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The Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 and Its Relevance to African Christian Perspectives on Suffering and Redemption

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Abstract

Suffering, though universal and inevitable, most of the time, is not pleasant. The contemporary African Christians experience physical, psychological and emotional traumas as do many others globally. Traditionally, Christian theology has understood Isaiah 53 as a prophetic anticipation of the passion, death, and atoning work of Jesus Christ. Yet, in the African context—marked by historical and ongoing experiences of systemic poverty, political unrest, ethnic strife, and health crises—this passage acquires contemporary significance. Therefore, this paper explores the figure of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 and its enduring theological and existential relevance within African Christian interpretations of suffering and redemption, using John S. Mbiti's contextual hermeneutics approach. It engages in an exegetical analysis of Isaiah 53, considering its historical context while acknowledging African cultural and spiritual realities. This allows the passage to speak meaningfully to the real-life struggles of contemporary African Christians. The study aims to bridge the gap between biblical exegesis and contextual theology, highlighting how African Christian communities draw hope, identity, and purpose from an incarnational and redemptive reading of Scripture.

Keywords: Isaiah 53, Suffering Servant, African Christianity, Contextual theology, African biblical hermeneutics

Introduction

This interrogation of Isaiah 53 is motivated by recurring African Christian experience of suffering despite living righteous lives. Daily confrontation with suffering makes pain an innate and a universal component of human experience. For African Christians, suffering has particular forms, determined by the socio-political, economic, and historical context in which they find themselves. We know that Africa's story of suffering is like no other; that our experience with colonialism, slavery, political instability, and ethnic conflicts, in addition to sheer powerlessness and poverty, has given us peculiar knowledge about suffering. This

backdrop has enabled African Christians to view suffering not only in negative and punitive terms, but as a medium for spiritual transformation, social solidarity and redemption. One of the passages in the Bible that comes close to African Christians when they consider the problem of suffering is Isaiah 53. Africans listen and hear in the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 a figure that speaks with another tonality and another resonance in spite of the situation, where poverty, politics, health and abusive relationships characterise the whole way of being and life of people on the African continent.

This paper is set to discuss the image of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53, and its theological and existential importance to modern African Christian views on pain and salvation. Using John S. Mbiti's contextual hermeneutics, this work performs a theology that places the Suffering Servant in its original Hebrew Bible context and current relevance for African Christians. Mbiti's approach serves as a critical lens through which Isaiah 53 is explored to resonate with African Christians and how they find hope, identity, and redemption in the figure of the Suffering Servant.

By performing an exegetical study of Isaiah 53 in this particular cultural setting, the paper tries to close the chasm between critical biblical exegesis and contextual theology, showing how African Christians understand the passage not as a theological artefact but as a living, inspiring source that relates directly to their daily struggles and desires for justice and peace. This paper seeks to show that African Christians read Isaiah 53 not simply as an ancient theological text, but as a message that continues to speak into their daily realities, giving meaning to their suffering and nurturing their hope for justice, healing, and peace.

Theological Framework: Contextual Hermeneutics

Contextual hermeneutics belongs to that set of methods of biblical interpretation which considers the readers' cultural, social, and historical setting. It upholds the view that Scripture should be read as life-bound and in constant dialogue with the realities of the community. This creates an avenue within African Christian Theology to explore how African believers relate to the Bible through their experiences of marginalisation, poverty, conflict, and social transition.

John S. Mbiti (1969: 2), avers that theology without lived experience is incomplete and unfaithful to the Gospel's incarnational nature. Mbiti said African societies are communitarian—identity comes from relationships, roles, and responsibilities within the family, clan, and community. So African theology must thus include communal values and spiritual perceptions in African traditions. Mbiti's view is important when thinking about communal suffering because suffering is not private but a reality that links the living, the dead, and the unborn. Healing and community response are important: burdens are shared, solidarity is practised, and communal rituals have a role in healing. This communitarian reading differs from the individual-centred frameworks in Western theology, which often see suffering as personal guilt, moral failure, or personal growth. In this way, contextual reading allows African Christians see the "Suffering Servant" of Isaiah 53 not as one person alone, but rather as Christ carrying the pain of the whole community (Mbiti, 1969: 2).

