

# THE SERVANT OF GOD

by NORMAN HILLYER

**I**N this paper, which was originally read to a New Testament Study Group in Tyndale House, Cambridge, Mr. Hillyer, Warden of Ponsbourne College, explores the influence of the Old Testament theme of the "Binding of Isaac" on the Servant Christology of the New Testament.

## I. INTRODUCTION

**W**E are assured that there is no area of the primitive Christian life of faith which was not stamped and moulded by the "Servant"-Christology,<sup>1</sup> even though the actual term *παῖς θεοῦ* appears but seldom. *παῖς* occurs once in Matthew and four times in Acts;<sup>2</sup> *παῖς κυρίου* is in Barnabas 6: 1 and *παῖς μου* in Barnabas 9: 2 (in both instances the phrases are deliberately inserted into OT quotations). Up to A.D. 160 *παῖς θεοῦ* is found in Gentile Christian literature only in three writings (eleven instances),<sup>3</sup> and thereafter disappears. But it is highly significant that nearly every time the title is in a stereotyped liturgical formula, *διὰ ἰησοῦ τοῦ παιδός σου*. The expression and the concept must therefore be extremely primitive.<sup>4</sup>

The OT basis of the "Servant"-Christology is usually sought in the Servant Songs, a task not made easier by a concept which in Isaiah is by turn corporate and individual, and when corporate applied both to the nation of Israel and to a godly remnant.

The Septuagint usually renders 'ebed *Yahweh* by *παῖς*, a word which properly means "son" and secondarily "servant". Generally speaking, *δοῦλος* would no doubt be avoided as it often refers to one slave-born. In Isaiah's Servant Songs *παῖς* occurs five times (Is. 42: 1; 49: 6; 50: 10; 52: 13; 53: 2 [*παιδίον*]) and *δοῦλος* twice (Is. 49: 3, 5). Although Jesus never speaks of Himself as *παῖς*, others apply the term to Him in Acts 3 and 4. In Phil. 2: 7 it is said that Christ Jesus took the form of a *δοῦλος*. Paul possibly has Is. 53: 2 in mind, although in fact the LXX there uses *παιδίον*. Apart from this one instance in Philippians, *δοῦλος* is never applied to Jesus in

<sup>1</sup> W. Zimmerli and J. Jeremias, *The Servant of God*, E.T. (SCM, 1957), 98.

<sup>2</sup> Mt. 12: 18 (quoting Is. 42: 1); Acts 3: 13, 26; 4: 27, 30.

<sup>3</sup> Didache 9: 2, 3; 10: 2, 3; 10: 7 (Coptic); 1 Clement 59: 2-4; Mart. Polycarp 14: 1-3; 10: 2.

<sup>4</sup> Zimmerli, *op. cit.*, 83.

the NT.<sup>5</sup> The nearest occasion is when He Himself portrays His ministry in terms of slave-service in the feet-washing episode in the Upper Room, and adds the comment: "Α δούλος is not greater than his κύριος" (John 13: 16).

R. H. Fuller<sup>6</sup> has argued that while Jesus admittedly made no use of the actual title, He did take the OT figure of the Servant as the pattern for His own filial obedience to His Father. Fuller assumed, as do most commentators, that the *bath qol* at the baptism of Jesus echoes the words addressed to the Servant in Isaiah 42: 1. But from this he goes on to conclude that the "Servant"-Christology, for that reason, must be derived from the Servant Songs of Isaiah. In a later book<sup>7</sup> Fuller denies that Jesus understood Himself to be the Servant of the Lord, let alone the suffering atoning Servant of Isaiah 53. These interpretations "must have come from the early Church", though, as he concedes, the very early Church.

Though from a different standpoint, Oscar Cullmann<sup>8</sup> is another to begin a discussion of the "Servant"-Christology from the baptism of Jesus. He points out that this event includes the notions of representation and covenant, which are basic to the OT concept of the Servant of God.<sup>9</sup> Cullmann is hardly so convincing when he goes on to deduce from this that Jesus for the first time realized His call to be the 'ebed Yahweh as He came up from the waters of Jordan and heard the heavenly voice echoing Isaiah 42: 1. While the baptism itself is not mentioned in the Fourth Gospel, John the Baptist is no doubt referring to it when he points to Jesus as "the lamb of God" (John 1: 29, 36). This expression too could allude to the Servant concept, if the word "Lamb" represents the Aramaic *talya* with its double sense of lamb and boy or servant.<sup>10</sup> The explanatory clause about "taking away sin" may reflect a similar 'ebed phrase in Isaiah 53: 12, and Cullmann takes this as supporting evidence for his thesis.

## II. THE BINDING OF ISAAC IN JUDAISM

But the Servant Songs of Isaiah are not the only possible OT

<sup>5</sup> In the NT believers are regularly described by the term δούλος, but never by πραις; cf. Acts 4: 30.

[In Is. 53: 11 LXX "my righteous servant" is translated εὖ δουλεύοντα. Ed.]

<sup>6</sup> *The Mission and Achievement of Jesus* (S.C.M., 1954), 86-95.

<sup>7</sup> *The Foundations of NT Christology* (Lutterworth, 1965), 115-119.

<sup>8</sup> *The Christology of the NT*, E.T. (S.C.M., 1963), 64ff.

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 42: 6; 49: 8; 53: 10.

<sup>10</sup> Zimmerli, *op. cit.*, 82; A. Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the NT* (S.C.M., 1961), 180f., 228f.

source of the "Servant"-Christology. In recent years some writers<sup>11</sup> have been drawing attention to the extraordinary place in Jewish theology occupied by Abraham's offering of Isaac (Gn. 22), an event which in the Rabbinic view, according to Edersheim,<sup>12</sup> was the basis of all sacrifices. This paper seeks to show something of Jewish thought on that subject, usually known as the '*Aqedah* or "Binding" (of Isaac), and to indicate how it may suggest another aspect of the OT background of the "Servant"-Christology.

