, 40). This plan does not seem to be a necessary part of “representation” as proposed by Whybray and “*inkludierende Stellvertretung*” according to Hooker.

27 Hermission points out the incomprehensible nature of God’s plan when he says, “Was für die ‘Vielen’ nur das erbärmliche Ende einer Elendsgestalt war, das lag gerade in Jahwes Heilsplan: Gott bekennt sich zu seinem gescheiterten Knecht und wird durch sein Scheitern die Vielen zum Heil bringen und so den Knecht Erfolg und Lohn – das ist die Gewißheit des letzten Textes” (Hermission 1996:24, 25). How the defeat of the servant could have become a success is part of the wonder of God’s plan as expressed by Mesters, “Welch seltsamer Sieg!... Zu unserer Denkweise will das nicht recht passen. Wir können das in unsere Vorstellungen nicht einordnen. Was wir uns vorstellen können, ist ein Sieg des Großen über den Kleinen, ja auch des Kleinen über den Großen. Wir können uns ein Unentschieden vorstellen. Aber eine Niederlage, die ein Sieg ist? Das ist etwas ‘was niemals je geschehen ist’ (Jes 52:15)” (Mesters 1982:100).

28 Relating place-taking to the people Jesus healed, would entail that He took the place of the blind, the deaf and the lame that he healed.

Bailey points out that Janowski's interpretation does not fit either the idea of representation or substitution, but includes both of them to some extent. The "we" were in a sense excluded originally, but after their realisation of what was done on their behalf, they are included in the event. He continues by indicating that this realisation of what someone else has done for you long after you can do anything about it is not a cheap way of evading guilt, but heart-wrenching. Bailey proposes that the disciples also did not realise to what extent Jesus carried their sins on the cross, before the coming of the Holy Spirit (Bailey 1998a:248).

This remark points to the possibility that the exclusive and inclusive elements of the place-taking of Christ for sinners can better be understood if it is viewed from a Christological and a Pneumatological perspective. The Christological perspective would do justice to the exclusive elements in place-taking, while the Pneumatological view would be one in which the guilty persons for whom this work has been done, are included. In a way one could say that the Spirit includes the sinner through pointing out the exclusive nature of the work of Christ. This could be called a Pneumatological finesse. The way from the exclusiveness of the place-taking toward its inclusiveness is not a hermeneutical one, but essentially a Pneumatological one. It is a truth of faith, which implies knowing Christ according to the Spirit²⁹, not according to the flesh.

The exclusive nature of the place-taking of Christ is revealed by the Spirit in the fact that the servant bore the sickness so that they would not have to bear it. This is the opposite of representation as proposed by Weaver and Hooker, who presuppose that the punishment for the sin and suffering that the people went through, were shared by the servant. What if the servant bore the judgment and disease in their place, so that they did not suffer it at all?

This perspective becomes clearer when one sees the place-taking not directly in relation to personal bad deeds or sickness, but in relation to the totality of expressions of sin and suffering in the world. When one sees the suffering of the servant in relation to Christ's words at his baptism: "... thus it is necessary to fulfil all righteousness ..." (Mt 3:15) the consequences force us beyond all evident categories into the realm of faith.

The Spirit shows us that not only did Jesus Christ take our place, but also that every sin and consequence of sin (punishment) and every disease and sickness is born "for us" by other people³⁰. Those from whom we turn our faces take our place in walking these paths so that we do not. This is a reality of faith³¹ and something that truly defies our wildest imaginings (Isa 52:15).

In the work of Dostoyevski and Noordmans they attempt to illustrate this truth by pointing out how people take one another's place in sin and suffering.

29 The blindness of the servant (Israel) (Isa 42:19) is part of the cause of the suffering of the Servant in Isaiah 53, which critically oppose the idea of shared suffering.

30 It would be consistent to say that the children who died in Jesus' place at the hand of Herod at his birth (Mt 2:17) also took his place.

31 Levinas, going against philosophy of the free subject, shows that place-taking, especially with reference to suffering, is not the free choice or an attribute of a person, but the existence of the "self" is defined by the impossibility to detach itself. The acceptance of suffering and guilt is the essential being of freedom. Substitution is when the "self" takes the place of the other and returns to the "self". The "self" is then driven so deep into itself that it puts itself in the place of everyone that pushes it into the no-Place, which means that the "self" is "on the other side of essence". This is a form of non-being, which cannot be described in ontological terminology. The subject is the one that turns the other cheek "... omdat daarin de belediging jegens mij, de oerverwonding en de terugkeer naar zichzelf plaatsvindt waarin ik verantwoordelijk ben voor wat ik niet heb gewild, wat in absolute zin wil zeggen, voor de vervolging die ik onderga" (De Boer 1989:29, 30, 53).

Dostoyevski touches on the theme of the servant and place-taking in quite an obscure way. Although this theme is present in the whole of the *Brothers Karamazov*, it is poignantly related to the servant in Alyosha's recollection of the life of the Elder Zossima as he told it to the monks on the night before he died.