Tite Tiénou (193:98) builds on Mbiti's view by urging African theologians to make the context of the African people central to theological reflection. He argues that African theology must emerge from the questions, struggles, and hopes of African Christians. In this view, theology becomes a dynamic response to human life rather than an abstract system. The enduring relevance of Isaiah 53 for African readers comes from this interaction between Scripture and context. Similarly, Jean-Marc Ela's (1996:85) theology starts from the suffering of African peoples. He maintains that theology must be forged "from below," shaped by the cries of those who suffer and struggle for justice. Ela sees the Suffering Servant as a figure through whom African Christians express their hopes and pain. In this reading, Isaiah 53 is not only about

Jesus' sacrifice but also a call to resist systems of oppression and to trust in the God who walks with the afflicted. Ela explores the intersection of suffering, community, and redemption in African Christianity, further developing the notion of the Suffering Servant as a communal symbol (Ela, 1996: 85). Sanneh (1989:115) discusses the impact of African Christianity on the interpretation of Scripture, emphasising how African Christians read passages like Isaiah 53 through their own lived experiences. More so, sAfrican scholars are of the view that African theology should not be confined, to Western interpretations of suffering, but should rather be shaped by African experiences of oppression, poverty, and social exclusion, and eventually, African solutions (Momberg, 2023:3; Mgezi, 2023:11). They argue that contextual theology gives African Christians the tools to engage Scripture in ways that speak to their own lives, making it a living and dynamic source of meaning, affirming the legitimacy of African experiences in Biblical interpretation and moves interpretation beyond abstract doctrine

Other African scholars emphasise that contextual interpretation must include a faithful reading of Scripture and a critical analysis of society. For instance, Jesse N. K. Mugambi (1989:114) argues that suffering in Africa cannot be fully understood without considering historical injustices such as slavery, colonisation, and economic exploitation. Therefore, the Suffering Servant's figure speaks to personal pain and collective trauma. African contextual hermeneutics does not reject traditional Christian doctrines; it instead seeks to speak to them in ways that speak directly to African realities. Isaiah 53 therefore, becomes a prophetic vision of Christ and a theological resource for African Christians living amid hardship.

Historical and Literary Context of Isaiah 53

The Fourth Servant Song (Isaiah 52:13–53:12) of Deutero-Isaiah (chapters 40–55), includes Isaiah 53. Most scholars placed this material in the Babylonian exile in the sixth century BCE, when Israel lost its land and temple and experienced a national crisis. To address this issue, The Servant Song shows how God can act through a servant's suffering as opposed to through kings or armies. This section gives the exiles hope by reaffirming the validity of God's covenant (Paul, 2012:398–399). However, Joseph Blenkinsopp (2002:349-351) opines that this message runs counter to the political ideology of the era, which linked power to monarchs and empires. The Servant is portrayed as someone who restores through enduring hardship and perseverance, which sets them apart from ancient rulers (Freedman, 1992:1092–1094).

Because of its meticulous arrangement, scholars frequently break the poem into five sections: first, the Servant is lifted (52:13–15). The second is the rejection of the Servant (53:1–3). Third, according to 53:4–6, the Servant endures suffering on behalf of others. Fourth, the Servant perseveres without speaking (53:7–9). Fifth, God raises the Servant (53:10–12). John Oswalt Verses 4–6—which depict the Servant suffering on behalf of others—are the focal point of the passage (Oswalt, 1998, 376–378).

