

**Surely he [my servant] has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
Upon him was the chastisement
that brought us peace,
and with his stripes we are healed.**

These words made famous by Handel's Messiah are from the best known 'Servant Song' in the prophet Isaiah. We recall them at this time because the first Christians found in them a profound understanding of the significance of Jesus' death. That Jesus should have died so young and in such a terribly shameful way was a scandal which needed an explanation. Isaiah's prophecy went some way to providing it.

Yet there is a mystery to this prophecy which scholars have long debated. The 'servant' is never named. Who was he, the prophet himself? An unknown person? Or the people of Israel themselves? Sometimes he seems to have an individual and sometimes a corporate personality. He could be an individual or the whole people of God. Perhaps this ambiguity is deliberate as I think it is. Let me explain.

Some days ago I was watching an episode of *'The Crown'* on Netflix. (Our son Simon had included us on his Netflix account last Christmas). It was the one in which Princess Margaret presented Queen Elizabeth with a terrible dilemma. As very young princesses they had given a solemn promise to their father, George VI, that they would support each other throughout their lives. But as adults Margaret wanted to be married to a divorced man, the very handsome Peter Townsend. But as head of a church that, in those days, did not allow divorce, could the Queen allow it? She was in a terrible dilemma; as an individual she wished to keep their solemn promise as children to their father and to one another; but at her Coronation she had given an oath to uphold the faith of the Church of England Established in the realm. She could not keep both. Should she act as an individual or in her corporate capacity as Head of the Church and representative of the nation's morality?

In the Netflix version of events she spoke to her uncle, Edward VIII, who, having abdicated, was in Paris and he, rather uncharacteristically, advised her to defend the Crown and so act in her corporate capacity and deny Margaret the marriage. This she did.

The point is not whether that decision was right or wrong but to demonstrate that the Queen had a dual persona. She had and has both an individual and corporate persona. She is representative not only of the national church but of the nation and indeed the Commonwealth.

Jesus also had and has a dual persona. He was the son of Mary and Joseph and had brothers and sisters and was born in Bethlehem and brought up in Nazareth. He died a criminal's death according to the Roman torture of crucifixion and according to the witness of his followers rose from the dead. But he also claimed the title Son of Man, a representative role for humanity, and was acclaimed Christ, the Anointed One, representative of his nation and, in the eyes of the church, head of the new people of God.

There is, of course, a big difference between the dual personas of the Queen and that of Jesus. We notice that the Queen has these two personas because there was a conflict of interest. In Jesus' case there is no conflict. What he was as Jesus the man so he was and is as Jesus the Christ. In fact it is precisely because he was the person he was that he is also claimed to be the Christ.

It is nevertheless only by acknowledging the dual persona of Jesus and that he was acting in both capacities on the cross that we can make sense of the church's claim that he died for our sins. And that, as Isaiah prophesied, 'with his stripes we are healed'.