The '*Aqedah* undoubtedly played a prominent part in the doctrinal development of Judaism.<sup>13</sup> By consenting to offer to God his "only" son,<sup>14</sup> Abraham demonstrated his perfect love, and his example became the basis of the whole Jewish theology of the love of God, though it is clear that some of the Rabbis were a little hesitant. For example, one declared, fairly enough, that it was unreasonable for a father to slay his son with his own hand.<sup>15</sup>

But these Rabbinic doubts are far from common. On the contrary, one Midrash describes Isaac as a "perfect sacrifice",<sup>16</sup> while another boldly declares: "Isaac lay bound upon the altar like a bunch of grapes (an image for ransom money), because he expiates the sins of Israel".<sup>17</sup>

The "ashes" of Isaac (that is, of course, the ashes of the substituted ram) play a soteriological role in various Rabbinic texts. Ashes are strewn on the head on fast days so that God may be mindful of the ashes of Isaac;<sup>18</sup> or on the prayer-desk in the synagogue, as a means of obtaining forgiveness of sins.<sup>19</sup> The ashes of Isaac lie on the ground on which the Temple at Jerusalem was built,<sup>20</sup> and God regards them as though they were piled up on the altar of sacrifice.<sup>21</sup> Even today Jews pray standing on the ashes of the lamb that was bound.<sup>22</sup> When mention is made of the Binding of Isaac, God "gets

<sup>11</sup> Notably H. J. Schoeps, *Paul*, E.T. (Lutterworth, 1961), 141-149, and "The Sacrifice of Isaac in Paul's Theology" in *J.B.L.*, 1xv (1946), 385-392, where he lists the main writings.

<sup>12</sup> *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Longmans, 1900), I, 343.

<sup>13</sup> G. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism* (E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1961), 193ff.

<sup>14</sup> Esau does not count, for he was "born after the flesh" (Gal. 4: 29).

<sup>15</sup> Genesis R. 56 on 22: 9. Most of the Midrash material on the Sacrifice of Isaac is collected in Parasha 56 of Genesis Rabba.

<sup>16</sup> Genesis R. 64 on 26: 3.

<sup>17</sup> Cant. R. on 1: 14.

<sup>18</sup> Taanith 11.1.

<sup>19</sup> Jer. Taanith 11.65a.

<sup>20</sup> Zebahim 62a.

<sup>21</sup> Tanhuma Wayyera 23.

<sup>22</sup> Schoeps, *Paul*, *op. cit.*, 145.

up from the throne of judgment and sits down on the throne of compassion".<sup>23</sup>

The Mishnah uses the incident in the special invocation for fast days: "May He who answered Abraham on Mount Moriah also answer us".<sup>24</sup> One reason for the New Year custom of blowing the ram's horn in the synagogue is that God may recall the 'Aqedah and grant forgiveness to the seed of Isaac.<sup>25</sup>

The Holy One, blessed be He, said: "Sound before Me a ram's horn so that I may remember on your behalf the Binding of Isaac, the son of Abraham, and account it to you as if you had bound yourselves before Me."<sup>26</sup>

It may have been to encourage the ultimate faithfulness to Judaism that this reference to Isaac was introduced into the New Year service.<sup>27</sup>

Although the OT restricts Isaac's part to that of a passive victim, Rabbinic literature frequently credits him with an active and prominent role in the story of the 'Aqedah. The characteristic virtue of Isaac is that he *bound himself* upon the altar<sup>28</sup> as a willing sacrifice, a proof that he loved God with all his heart, in accordance with Dt. 6: 5. A slightly different account reports that Isaac begged his father to bind him firmly, so that he might not tremble and thus invalidate the sacrifice.<sup>29</sup> Instead of a mere "lad" (*na'ar*) as in the Genesis version, Isaac is a mature man of 37 years.<sup>30</sup>

In Rabbinic teaching in general, death is often interpreted sacrificially as a sin-offering. The death of certain pious individuals is thought of as atoning for their own sins,<sup>31</sup> or for the sins of others.<sup>32</sup> For example, "the death of the high priest is an atonement"<sup>33</sup>—thus when that event took place the slayer was allowed to vacate his city of refuge (Nu. 35: 25).

But Jewish thought on the doctrine of death gives a special place to the 'Aqedah. For instance, Pseudo-Philo<sup>34</sup> brings out three points. First, Isaac offered his life freely and willingly. Secondly, his sacrifice is related to other sacrifices offered to God and accepted by Him for

<sup>23</sup> C. G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, *Rabbinic Anthology* (Macmillan, 1938), 228.

<sup>24</sup> Taanith 2.4.

<sup>25</sup> Lev Gillet, *Communion in the Messiah* (Lutterworth, 1942), 91.

<sup>26</sup> Rosh Hashanah 16a.

<sup>27</sup> Genesis R. 56.9 on 22: 13.

<sup>28</sup> Sifre Deut. 32.

<sup>29</sup> Pirke R. Eliezer 31.

<sup>30</sup> Genesis R. 56.8 on 22: 11. Another version says 26 years.

<sup>31</sup> Sanhedrin 44b.

<sup>32</sup> Sukkah 20a; Yebamoth 70a.

<sup>33</sup> Jer. Yoma 7; Makkoth 11b.

<sup>34</sup> *Biblical Antiquities* 32: 2-4.

the sins of men. Thirdly, Isaac was made aware of the beneficent effect of his self-offering upon future generations. Ps-Philo believes that by Isaac's unique example God conferred upon human nature its true dignity, the dignity of a divinely-required and freely-offered self-sacrifice. The blessing resulting from it would extend to all men for ever, and they would understand that they possessed the same humanity which was made holy by Isaac's sacrifice.