There has been much discussion about who the Servant is. Israel or the faithful portion of Israel, who suffered in exile but hoped for restoration, is frequently identified by Jewish interpreters as the Servant (Berlin and Brettler, 2004:899–900). According to Brevard Childs (2001:899-900), this reading emphasises God's entire people. As an example of faithfulness during difficult times, Sakenfeld (2009, 412–414) advocates viewing the Servant as Israel. Christian tradition sees Jesus Christ as the Servant. Isaiah 53 is mentioned in the New Testament in Acts 8:32–35 and 1 Peter 2:24–25. The text's themes of innocent suffering and vindication directly connect to the story of Christ, even though it must be interpreted within its exilic context (Seitz, 2001, 349–351). The passage's sacrificial imagery, like bearing sins, is reminiscent of the Leviticus 16 scapegoat rituals. This background depicts the Servant as someone who uses suffering to bring about reconciliation (Westermann, 1969: 261–264). Isaiah 53 is still relevant in Africa because it addresses the realities of poverty, oppression, and violence that many communities face. The Servant is a paradigm of service-based

leadership that pushes leaders to act in the public interest (Adeyemo, 2006: 719–721). To African theologians, Isaiah 53 is a passage about hope and suffering. It reaffirms that sharing suffering can lead to healing. The passage reassures believers that God is present and that suffering can pave the way for renewal in the face of injustice, illness, and war.

Grammatical Analysis of Isaiah 53

Verse 1

Isaiah 53:1 asks: *"Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"* The verse is both a lament and an observation. It presents the paradox of divine revelation that is met with human refusal. The Hebrew שְׁמֻעָתֵנוּ ("report" or "message") refers to what is heard or proclaimed. In Isaiah 28:9, the same term points to prophetic teaching. Here, it is the message about the Servant. Brevard Childs (2001:411) observes that this word has both the sense of a prophetic announcement and the response it demands. It is not just information; it is revelation that calls for faith. Claus Westermann (1969:261) notes that the rhetorical question assumes a negative answer: almost no one believes it. This matches the Servant's rejection described in 52:13–15 and 53:3. Thus, the problem is not with the message but the audience. Alec Motyer (1993:424) stresses that "believe" (הֶאֱמִין) is the same verb used in Genesis 15:6, where Abraham "believed the Lord." It shows that the right response to revelation is trust, not proof.

The phrase וּזְרוֹעַ יְהוָה ("arm of the Lord") is a key biblical image. Isaiah 51:9 and 52:10 are linked with God's mighty acts in history, especially the exodus. The "arm" is shorthand for God's power to save, often displayed in visible acts, revealed in the Servant. This is paradoxical because God's power appears in weakness, not force (Goldingay, 2005:292). What was revealed looked too ordinary for many to recognise as divine. This links directly with verse 2, which describes the Servant's lack of outward majesty. John Oswalt (1998:377) underlines that the "arm" is not hidden but "revealed". The verb נִגְלָתָה ("has been revealed") shows that God's power was made visible. People saw but did not understand.

Blenkinsopp (2002:349) explains that this verse highlights the scandal of revelation: God acts, but human beings resist belief. The Servant embodies God's plan but is dismissed because it does not match human expectations. In the New Testament, John (12:38) and Paul (Rom. 10:16) use this verse to explain unbelief in Jesus. Evans (2001:324) remarks that for some, Isaiah's words showed that rejection was foreseen by Scripture, so it did not mean failure but fulfilment. For the African church, where faith is sometimes measured by outward success, this verse reminds us that true faith is trust in God's word, even when it does not look impressive.

