

## Justice through compassion in Isaiah 42:1- 4: Evangelistic mission today

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### *Abstract*

The first song, Is 42:1-4, of the four Servant Songs in the Book of Isaiah introduces the servant who is chosen for a universal mission of bringing justice to the nations. The servant in this song is known as being upheld, pleasing the Lord, and faithful to the entrusted mission. Above all, the servant is portrayed as the one who carries out mission, not with violence but deep compassion. The exegesis of this passage explores what the nature of mission accomplished by the beloved servant is, that is, profound compassion. The servant's ways of doing mission becomes a guiding light for missionaries around the world, especially in the context of Vietnam.

**Keywords:** justice, compassion, mission

## Justice through compassion in Isaiah 42:1- 4: Evangelistic mission today

### 1. Introduction

The Book of Isaiah is one of the most significant prophetic books in the Old Testament, attributed to the prophet Isaiah, the first of the so-called "Major Prophets," during the eighth century in the southern kingdom. This Book is written during the Babylonian exile and divided into three parts: Proto-Isaiah (chs 1-39), Deutero-Isaiah (40-50), and Trito-Isaiah (56-66). The four so-called servant songs (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; and 52:13-53:12), first identified by Bernhard Duhn, are considered insertions to the Book. The task of an individual in these songs is to bring back the exiles of Israel (Menezes, 2002). Isaiah has been known as the evangelist among the prophets, a title that only fits the Deutero-Isaiah, where the first song or poet is located. Menezes points out three places where the Second Isaiah treats the "proclaimers of Good News:" Isa 40:9; 41:27; 52:7. The Deutero-Isaiah is probably attributed to a disciple of the Proto-Isaiah as an author who foretells the end of the Babylonian exile and pictures of the coming restoration in glorious terms. The author is a contemporary of King Cyrus the Great, the emperor of Persia (550-529 B.C.E.). During this period, the Israelites were in exile, and Jerusalem was destroyed (Menezes, 2002).

Apart from common elements, Deuto-Isaiah varies from Proto-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah in words that are more about the near future of restoration, for which God sends his prophet to carry his plans of healing and uplifting his people. Likewise, although the Lord's servant in the first song has some characteristics in common with the other three songs, it contains different nuances in holding his mission. The sections below aim to explore the profound nature of his mission by delving into an exegesis of the passage, the intertextuality of other passages that closely connect with the text's message, and its relevance to the temporary context.

### 2. The Exegesis of Isaiah 42:1-4

**De-limitation** - Isaiah 42:1-4 is categorized as the first of the four servant songs in Isaiah. This literary unit is marked by its surrounding context—where it starts and where it ends. First, the unit opens with the interjection *hēn* (Behold), which signals the beginning of a new scene after a court scene in the heavenly judgment scene (41:21-29), a lawsuit between God and the "gods." This interjection serves to draw the reader's attention to an important pronouncement. Second, the song is followed by verse 5, which begins with the formulaic expression, "Thus (*kōh*) says the Lord God." This expression is often used to introduce a divine message, marking the start of a new divine speech. Other rhetorical features that support the passage's conclusion as a distinct unit of the Book are further explained in the later section.

**Organization** - Closely examining the verbs and repetitions within Isaiah 42:1-4 reveals a chiasmic structure that deepens our understanding of the text. The three-time repetitions of the noun "justice" (*mishpāt*) in verses 1,3, 4; of the verbs it follows, "bring forth" (*avdi*) in its hiphil (vv. 1-2) and "establish" (*śim*) in its qal imperfect (v.3) form a chiasm with a climax in verse 3; of the sense of universalism as "nations" and "coastlands;" the rhetorical repetition in parallelism of root words: *rāṣūṣ* and *kēhāh* in verses 3,4. The structure is characterized by parallel elements highlighting key aspects of the servant's role. The chiasmic structure can be demonstrated as follows:

A Universalism of the Mission (v.1)

*"Behold, my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights, I have put my spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations."*

B Nonviolence in the mission (v.2)

*"He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street;"*

C Mission through compassion (v.3)

*“a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.*

B' Non-violence in mission (v.4a)

*“He will not fail or be discouraged.”*

A' Universalism of the Mission (v.4b)

*“till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.”*

In this chiasmic structure, the word “justice” is repeated three times (vv.1, 3, 4) in the poem; thus, it is important and serves as a thread theme of the entire poem.

- A and A' frame the text with a focus on the servant, who is divinely chosen for a universal mission to bring justice to the nations (v.1), continuing until he accomplishes this task (v.4b). Both emphasize the extension of the servant's mission toward the whole world, including the farthest reaches of the earth.
- B and B' describe what the servant is not to perform while carrying out his mission, emphasizing his nonviolent approach (vv.2&4a).
- C stands at the center of the chiasmic structure to underscore the servant's mission through compassion and the manner in which he fulfills it (v.3).

**Semantics** - The thread to link each line in the passage is the nature of the servant and his mission solemnly pronounced by the LORD. The meanings of keywords in the passage are important to comprehend the entire passage.