This interpretation of the *'Aqedah* becomes clearer when it is compared with the Haggadah of the angels' criticism of the creation of man. When in the Genesis story God said, "Let us make man . . .", the angels are supposed to have replied with the words of Psalm 8: 5-8: "What is man that Thou shouldest remember him? and the son of man that Thou shouldest visit him? Yet Thou has made him little less than God . . . Thou hast made him to rule over all the works of Thy hand, and put all things beneath his feet . . ." One explanation of "man" and "son of man" is that they refer to Abraham and Isaac:

When the Holy One, blessed be He, sought to create the world, the ministering angels said to Him, "What is man that Thou shouldest remember him?" God replied: "Ye shall see a father slay his son, and the son consenting to be slain, to sanctify My name."<sup>36</sup>

Thus through the merits of the *'Aqedah*, Abraham and Isaac vindicated man's peculiar dignity among creatures, a dignity envied even by angels.

The value of atonement depended upon the shedding of blood, without which there was no forgiveness, a dogma repeated three times in the Talmud,<sup>36</sup> in words strikingly similar to Heb. 9: 22.

Although without Scriptural foundation, the new doctrine arose that Isaac did in fact shed his blood. It was because God saw "the blood of the Binding of Isaac" that the first-born sons of Israel were saved on the night of the first Passover.<sup>37</sup> For the same reason, the Israelites were preserved when they entered the Red Sea,<sup>38</sup> forgiveness obtained for Israel after the sin of the golden calf,<sup>39</sup> Jerusalem shielded from the Destroying Angel following the sinful census of David, and deliverance secured despite the plot of Haman.<sup>40</sup>

It followed from the belief in the actual shedding of blood that, as in Hebrews 11: 17-19, Isaac was regarded also as the prototype of the resurrected man:

<sup>36</sup> Tanhuma Wayyera 18; Sotah 6.5; Genesis R. 56.3.

<sup>36</sup> Yoma 5a; Menahoth 93b; Zebahim 6a.

<sup>37</sup> Mekhilta 8a on Exodus 12: 13.

<sup>38</sup> Mekhilta 30a on Exodus 14: 15.

<sup>39</sup> Exodus R. 44.5 on 32: 13.

<sup>40</sup> Prayer of Esther in Targum Esther.

Through the merits of Isaac, who offered himself upon the altar, the Holy One, blessed be He, will raise the dead. For it is written (Ps. 102: 21), "From heaven the Lord looked upon the earth . . . to deliver the children of death."<sup>41</sup>

When the blade touched his neck, the soul of Isaac fled and departed. But when he heard God's voice from between the two cherubim saying to Abraham, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad" (Gn. 22: 12), his soul returned to his body, and Abraham set him free, and Isaac stood upon his feet. And Isaac knew that in this manner the dead of the future would be quickened. So he opened his mouth and said, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who quickenest the dead" (the second of the Eighteen Benedictions).<sup>42</sup>

### III. THE BINDING OF ISAAC AND THE SUFFERING SERVANT

Recently R. A. Rosenberg has canvassed the proposal that the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 was viewed as a "new Isaac", in the sense of a substitute who dies for the people.<sup>43</sup>

The association of the 'Aqedah with the figure of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 is of course not unexpected in view of the similarity of motifs—the voluntary offering, the comparison with the lamb brought for the slaughter, the God-ordained sacrifice.

The basis of Rosenberg's suggestion is the ritual humiliation of a king<sup>44</sup>—a practice known in Babylon and Assyria, suspected in Judah, and carried out as late as 1591 in Persia. The king's insignia were bestowed upon a condemned criminal, who for a few days reigned in the king's stead. Then he was executed. The death of this common man while acting as a "substitute" for the king was believed to avert some impending danger, national or royal. The description of the Servant in Isaiah 53 could possibly point to such a ritual drama, rather than to the identification of the Servant with a king or a prophet. For example, "no form or splendour" (53: 2) hardly fits royalty—though it could describe a commoner; the Servant's silence (53: 7) is inappropriate to a prophet—though it might well apply to a peasant unused to public life.

The Jewish tradition of the 'Aqedah thus sees the Suffering Servant as a "new Isaac", a "substitute king" who dies that the people might live.<sup>45</sup> The title of the Righteous One (*saddiq*) is bestowed upon the Servant (Isaiah 53: 11), a title considered Messianic by the Targum on Isaiah and the apocalyptic Book of Enoch,<sup>46</sup> a work popular with Covenanters and Christians alike.

<sup>41</sup> Vermes, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

<sup>42</sup> G. Friedlander, *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer* (Kegan Paul, 1916), p. 228.

<sup>43</sup> R. A. Rosenberg, "Jesus, Isaac, and the Suffering Servant" in *J.B.L.* lxxxiv (1965), 381-388.

<sup>44</sup> J. Pedersen, *Israel* (O.U.P., 1940), iii-iv, 748; cf. H. H. Rowley, *The Servant of the Lord* (Blackwell, 1965), 16f.

<sup>45</sup> 4 Maccabees 13: 12.

<sup>46</sup> Enoch 38: 2; 46: 3; 92: 3.

Jesus is twice called the "Righteous One" in Acts (7: 52; 22: 14), implying that through His suffering Jesus is able to bring *sedeq* (righteousness or acquittal) to others, like the *saddiq* whose sacrifice is described in Isaiah 53.<sup>47</sup>

While the uncertain date of much of this Rabbinic material casts a shadow over its value as evidence for the existence of the 'Aqedah doctrine in Jewish circles as early as our Lord's day, other sources are more definite.