Verse 2

This verse describes the Servant with natural images, one that is easily comprehensible to the immediate context: יוֹנֵק ("young shoot") and שֹׁרֶשׁ מֵאֶרֶץ צִיָּה ("root out of dry ground"). These words show a weak plant springing up in a dry place. The picture is of growth where growth should not be expected. Many scholars note that the Servant is described as coming from a setting where no one would look for God's saving work (Goldingay, 2005:286). The Servant had "no form or majesty" and "no beauty that we should desire him." This language shows that the Servant did not impress people with outward strength or appearance. Motyer (1993:334) explains that the point is not simply a lack of beauty but the absence of qualities that people usually admire in a leader. Oswalt (1998:385) adds that the Servant's ordinary appearance kept people from recognising him as God's chosen agent. In Jewish interpretation, this verse has often been linked to the nation of Israel, which appeared weak among the nations but carried God's purpose (Levenson, 1993:213). In Christian interpretation, the verse points to Jesus, whose life and ministry began in humble settings such as Nazareth, and who did not fit the expected image of a triumphant Messiah (Westermann, 1969:261; cf. John 1:46).

Verse 3

Here, the Servant is the object of ongoing contempt and social removal. The niphal participle נִבְזֶה (“despised”) marks a state rather than a single act. The clause with חָדַל signals exclusion from normal fellowship. The perfect וְלֹא חֲשַׁבְנֵהוּ (“we did not value him”) records a collective verdict that withholds worth. Scholars note how grammar and parallel lines move from contempt to exclusion to an agreed dismissal of status (Paul 2012: 396–401; Williamson 2018: 214–219). Readers also see a link to prophetic figures who carry rejection as part of their call, which fits the wider pattern in Isaiah 40–55 where witness often meets refusal (Goldingay 2005: 287–292). Isaiah 53:3 shows that rejection can mark faithful service and serve God’s purpose for many (Katongole, 2017: 41–54; Orobator, 2018: 63–78). This gives ground for patience and solidarity.

Verse 4

This verse shifts to the Servant’s burden. The qal perfects נָשָׂא (“he bore”) and סְבָלָם (“he carried”) present completed bearing of griefs and pains. The community’s judgment וַחֲשַׁבְנֵהוּ נָגוּעַ (“we reckoned him stricken”) shows a misreading of the cause of his suffering. Commentators highlight the contrast between what the Servant truly bears and what observers think he bears (Goldingay, 2014: 86–90; Paul, 2012: 402–405). The Masoretic Text stresses sickness and pain, while the Greek tradition leans more quickly toward sins and iniquities; both trajectories converge in verse 5, where moral guilt stands in view and prepares for atonement language (Williamson, 2018: 220–226). The verse teaches the church to see borne burdens as acts that can serve others. It calls communities to stand with the afflicted and to refuse blame that has no warrant (Abernethy, 2016: 129–134; Boda and McConville, 2012: 681–686).

Verse 5

Isaiah 53:5 names cause and the result of the Servant’s pain. The pual forms מְחֹלָל(“pierced”) and מְדֻכָּא (“crushed”) present inflicted suffering. The phrases “for our transgressions” and “for our iniquities” give the substitutionary frame. The line “discipline for our peace was upon him” joins punishment to communal shalom, and “by his stripe we are healed” states the result for the many. The grammar moves from passive wounds to active outcomes for others, which is the core of vicarious atonement in the song (Goldingay, 2017: 155–162; Williamson, 2018: 226–234; Paul, 2012: 405–410). African readers know forms of innocent suffering, where many suffer innocently. Isaiah 53:5 gives a way to hold this reality within hope. It says God can turn harm toward peace and healing for communities.

Verse 6

Isaiah 53:6 introduces a key theological turning point in the Servant Song. The sheep metaphor is one of corporate disobedience and helplessness. The verb תָּעִינוּ (“we have gone astray”) is written in the perfect tense, suggesting an action already completed. Israel’s condition of straying is not occasional or accidental but a state that has already taken root in the community. The comparison to sheep emphasises vulnerability and lack of direction without divine shepherding. The second part of the verse shifts attention from human guilt to divine initiative: הִפְגִּיעַ בּוֹ (“the Lord laid on him”)**.** The hiphil stem of the verb points to God’s active role in placing the burden of sin upon the Servant. God is not a detached observer of human sin but the one who channels redemption by transferring communal guilt to the Servant. This divine causality transforms the Servant’s suffering into the decisive act of atonement. “God himself redirects human sin to achieve reconciliation” (Goldingay, 2014: 320–322).