The Elder Zossima recounts how he was greatly influenced by his brother Markel. Markel became an atheist under the influence of a university professor and started scoffing at the Easter and Holy Communion, but changed dramatically after he got severely ill from consumption. He would say strange things telling the servants that he ought to wait on them and wanted to be the servant of the servants. He further told them that every one is responsible for everyone else in every way, and he most of all. He would even ask the birds sitting in front of his window for forgiveness for having sinned against them. His mother said that he took many sins on himself and she could not understand why he had to accuse himself before everyone seeing as there are many murderers and robbers in the world. Markel would admit that he could not explain it, but one day near the end, Markel took his younger brother (Father Zossima) by the shoulders, looked at him intently for a long time and said, "Well, now run away and play, live for me!".

Father Zossima recounts how these events came to influence his whole life. As a cadet he lived a life of drunkenness and debauchery. One day he challenged an innocent man to a duel. The day before the duel, he hit his servant twice in the face out of frustration. The next morning his brother's words came into his head concerning servants and masters and that all are responsible for all. These thoughts crushed him so that he wept and went to his servant and begged him for forgiveness. He then recounts how on the morning of the duel he did not return the shot of his opponent, but fired his shot into the woods. This behaviour caused his fellow cadets to criticise him severely, but they accepted his behaviour when he said he was going to become a monk.

Zossima then recounts the story of a man that came to visit him several times after having heard his story. After almost killing Zossima, the man confessed in great distress that he had murdered a woman whom he had loved and who had scorned his advances. He got away with the murder, because a servant had been blamed for her death in his place and had died soon after. He agreed with Zossima that all were responsible for all, but only now after many years of suffering confessed his guilt. He died soon after. Zossima tells how he had entered the monastery, but says that he remembered "the much-suffering servant of God, Mikhail" (1958:368) daily in his prayers to that day.

This is Dostoyevski's only direct mention of the servant, but throughout the life of Father Zossima the theme of place-taking is central. His brother Markel tells him that all are responsible for all and that Zossima has to live for him (in his place). Mikhail, the murderer, understands these incomprehensible statements better than anyone, because he lives in the place of the woman he had killed and the servant that was blamed for the murder and died soon after. He is, however, called the suffering servant of God. Zossima's appraisal of him seems to indicate that he bore Zossima's guilt. If one were to say that all are responsible for all, then Markel's atheism and Mikhail's murder are both Zossima's responsibility. They bore these things for him.

In relating Mikhail to the servant, Dostoyevski illustrates how the guilty sufferer could bear the guilt for others. Dostoyevski makes connections that seem impossible, but seem to echo something of the wonder of the servant's suffering in Isaiah 53.

Noordmans shows how the refusal to live in God's Kingdom of place-taking, where deed and consequence do not follow each other logically, is to bear the consequences of your own guilt directly:

He who does not want to work with God's place-taking, is condemned to experience the consequences of this refusal. His own sin and guilt attaches itself to him all the more when he does not want to bear others' sin and guilt. It becomes unbreakable laws that leave him no will or way towards the good any longer. That is the Biblical doctrine of original sin. With this, the Bible does not take on any elements of fate in itself. The Bible does not go back from the deed to the resolution. That is why one must not apply this doctrine to the beginning, but to the whole of life or to the end. Original sin is no particular coincidence, but social tragedy. It is the result of the refusal of place-taking³² (Noordmans 1990:219).

Place-taking is the opposite of fate. As believers we do not suffer the twists and turns of fate, but see our own life with all its gracious gifts and all is suffering in the light of Christ's place-taking and therefore in relation to all place-taking. The Spirit shows us that the exclusive elements in the work of Christ and in so doing, includes us in all suffering and punishment. Noordmans calls this the great mystery of place-taking that breaks the hardest of hearts (Noordmans 1990:308).

The alternative to this belief would be bearing the consequences of our own guilt and thus living in the deed-consequence framework, which allows for no redemption or atonement. Suffering for others is salvation, suffering for one's own sin is condemnation. Bonhoeffer agrees in this regard when he says that everyone becomes responsible through the fact that Jesus took on himself the guilt of mankind. Any attempt to evade one's responsibility amounts to disconnecting oneself from the redemptive mystery of Christ's bearing of guilt. In placing one's personal innocence above the accountability towards others, one heaps guilt on oneself and is blind to the fact that true innocence is expressed in becoming part of the sin of others for their sake.³³.

The way of faith is one of place-taking. It means living with the words of Jesus at his baptism: "... thus it is necessary to fulfil all righteousness ..." Everyone has a cross to bear, but not as atonement for our sin, or the sins of any other person, but as the part the Spirit has graciously given us to bear to fulfil all righteousness.

This work as co-workers of God Noordmans calls child's play because "...[i]t is the mimicking of God's work and yet it still remains true that the work has already been completed.