According to the Book of Jubilees, perhaps the oldest Midrash on Genesis, the trial of Abraham was initiated not by God Himself but by the chief of the evil spirits, Mastema, whose aim has always been to lure men from the way of God (17: 16). The unswerving obedience of Abraham (as in the OT, Isaac himself is passive) is the means by which "the Prince Mastema was put to shame" (18: 12). The Book of Jubilees is dated about 100 B.C. Within fifty years or so the doctrine of the 'Aqedah begins to be developed. Already in 4 Maccabees, which Charles dates between 63 B.C. and A.D. 38, Isaac is the outstanding example of a martyr's readiness to lay down his life at God's command: "Isaac for righteousness' sake yielded himself to be a sacrifice" (13: 12); and again, "Isaac, seeing his father's hand lifting the knife against him, did not shrink" (16: 20).

The ritual for the New Year prayers is known to have existed in the first century A.D., and as the part relative to the 'Aqedah is integral to it, it is certain that the doctrine behind the 'Aqedah was already popular at this time.<sup>48</sup>

The Targum of Job (3: 18) gives Isaac the title of the Servant of the Lord, on the grounds of his self-sacrifice, and there is reason to believe that this Targum dates back to the first century A.D. Gamaliel is said to have had a Targum of Job (a portion of one such Targum was found in Cave 11 at Qumran): and Zunz considers that most OT books were in translation about the beginning of the Christian era.<sup>49</sup>

The Messianic Hymn in the Testament of Levi foretells that the Lord will "raise up a new priest". The passage continues:

The heavens shall be opened,  
And from the temple of glory shall come upon him sanctification,  
With the Father's voice as from Abraham to Isaac.

<sup>47</sup> Rosenberg, *op. cit.*, 385.

<sup>48</sup> Israel Lévi, "Le sacrifice d'Isaac et la mort de Jésus" in *Revue des Études juives* (Paris, 1912), p. 178.

<sup>49</sup> E. E. Ellis, *Paul's Use of the OT* (Oliver & Boyd, 1957), p. 40. The pre-Christian dating of the bulk of the Palestinian Targum has been strongly argued by M. McNamara ("The NT and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch" in *Analecta Biblica* (27 (1966), pp. 31f.), following up the unearthing of Neofiti I by A. Díez Macho; *VT Supp.* 7 (1959), pp. 222-245.

And the glory of the Most High shall be uttered over him,  
And the spirit of understanding and sanctification shall rest upon him.<sup>50</sup>

Not surprisingly this remarkable prophecy has been seized upon as one which influenced the Synoptic account of the baptism of Jesus.<sup>51</sup> But our interest is in the reference to "the Father's voice as from Abraham to Isaac". The only words which Abraham is recorded in Genesis as saying to Isaac are: "God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son" (Gn. 22: 8).

Abraham, in uttering these words and in then proceeding "to the place which God had told him of", is obeying the divine command: "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering" (Gn. 22: 2).

Matthew Black<sup>52</sup> considers that the voice of the Father to His Messiah in the Testament of Levi passage, a voice like Abraham's to Isaac, is the voice of parental authority calling for the obedience of a beloved Son to the point of complete readiness to offer Himself in sacrifice. The Son's willing response is acknowledged by a *bath qol* ("And the glory of the Most High shall be uttered over him") which consecrates him ("And the spirit of understanding and sanctification shall rest upon him").

The Jerusalem Targum gives a poetic presentation of the 'Aqedah which bears a striking resemblance to Test. Levi 18: 6f:

The heavens were bowed and brought low,  
So that Isaac beheld their perfection  
And his eyes were dazzled by their heights.

(Jer. Targ. Gn. 22: 8)

Another passage declares:

The eyes of Abraham were gazing into those of Isaac.  
But the eyes of Isaac were fixed on the angels on high,  
Which Isaac did see, but Abraham failed to see.  
Thereupon there descended a voice (*bath qol*) from heaven and said:  
Behold the righteous twain, the only ones in the world,  
One sacrificing, the other being sacrificed.

(Jer. Targ. Lv. 22: 27)<sup>53</sup>

Although the date of the original material in the Targum cannot be judged with any certainty, the Testament of Levi, which it so plainly reflects, is undoubtedly early. It is true that the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs include a certain number of Christian interpolations, but these are slight in quantity and readily discernible. Leaving such passages aside, Charles dated the bulk of the material

<sup>50</sup> Test. Levi 18: 6, 7; see R. H. Charles, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (SPCK, 1917), 46f.

<sup>51</sup> Richardson, *op. cit.*, 180f.

<sup>52</sup> *Exp. T.* lx (1948-49), 322.

<sup>53</sup> M. Black, *Exp. T.* lxi (1949-50), 158.



about 109–106 B.C. But more recently the evidence has been subject to a major re-examination for the first time since Charles' day. As a result of this, E. J. Bickerman<sup>54</sup> has now shown that the Testaments are nearly a century older than Charles thought and are to be dated between 200 and 175 B.C.

One way and another, therefore, there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that Isaac's willingness to be offered, the atoning virtue of his action, and the linking of Gn. 22 with the Suffering Servant of Is. 53 were already traditional by the first Christian century.<sup>55</sup> We are justified in expecting to find allusions to all this in the NT.

#### IV. THE BINDING OF ISAAC IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

It is a fundamental concept in the Old Testament that the first-born in Israel belong to the Lord; and if not offered in sacrifice to Him, they must be redeemed. Abraham's intended sacrifice and Isaac's replacement by the ram are an illustration of this principle.

It is remarkable that in the LXX version of Genesis 22 Isaac is three times referred to as υἱὸς ἀγαπητός, the "beloved only son", the term used of the divine Sonship of Jesus at His Baptism (Mk. 1: 11) and Transfiguration (Mk. 9: 7), and indirectly in the parable of the wicked husbandmen (Mk. 12: 6), a trio of events related to three major landmarks of His life—incarnation, death, and glorification.