The verse also marks a structural and theological shift within the pericope. Verses 4–5 highlight the Servant’s saving work, his bearing of griefs and wounds, whereas verse 6 turns the focus back to the people’s sin and God’s redemptive initiative. The subject change is striking (Motyer, 1993:335). For African Christians, this verse echoes with collective experiences of sin, brokenness, and exploitation. In societies marked by colonial history,

postcolonial struggles, and persistent political and economic injustice, the confession "we have gone astray" can be read as a statement about systemic failures as much as individual sins. However, the assurance that "the Lord laid upon him the iniquity of us all" provides a foundation of hope. It means that oppression and fragmentation, though painful, are not outside God's redemptive scope. As Childs (2001:414-416) notes in his canonical reading of Isaiah, the placement of this verse in the prophetic book suggests that Israel's corporate future depended not only on political deliverance but also on spiritual atonement. Finally, this verse invites African Christians to connect biblical faith with lived realities. It suggests that suffering, particularly unjust, is not wasted but can participate in God's purpose for communal healing and renewal.

Verse 7–8

Isaiah 53:7–8 highlights the Servant's silence in the face of violence and oppression. The phrase וְלֹא יִפְתַּח־פִּיו ("and he did not open his mouth") is repeated, emphasising a deliberate refusal to defend himself. This silence connects with the image of the lamb, recalling sacrificial practices in Israel's worship (cf. Leviticus 16). The Servant's silence is not weakness but a form of obedience, showing his willingness to submit to God's redemptive plan. The nouns עֹצֶר ("oppression") and מִשְׁפָּט ("judgment") point to a miscarriage of justice. Joseph Blenkinsopp (2002:349–351) explains that the Servant undergoes a judicial process stripped of fairness, highlighting how power can distort legal structures. The silence underlines trust in God's justice beyond human systems (Goldingay, 2014:96) and the Servant embodies the paradox of righteous suffering as part of God's plan for salvation (Childs, 2001:414).

For African Christians, this theme echoes with life under corrupt governments and unjust courts, where Fundamental Human Rights of the citizens are trampled upon. Protests against unfair treatments cannot be staged, many people experience unfair trials, wrongful imprisonment, and silencing by oppressive authorities (Oyekan, 2024:13). The Servant's silence mirrors their struggle, not by endorsing passivity but by affirming that God sees and shares in unjust suffering. The Servant's silence challenges triumphalist readings of power, replacing them with a theology of endurance and trust (Migliore, 2014:183).

Verse 9

Isaiah 53:9 transitions from the Servant's suffering to the aftermath of his death, highlighting both dishonour and paradox. The phrase אֶת־רְשָׁעִים קִבְרוֹ ("his grave was with the wicked") suggests that the Servant was condemned to the same fate as criminals, reflecting societal rejection despite his innocence. The use of בְּמֹתָיו ("in his deaths") is grammatically complex, with some scholars interpreting it as an intensification of his suffering and others as a collective expression of violent death (Oswalt, 2003: 391–392). The verse contains a profound irony: though treated like a criminal, the Servant is paradoxically "with the rich in his death." This as an unexpected reversal, a hint that God's vindication interrupts human injustice (Goldingay, 2014: 97). The juxtaposition of "wicked" and "rich" reveals divine providence overturning the expected dishonour of the Servant's burial (Childs, 2001: 415). The verse affirms that God's redemptive plan transforms shame into honour. Christian theology finds here a precursor to resurrection hope: even in apparent defeat, God's justice prevails (Migliore, 2014: 183).

African Christian Perspectives on Suffering and Redemption

A major theme in African Christian theology is suffering, which is influenced by the realities of injustice, poverty, illness, political unrest, and colonialism. In this light, biblical passages like Isaiah 53 acquire new significance. African Christians use the image of the Servant—hatred, suffering, and carrying the burdens of others—as a theological lens to understand their suffering. Suffering is not viewed as a pointless fate or as divine retribution. Rather, it is considered a route to community healing, growth, and redemption.