32 "Wie aan Gods plaatsbekleding niet wil meewerken, die is veroordeeld de consequenties van die weigering te ondervinden. Zijn eigen zonde en schuld hechten zich dan des te meer aan hem vast, wanneer hij die van anderen niet wil helpen dragen. Zij worden tot onverbreekbare wetten, die hem geen wil en weg ten goede meer overlaten. Dat is de betekenis van de bijbelse leer der erfzonde en erfschuld. Daarmee neemt de bijbel geen elementen van noodlot in zich op. De Schrift gaat hier niet van de handeling naar de schikking terug. Daarom moet men die leer ook niet op het begin, maar op het geheel van het leven of op het einde toepassen. Erfzonde is geen particuliere toevalligheid, maar sociale tragiek. Zij is het gevolg van de weigering der plaatsbekleding" (Noordmans 1990: 219).

33 "Weil Jesus die Schuld aller Menschen auf sich nahm, darum wird jeder verantwortlich Handelnde schuldig. Wer sich in der Verantwortung der Schuld entziehen will, löst sich aus der letzten Wirklichkeit der Geschichte, aus dem erlösenden Geheimnis des Schuldtragens Jesu Christi und hat keinen Anteil an der göttlichen Rechtfertigung, die über diesem Ereignis liegt. Er stellt seine persönliche Unschuld über die Verantwortung für die Menschen und ist blind für die heillosere Schuld, die er gerade damit auf sich lädt, blind auch dafür, daß sich wirkliche Unschuld gerade darin erweist, daß sie um des anderen Menschen willen in die Gemeinschaft seiner Schuld eingeht. (Bonhoeffer 1966:469).

Christ remains the place-taker, not only for the suffering, but also for the work³⁴ (Noordmans 1979:316). This is echoed in the words of Markel to Zossima just before he died, “Well, now run away and play, live for me!” This illustrates the exclusive element in place-taking, which bears on the fulfilled work of Christ.

This burden is more bearable than the burden of our own sin. This is a life lived on the foundation of what Christ has done not on what we can do. The Spirit, however, includes us in this work beyond any measure of our own guilt. In this way, through the body of Christ³⁵ bearing our sin and sickness, we are connected to every sinner and every sick person³⁶ – and all are responsible for all.

Seeing ourselves as excluded from the servant’s punishment and suffering, just like seeing ourselves excluded from sinners’ punishment and sufferers’ disease, is the result of our sinful blindness (like the servant Israel) to the exclusive work of Christ into which the Spirit includes us by faith.

The implications of *Existenzstellvertretung* are quite devastating. It would mean that the murderer’s (Cain, Gen 4:8-14) the rapist’s (Amnon, 2 Sam 13:12-29) and the betrayer’s (Judas Mt. 27:3-5) suffering were done for me (in my place). Not only the suffering of those who are evidently innocent sufferers are done for me, but also the suffering of the guilty ones. Those who are rightly punished by God for their sin, they bear our sin. This is the highly illogical character of the servant’s place-taking. Only the Spirit can convince us through the exclusive work of Christ that we are included in this place-taking.

CONCLUSION

The place-taking of the servant and the place-taking of Christ mutually inform each other. Christ, who would appear to us as a sinner and sufferer who is rightly punished by God, is the one who bears it for us. He takes our place completely before we could chose or ask and this points to the exclusive elements in place-taking. When the Spirit includes us by opening our blind eyes to faith, we see that we are included in what Christ has done. Through faith we see that countless others also exclusively take our place. This brings us to the belief that all are responsible for all.

This belief has many implications for living in crime-ridden South Africa today. It means the prisons and the hospitals are all our responsibility, because He “was crushed for sins... because of his wounds we have been healed”.

34 [“Het is een nadoen van Gods arbeid en onder alles door blijft het waar dat het werk volbracht is. Christus blijft de plaatsbekleder, niet alleen voor het lijden, maar ook voor de arbeid.”]

35 Eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ is living off the bodies of others. This would amount to sheer cannibalism of which the early church was accused and explains the disgust of modern people at the idea of the atoning death. Selma Lagerlof, in her book “De banneling” (Dutch Translation), tells the story of a fisherman’s son who went on an expedition to the North Pole. They were caught in a storm and resorted to cannibalism to survive. On his return home he was shunned by all the people. The parish priest could also not contain his disgust at what the son has done to survive. Place-taking does elicit disgust in us, but would this disgust not be the result of our own blindness at our own cannibalism? At the end of the story it becomes clear that the son was the only one on the expedition that did not cannibalise his mates, because he fell unconscious. In this regard the sketch by Kokoschka (1945), depicting the children who had died from the cold and hunger during Christmas eating Christ’s flesh from the cross, is a poignant illustration of the disgust and comfort afforded by Christ’s atoning death.

36 I had a friend, Pieter Bezuidenhout, who lived and died in a wheelchair for me.

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KEY WORDS

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