Paul's description of Jesus' relationship to God as "the Son of His love" (Col. 1: 13) is unique and beautiful. The only parallel in the OT, and a very close one at that, is this threefold use of υἱὸς ἀγαπητός for Isaac in Gn. 22.

In the Abraham-Isaac story the son in the end is not required to be sacrificed; a ram is offered and accepted in his stead. By contrast, Rom. 8: 32 shows that the feature of the new covenant which moved Paul so strongly was that in the new dispensation God did *not* spare His only Son; no substitute was possible.<sup>56</sup> It is this very verse in Romans which, as Origen<sup>57</sup> noticed long ago, echoes the LXX of the Isaac sacrifice.

Rom. 8: 32 reads ὃς γὰρ τοῦ ἰδίου υἱοῦ οὐκ ἐφείσατο, "He that spared not His own Son"; while Gn. 22: 16 has καὶ οὐκ ἐφείσω τοῦ υἱοῦ σου τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ δι' ἐμέ, "And on My account thou hast not spared thy beloved son".

<sup>54</sup> *J.B.L.* lxi (1950), 245–260. [For a later dating see M. de Jonge, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Assen, 1953), "Christian Influence in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs", *Novum Testamentum* iv (1960), pp. 182ff. Ed.]

<sup>55</sup> *Contra* C. K. Barrett, *From First Adam to Last* (A. & C. Black, 1952), pp. 26ff.

<sup>56</sup> R. H. Lightfoot, *The Gospel Message of St. Mark* (Oxford, 1952), 57.

<sup>57</sup> Migne, PG, 12, 203.

H. J. Schoeps<sup>58</sup> goes so far as to claim that the model which Paul used to expound his doctrines of the expiatory power of the sacrificial death of Christ owes a good deal to the 'Aqedah teaching, even though Paul treats the sacrifice of Isaac merely as the "type", the "shadow" for the redemption wrought fully and finally by the death of Jesus.

The Pauline doctrine that Jesus was "delivered for our offences" (Rom. 4: 25; cf. 5: 8; 8: 32; Gal. 1: 4, etc.) resembles Abraham's expiating sacrifice in the way that Judaism understood it. As we have already seen, the idea of the atoning value of suffering in the case of certain pious individuals is extensively found in Judaism, and indeed this is true of Samaritan theology as well.<sup>59</sup> The Samaritans include Isaac in the chain of the meritorious through whom grace comes.<sup>60</sup>

Paul says in 1 Cor. 5: 7 that "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us" and in Rom. 5: 9 that we are "justified by His blood". In Jewish thought the blood of the Passover lamb, sprinkled on the doorposts of the Israelites about to escape from Egypt, derived its saving power from the "Binding of Isaac"<sup>61</sup> According to old sources,<sup>62</sup> some of which go back before Christ, the 'Aqedah took place on the date of the Passover,<sup>63</sup> Nisan 15.<sup>64</sup> As a pious Jew, Paul would be aware of this tradition identifying Isaac with the Passover lamb. But all the same he describes the paschal lamb as a type of Christ.<sup>65</sup> The association in his mind of Christ with Isaac would seem to be clearly implied.

Schoeps<sup>66</sup> mentions one of the few modern writers to note the connection between Mount Moriah and Golgotha. The Jewish writer, Franz Rosenzweig,<sup>67</sup> uses it in discussing the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. He writes:

Abraham sacrificed not some particular thing, not just a child, but his only son,<sup>68</sup> and what is more, the son of the promise. Moreover the sacrifice was made to the very God who had given this promise, the contents of

<sup>58</sup> Paul, *op. cit.*, 141.

<sup>59</sup> J. Macdonald, *The Theology of the Samaritans* (S.C.M., 1964), 211, 318f.; A. E. Cowley, *The Samaritan Liturgy* (Oxford, 1909), 241 (27).

<sup>60</sup> Macdonald, *op. cit.*, 321.

<sup>61</sup> Mekhilta 12: 13.8a; Exodus R. 12: 22.17.

<sup>62</sup> Jubilees 18 (100 B.C.); Exodus R. 12.2.

<sup>63</sup> Schoeps, *Paul*, 147.

<sup>64</sup> Nisan 15 was regarded as the most important date in the saving history of Israel and linked with the Messianic hope. The birth, the 'Aqedah, and the death of Isaac are all placed on this day; see R. Mach, *Der Zaddik in Talmud und Midrasch* (Leiden, 1957), 80-83.

<sup>65</sup> 1 Cor. 5: 7; Rom. 5: 9.

<sup>66</sup> Schoeps, *J.B.L.* lxx (1946), 391f.; *Paul*, 148.

<sup>67</sup> *Briefe* (Berlin, 1936), 689.

<sup>68</sup> Probably alluding to Sanhedrin 89b.

which, humanly speaking, would be nullified by the carrying out of the sacrifice. It is not without significance that this passage belongs to our most solemn feastdays. This is the prototype sacrifice, not of particular individuality (as on Golgotha), but of the people's existence as son. We appeal before God to this sacrifice, or rather to the father's readiness to sacrifice, not to that of the son so greatly stressed in the narrative [Rosenzweig apparently means the Midrash, rather than Gn. 22]. The son is restored to life: he is now exclusively the son of the promise.