Africa's history and the structural factors that continue to influence its societies are connected to the continent's experience of suffering. Africa has endured oppressive systems that have left lasting effects, from the transatlantic slave trade to colonial rule and the post-independence period (Falola, 2020:212-220) . Poverty, weakened institutions, political violence, and social disintegration are all outcomes of these processes; these result from structures that evolved, not isolated issues. One of the main causes of these circumstances was colonialism. It uprooted populations, upended African social structures, and brought in economies that took advantage of people and land. According to Kwame Bediako (1992:229–231), colonialism was about reshaping African self-perception and gaining political control through Christian missions and Western knowledge systems that frequently collaborated with imperial power.

Suffering has also characterised the postcolonial era. Civil wars, military rule, and foreign economic dominance have all affected many African nations. The Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) of the 1980s and 1990s, which were led by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, worsened poverty and threatened social services. Nevertheless, these policies made communities more vulnerable and limited access to healthcare and education (Mugambi, 1995: 48–51). Thus, African suffering has social, political, economic, and spiritual aspects.

The Ubuntu principle, "I am because we are," demonstrates that suffering affects the entire community. This shared understanding influences churches' responses to crises. They frequently offer spiritual support, practical care, and camaraderie. For instance, churches took an active role in providing care during the COVID-19 pandemic by combining prayer, health support, and efforts to lessen stigma, and even supporting government in enforcing compliance legislations (Adetunji & Oyekan, 2024:29). Oduyoye (2001:38-40) emphasises how theology must act empathetically toward communities most impacted by poverty and illness, particularly women.

Many have questioned where God is amid suffering triggered by ethnic and religious conflicts, such as the genocide in Rwanda or the violence committed by Boko Haram in Nigeria. To make sense of their suffering, African theologians have resorted to the theology of the cross, particularly the suffering of Christ in Isaiah 53. According Katongole (2017: 13), "the cross is not a metaphor but a historical reality that speaks directly to the "wounds" of Africans. God's presence among oppressed people is demonstrated by the suffering Servant. Hence, suffering in Africa is not just a personal matter but also a reality that has been influenced by history, shared by society, and explained by religion. African Christians demand a theology that explains suffering in the context of justice, community, and faith(Assié-Lumumba, 2016:15).

Implications for Christianity in Africa

African Christians' reactions to suffering are influenced by their faith, communal values, and redemptive perspective. The church contributes by providing both practical assistance and spiritual support. African Christians frequently view suffering as a means of connecting with God and participating in God's redemptive plan rather than as a form of divine punishment. This perspective, which emphasises unity with Christ and the promise of renewal for individuals and communities, aids people in finding meaning and hope in hardships in diverse ways:

Firstly, African Christians face adversity through prayer, faith, and communal life. This fortitude is a component of African Christian philosophy, which views suffering as a time when God is close rather than as a form of divine absence or punishment. African Indigenous Churches (AICs) have developed liturgies and practices that situate suffering within a participatory and redemptive framework (Anderson, 2001: 115). Prayer, fasting, and worship become ways to express courage and agency during social and political upheavals. African women exhibit a "theology of resilience" by finding strength in the stories of biblical characters like the Suffering

Servant, Hagar, and Ruth (Amoah, 2001: 36). The church generally functions as a place of safety and empowerment in times of suffering. Isaiah 53 shows a servant who endures rejection, and this image shapes the African Christian response to hardship.

Secondly, there is holistic healing. A key passage in African interpretations is Isaiah 53:5, which states, "by his wounds we are healed." In African Christianity, healing is viewed as more than just spiritual. It encompasses social order, mental tranquility, emotional fortitude, and physical well-being. This is consistent with the African belief that the spiritual and physical are intertwined. This is expressed differently in different churches. Pentecostal and Charismatic communities emphasise using prayer, laying on hands, sharing testimony and casting out spirits to achieve divine healing (Owoeye, nd:109). Also, mainstream churches such as for example, The Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Anglican denominations, believe that God heals via faith and community support by compassionate fellow-Christians. God heals individuals and communities through the suffering of the Servant.

Future healing is also observed. It alludes to the end of suffering, death, and oppression. The concept of *Ubuntu* (Tutu, 1999: 31), which holds that a person is shaped by their community, influences how people view suffering and recovery. The community bears the burden when someone is harmed. Through prayer, ritual, and care, healing is shared rather than private (Stinson, 2004: 89). Churches provide social and spiritual support. They guide mourning, offer money, medical care, and advocacy

Thirdly, there is the hope of redemption. Isaiah 53:5 states that the servant who "was pierced for our transgressions" will "see the light of life" and "justify many" (v. 11). For African Christians who live under oppressive systems, this change has significance. The servant's suffering is a necessary component of God's plan, not a meaningless one. In African theology, this is viewed as participating in Christ's mission rather than being passive. African Christians "learn to pray not simply for escape from suffering but for the courage to live faithfully within it" when they are surrounded by violence and loss (Katongole, 2017: 45). Christ's suffering is a model and a substitute, encouraging followers of Christ to endure suffering in the hope of obtaining new life. In 1 Peter 2:21–24 (NRSV) we read "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."

Theology must take into account people's lives, including their suffering (Mbiti, 1969:2; Oduyoye, 1986: 35). Suffering is a part of Christ's mission and passion, not a form of divine punishment. African Christians can view their suffering in the context of God's presence and renewal by reading Isaiah 53.

In the fourth place, there is the church's renewed commitment. African churches are more than just places of worship. They are centres for advocacy, healing, care, and education regarding suffering. This work is shaped by Isaiah 53, depicting a servant who endures suffering to bring about peace. For the benefit of their people, African churches view themselves as collaborators in Christ's redemptive work. They provide food assistance, trauma healing, legal clinics, schools, and hospitals. The Servant encourages reflection and action. Christianity in Africa has developed into a regional and grounded religion (Bediako, 2004: 56). For those suffering, the church is a living example of Christ.

Likewise, the church is a force that opposes injustice. In cultures characterised by violence, corruption, and division, it demands justice, forgiveness, and peace. The church interprets Isaiah 53:11, which depicts a servant justifying many, as a call to understand suffering and respond to it with dedicated compassion and service. Peacebuilding, community renewal, and

truth and reconciliation initiatives are examples. Nelson Mandela of South Africa may not have quoted Isaiah 53 directly, but he suffered partly for 27 years as a prisoner in Robben Island to ensure the emancipation of his people (Bady, 2014 : 107 The same can be said of John Henry Okullu of Kenya, an Anglican Church priest, and a political activist, who suffered series of arrest and harassments in the hands of President Daniel Arap Moi in the late 70s. (Adar, 2000:83).

Conclusion

Isaiah 53 has theological significance for African Christians because it addresses the reality of suffering. Many African believers relate the Suffering Servant to their own experiences with poverty, illness, political repression, and intercommunal conflict. The image of the innocent servant who endures suffering, rejection, and the pain of others resonates with individuals and communities who struggle to live just lives. African Christians can better understand their suffering using contextual hermeneutics developed by theologians such as John S. Mbiti. Isaiah 53 is more than just a prophecy of Christ's atoning sacrifice. This passage demonstrates that suffering can have a redemptive function and is not in any way meaningless . It implies that African Christians can find meaning and hope in adversity, just like the servant did. The church provides group healing and spiritual support as a communal setting. African Christians see a promise of material, social, and spiritual change due to the servant's suffering leading to restoration. As a result, Isaiah 53 gives believers courage by serving as a reminder that God is present in suffering and uses it to accomplish redemption for a fallen humanity.

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