Schoeps is prepared to take the argument further. He would say that through the *'Aqedah* the son of the promise has become the son of God. Isaac's redemption implies redemption for all Israel.<sup>69</sup> In his case, the willingness to be sacrificed was enough to accomplish expiation for the whole of Israel. Christ's sacrifice, however, cannot be understood in this manner, but only on the premises of the Christian faith. This is one reason why Paul argues that the effects of the sacrificial death of Jesus are not confined to Israel, but bring expiation to all mankind and open for it a way to God. Thus Paul addresses the largely Gentile churches of the Galatians: "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise".<sup>70</sup>

The basic difference between what happened on Mount Moriah and on Golgotha is that in the first instance the sacrifice was *not* actually performed, having been stopped by God. But the Midrash view is that God regards it *as if* it had really been completed;<sup>71</sup> and this is indeed the view taken by the NT: "By faith Abraham, being tried, offered up Isaac" (Heb. 11: 17); "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, in that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar?" (Jas. 2: 21). The thought that, after all, the sacrifice could have been carried out has ever since filled Jews with the utmost horror. In the Mishnah the words of Jer. 19: 5 ("neither came it into my mind")—the context concerns human sacrifice—are referred to the offering of Isaac;<sup>72</sup> and according to one Midrash<sup>73</sup> Abraham cried unto God, "Swear unto me that from now on Thou wilt not test me again, neither me nor my son Isaac".

It is noteworthy, however, that in the Genesis account, there is no suggestion that Abraham behaved with anything but calm deliberation, an impression shared by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "He that had gladly received the promises was offering up his only begotten son: even he to whom it was said, In Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God is able to raise up, even from the

<sup>69</sup> Pal. Taanith 11.4.65d.

<sup>70</sup> Gal. 4: 28; cf. Rom. 9: 7; Heb. 11: 17-19.

<sup>71</sup> Genesis R. 55.5.

<sup>72</sup> Taanith 4a; cf. Tanhuma Wayyera 40.

<sup>73</sup> Genesis R. 22.15.56.

dead; from whence he did also in a parable receive him back" (Heb. 11: 17-19).

There may be another reflection of the 'Aqedah in Rom. 3: 25 (ὃν προέθετο ὁ θεὸς ἱλαστήριον).<sup>74</sup> If the verb προέθετο is taken to mean "has provided", it could allude to *yir'eh* in Gn. 22: 8 ("God will provide Himself the lamb"). This would make Rom. 3: 25 read: "(Christ) whom God has provided as an ἱλαστήριον", an interpretation first proposed by Origen,<sup>75</sup> Ambrosiaster,<sup>76</sup> and John Chrysostom.<sup>77</sup>

The reflections of the 'Aqedah doctrine in the writings of St. Paul, to which Schoeps draws attention, are not restricted to the one apostle. While it must be conceded that the Genesis story is not mentioned directly, it is surely beyond the bounds of curious coincidence that so many motifs of the Abraham-Isaac sacrifice are reflected in the first dozen verses of 1 Peter. This is especially striking when it is borne in mind that although the theme of suffering runs through the entire Epistle, it is only in the opening passage that the string of parallels occur, though there is one other possible example in chapter 4. A mere catalogue of 'Aqedah features in chapter 1 is impressive:

- Verse 3 living hope; resurrection
- 4 inheritance sure
- 5 kept through faith; ready to be revealed at the last (moment?)
- 6 put to grief; temptations
- 7 proof of faith; proved by fire
- 8 God unseen yet loved; and trusted
- 9 receiving the end of faith; salvation
- 11 sufferings; glories to follow
- 12 benefit for future generations; spiritual world concerned

We may also compare Peter's "in this you rejoice" (verse 6) and "ye rejoice greatly" (verse 8) with the comment made by Jesus to the Pharisees: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day" (Jn. 8: 56), where the same Greek verb ἀγαλλιάω is used.

ἀγαλλιάω occurs again in 1 Peter 4: 13, where the RSV mildly translates it as "be glad". This passage too could well reflect an 'Aqedah background. Verse 12 speaks of a "fiery trial" and of its purpose to "prove" faith. The experience is described as "a strange thing", something quite out of the ordinary. The RSV goes on: "But rejoice (χαίρετε) in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice (χαρῆτε) and be glad (ἀγαλλιώμενοι) when his glory

<sup>74</sup> G. Klein, *Studien über Paulus* (Stockholm, 1918), 96.

<sup>75</sup> *Comm.* Rom. 3: 8; Migne PG 14.949.

<sup>76</sup> Migne PL 7.180.

<sup>77</sup> Migne PG 60.444; *contra*, Sanday and Headlam, *ICC on Romans* (T. & T. Clark, 1970), 87.

is revealed (ἐν τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ)". This again reflects the situation suggested by Jn. 8: 56.

Though not basing his argument on 1 Peter, Vermes<sup>78</sup> considers that the introduction of the *'Aqedah* motif into Christianity can be traced back to Jesus Himself. This is very close indeed to what Peter is in fact saying in the verses which round off what we may term his chapter 1 *'Aqedah* section: "Prophets . . . searching what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them . . ." (1 Peter 1: 11, 12).

The life of Isaac in the OT is comparatively unimpressive, yet his name is constantly linked with the far greater characters of Abraham and Jacob. The title "God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob" occurs some twenty-four times in the OT. It is true that one of these figures is Isaac's father and the other is his son. But it is still remarkable that Isaac gets mentioned so prominently, for on the surface his personal importance seems scarcely to compare with either. Abraham is after all the supreme exemplar of faith in the OT and the father of the nation, while Jacob begets the twelve tribes of Israel.

Isaac is a "middle-man". But therein lies his importance. On the purely human level, it can be said that there is always a place for even a colourless character who will faithfully transmit what he has received. In Isaac's case, however, there is a far more important function for him to fulfil. Although Abraham already has another son, Ishmael, and there are more children later on (Gn. 25: 1-4), it is made clear to him that only "through Isaac shall your descendants be named" (Gn. 21: 12; Rom. 9: 7). The "son of the promise" thus has a unique place in God's scheme.

A number of comparisons can be made in this connection between Isaac and Jesus, for the latter in a supreme sense is the "middle-man" between God and men (cf. Job's cry for a daysman, Job 9: 33). It may also be remarked that a servant is a middle-man—between his master and the world at large, representing him and acting on his behalf as he goes about the master's service.

The NT teaches that the divine service is to extend to the whole world (Lk. 1: 32; Mt. 22: 8, 9), and this links up with the import of the blessing renewed to Abraham after his supreme demonstration of faith in the sacrifice of Isaac (Gn. 22: 18).

Like Isaac, Jesus too was "the son of promise", both in the sense of fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy and in being born of Mary in accordance with the angel's announcement. There is a philological

<sup>78</sup> *Op. cit.*, 223.

link too. The LXX uses the verb ἐπισκέπτομαι when the Lord "visits" Sarah in connection with the promised birth of Isaac (Gn. 21: 1). Luke uses the same verb twice in the Song of Zacharias in speaking of the coming birth of Christ (Lk. 1: 68, 78).

Philo is probably pursuing a line of his own when he magnifies God's share in the birth of Isaac and goes so far as to call him υἱὸς θεοῦ.<sup>79</sup> In another passage Philo again implies that the conception was divine and not human, for he speaks of God as visiting Sarah "in her solitude",<sup>80</sup> although the Genesis account indicates that the visit was to be at the birth, not for the conception (Gn. 18: 10, 14; cf. 21: 1, 2). Paul could be understood as following a similar line to Philo's when in Romans he limits the "children of God" to those descended through Isaac and gives as reason God's promise to Abraham: "About this time I will return and Sarah shall have a son" (Rom. 9: 7-9). In Galatians Paul is still more explicit: "We, brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise", and Isaac, he goes on, was "born according to the Spirit" (Gal. 4: 28, 29). The Epistle to the Hebrews (11: 17), in speaking of the offering up of Isaac, describes him as the "only-begotten son" (τὸν μονογενῆ), paying no regard to Abraham's other children, who were born κατὰ σάρκα and not κατὰ πνεῦμα.

For Christians to be defined as those who have had a divine birth is not uncommon in the NT. Peter's use of the theme is especially interesting. In speaking of those who "have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God", Peter has just previously described them as having purified their souls by obedience, and bid them "love one another earnestly from the heart". Obedience and love are, of course, the major characteristics of Abraham in the *Aqedah* drama, while the reference to "seed" provides another parallel with the miraculous birth of Isaac (1 Peter 1: 22, 23).

True words apply supremely to Another, but Abraham too must have "set his face like a flint" in order to obey the divine command. Beyond his own personal feeling towards his son, feelings which because of the special circumstances of the birth were without doubt extraordinarily intense, Abraham was prepared to all appearances to throw away the whole divinely-promised future. Isaac for his part is willing to submit, for, whatever his age and however developed his filial obedience, he was certainly strong enough to have resisted his aged father. In both parent and child we have a type of our Lord. Jesus submits to His death with His life-work apparently incomplete

<sup>79</sup> *De Mutat. Nom.* 23.131.

<sup>80</sup> *De Cherubim* 45.

and its objects quite unattained. In utter trust the perfect servant is seen "putting His hands between God's hands and going forward".<sup>81</sup>

"Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day, and he saw it and was glad" (Jn. 8: 56, RSV). When did Abraham "see" Christ's day? Is not the occasion of the 'Aqedah as likely as any for such a revelation? The Genesis record admittedly is silent on the point, but it is at least possible that the future perfect sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God, was revealed to Abraham at that time. "Rejoiced" (ἀγαλλιάω) is a strong word and this together with the use of the aorist implies some exceptional single event, rather than a reference to the promise of innumerable descendants spread out over the generations ahead.

This suggestion would also throw light on the slightly obscure note in Gn. 22: 14: "So Abraham called the name of that place The LORD will provide; as it is said to this day, On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided." According to 2 Ch. 3: 1 and Josephus (*Antiquities* 1.224), Moriah was the hill on which Solomon erected the Temple, the scene of the regular sacrifices in the days of the kings, and close to the hill called Calvary where the final perfect sacrifice would be made.

If we retain the usual translation of *ra'ah*, the name of the place will be explained as "The LORD sees", that is, "sees Abraham's act of faith". The note which follows will apply to Abraham's vision of the future referred to by the Fourth Gospel: "On the hill of the Lord (Calvary) He, the coming perfect substitutionary sacrifice, is seen." The regular Hebrew word for a seer of visions (*ra'eh*) is derived from the same verb. The LXX uses the aorist: "And Abraham called the name of that place, The Lord hath seen (ἶδεν); that they might say today, In the mount the Lord was seen (ὤθη)." Symmachus translates Moriah as τῆς ὀπτασίας, the land of the vision.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Finally, a word may be added about the two general difficulties which were mentioned earlier. The first concerns vagueness about the date of the Rabbinic material. Much of it was not definitely in writing until well after the first Christian century, and whilst it incorporated oral tradition going back many decades before Christ, the extent of the pre-Christian material can hardly be determined with any certainty. On the other hand, at least some of the sources we have quoted are undoubtedly pre-Christian: the Book of Jubilees and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs are examples. Furthermore, we should not too readily discount the extraordinary accuracy

<sup>81</sup> A. G. Hebert, *The Throne of David* (Faber, 1941), p. 259.

of the eastern memory, coupled with the Rabbinic reluctance to commit anything to writing.

In addition, the absence of particular material from documents of a known period is no guarantee that the concepts concerned were not current at the time. A good illustration of this is the expression "Moses' seat". This cannot be traced in Rabbinic sources for several centuries into the Christian era, yet Mt. 23: 2 demonstrates its currency in first-century Jewry, "a striking illustration of the fact that an institution or idea may be early, even though it is mentioned only by the later Rabbis".<sup>82</sup> It is curious that even the prosaic matter of a synagogue service<sup>83</sup> is not described in Jewish writings until a long time after Luke 4 was published.

The second difficulty is about the absence of explicit references to the 'Aqedah in the NT documents. Had the doctrine been prominent in Jewish thought at the time, a clearer application of such an appropriate theme would presumably have been expected in Christian writings. As it is, the second-century Epistle of Barnabas (7: 3) provides the earliest example of Isaac as the OT type of the Passion of Christ. A little later Irenaeus,<sup>84</sup> Tertullian,<sup>85</sup> and Clement of Alexandria,<sup>86</sup> are all familiar with the idea of Christ as the Isaac of the Gospels. Yet it is not until the middle of the third century, in one of Origen's sermons,<sup>87</sup> that we find the first identification of the Lamb of God of John 1: 29 with the ram of Genesis 22: 13. Considering how apposite the parallels are, it is surprising the typology is not used explicitly much earlier and more often.

But it is well known that something of the same problem attaches to the doctrine of a Suffering Messiah. Whether or not some Jewish circles in the first century may have been expecting such a figure, it is a plain fact that despite the many warnings Jesus gave, the disciples themselves were quite unprepared either for His death or for His resurrection, although they had clearly accepted Him to be the Messiah.

The idea, therefore, must be considered as neither already in the popular mind nor indeed as self-evident from the Old Testament. Thus it is not surprising that efforts to show that at the beginning of the Christian era a Suffering Messiah was expected have so far been unconvincing. The earlier evidence of any substance is Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* (c. 160), and even this is not neces-

<sup>82</sup> D. Daube, *The NT and Rabbinic Judaism* (Athlone Press, 1956), 246.

<sup>83</sup> S. Neill, *The Interpretation of the NT, 1861-1961* (Oxford, 1964), 295.

<sup>84</sup> *Adv. Haer.* 4.4.

<sup>85</sup> *Adv. Marc.* 3.18; *Adv. Jud.* 10a.

<sup>86</sup> *Paedag.* 1: 5.1; *Strom.* 2.5.

<sup>87</sup> *Homil. Genesis* 8.



sarily a true reflection of contemporary Jewish opinion, let alone that of the century before in our Lord's own day. Justin was concerned, for apologetic purposes, to portray the Jewish spokesman as closely approaching the Christian interpretation. It is worth noting that Trypho admits only that the Messiah must greatly suffer in accomplishing his task. Death is not necessarily involved.

We can go as far as to say that Isaiah 53 indicates that a suffering deliverer was expected in pre-Christian times, and that Zechariah 12: 10 foretells that the dawn of the expected age would be heralded by the piercing of a sufferer. But so far it has not been established that Jewish thought was concentrated on the Davidic Messiah or that there was any serious integration of these and similar passages into a single whole.<sup>88</sup>

This is to be seen also in the cavalier treatment given to Isaiah 53 by the Targum of Jonathan. While the Targum certainly identifies the Servant with the Messiah, every reference to suffering is arbitrarily removed from the Servant and applied either to Israel or to the Gentiles. While in one sense, therefore, it is true that the Targum gives a Messianic interpretation to Isaiah 53, the two concepts of suffering and of Messianism are evidently still considered to be incompatible, at least in the particular circle in which that Targum originated.<sup>89</sup> It is of course possible that we have here someone who doth protest too much, and the reactionary attitude of the Targumist should be taken as evidence of a rearguard action.

In Christian circles, however, as the true import of the OT prophecies was revealed, we should have expected the theme of the Suffering Messiah to have become prominent, at least in the NT writings concerning life and teaching in the early Church. Yet Isaiah 53, which is the one clearly redemptive-suffering passage in the Jewish Scriptures,<sup>90</sup> occurs surprisingly rarely.<sup>91</sup> Peter in his First Epistle certainly does not hesitate to make use of it, but he is virtually alone in connecting it with the Atonement.<sup>92</sup>

In Peter's case, however, it is significant that the verses taken from Isaiah 53 are employed without regard to their original order. At the same time, Peter gives no hint that he is making verbal citations from the OT. Had we not the text of Isaiah before us, we should not know he was quoting. But evidently the passage and its application are sufficiently familiar to Peter's readers for his method

<sup>88</sup> Rowley, *op. cit.*, 75.

<sup>89</sup> M. D. Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant* (S.C.M., 1959), 55.

<sup>90</sup> C. F. D. Moule *The Birth of the NT* (A. & C. Black,<sup>3</sup> 1966), 81.

<sup>91</sup> R. A. Rosenberg, *J.B.L.*, lxxxiv (1965), 381-388.

<sup>92</sup> 1 Peter 2: 22-24.

not to require explanation. In other words, despite the scarcity in the NT of explicit references to a Suffering Messiah, Peter is able to assume that he is carrying his readers with him.

On similar grounds it is arguable that the absence of clear-cut references in the NT to the 'Aqedah is no guarantee that the doctrine did not play a part in colouring the background of the Servant-Christology. Mere hints and allusions may well be sufficient indication. Just as it seems to have been Jesus Himself who brought into focus the OT pointers to a Suffering Messiah, so, as we have noted from the close of Peter's 'Aqedah passage, there is reason to suppose that the typology of the Sacrifice of Isaac was a factor in the Servant-Christology, and that Jesus Himself was responsible for revealing it.

When all this has been said, however, we may surmise that the real reason for the comparative indefiniteness of the "Servant" Christology is that it was overshadowed by that greater insight which was given to the early Church, one applying both to the Person of Jesus and to His followers, and summarized by Paul in words to the Galatians: "Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son" (Gal. 4: 7; cf. 3: 29).

*Ponsbourne College,  
Hertford.*