*avdi* (v.1): The Hebrew word *avdi* (my servant) appears in verse 1 and occurs 145 times in the Old Testament. The masculine noun *eved* primarily means “servant” or “slave” and is used in various contexts of the Old Testament (Brown, Driver, & Briggs, 1994). The word *‘eved* is used in an individual sense as in cases of Abraham (Gen 26:24; Ps 105:6), Job (1:8; 2:3; 42:7.8), Isaac (Gen 24:14); Jacob (1Chro 16:13; Ps 105:6), Moses (Exod 14:31; Num 12:7-8), Joshua (Jos 24:29), Caleb (Num 14:24), David (Ezek 37:25), Salomon (1Kgs 3:8).

The identity of the servant in 42:1-4 has been the subject of scholarly debate, without reaching a consensus. In fact, the LXX adds *Iakōb* after *avdi* in the vocative case in place of *hēn* and inserts *Israēl* (Israel) before *behīri* (my chosen one). However, this assertion seems to be problematic for several reasons. First, all the verbs describing the servant in 42:1-4 are in a singular form, whereas Jacob is addressed in a plural form (41:14), and Israel is collectively referred to as a people (Isa 41:8.9, 44:21, 49:3, Ps 136:22). Second, there is a shift in grammatical person from the second person in Isaiah 41 to the third person in Isaiah 42:1-4. However, in verses 6-7 and the remaining portions of chapters 42 and 43, the servant continues to be addressed as Israel, and the narrative returns to the second person. Third, the appearance of Jacob and Israel in the second song assumes that the servant in Isaiah 42:1 cannot be Jacob or Israel. In Isaiah 49:5, the servant is tasked with bringing Jacob back to the Lord, something Jacob himself cannot do. Fourth, there is a distinct shift from a negative tone to messages of judgment to a positive proclamation (42:1-4). This contrast is reinforced by juxtaposing the molten images (41:29) with the Spirit of the Lord (42:1). The use of *hēn* functions as a transition from the despair of having no one to proclaim the good news (41:28) to the emergence of a powerful figure who will do so—the servant (42:1). Fifth, the servant in Isaiah 42:1-4 is presented differently from the figure in Isaiah 41. In Isaiah 41, a figure is an object of God's condescension, mercies, affections, and ministrations, needing strengthening, hardening, steeling, and forming. On the contrary, the servant in 42:1-4 does not need all that, for he is a finished product (Smillie, 2005). Moreover, if the person in Isaiah 41 is prepared for vengeful forcefulness, the servant in 42:1-4 is depicted in his manner of treating others with compassion, strong but gentle. It is because, as described, he is truly God's chosen one (*bāhîr*),

having God's spirit (*rūah*), God's source of joy (*rāšāh*), and whom God upholds (*tāmak*) and who is sent for a mission of bringing justice to the nations.

*yōšī'* (vv.1&3): The word *yōšī'* derives from the verb *yāšā'*, meaning to "go out, go forth." The verb appears 1068 times in the Old Testament with a literal, physical meaning of coming or going to some location and several hundred instances of a more figurative meaning of "bringing out of distress" or "delivering from enemies." It has the most theological significance with reference to the exodus, in which the people's suffering is connected with God's activities for his people (Merrill, 1997; cf. Pss 25:17, 68:7, 107:14,28, 142:8, 143:11; 2Sam 22:49, 22:20). The verb *yōšī'* in hiphil imperfect 3rd person masculine singular form occurs seven times in the Old Testament, with two of those occurrences in the first Servant song, which means to "cause to go forth, come forth, bring forth." These figurative meanings are central to the servant's role in this first song. His task is as fundamentally important as the exodus from Egypt (Baltzer, 2001). The Lord is the one who alone acts to deliver his people.

*mishpāt* (vv.1,3,4): The word *mishpāt* is a verbal noun, appearing three times in the first song. It derives from the verb *šāphaṭ*, meaning to "judge, govern, execute judgment." This verb is used more than 100 times in the Old Testament and describes a wide range of activities involved in establishing and preserving order (Schultz, 1997). The noun occurs 425 times in the Old Testament and is the most significant Hebrew term used to refer to divine and human justice (Enns, 1997). *Mishpāt* is the internal object of the verb *šāphaṭ*, and it refers primarily to the act or consequences of doing what *šāphaṭ* entails (Schultz, 1997). In the Old Testament, judgment and justice are inseparable. In the LXX, *mishpāt* is most commonly rendered to *krima* (decision, 182x), *krisis* (judgment, 142x), and *dikaiōma* (regulation, 38x) (Schultz, 1997). It can denote an "attribute of the *šāphaṭ*, "justice, right, rectitude," which is the attribute of God and of man (Is 30:18, Gen 18:25, Job 40:8, Deut 32:4 and attribute of man as in Pr 12:5, Jb 29:14, Ps 111:7). It is clear that God loves *mishpāt*, and God requires that man should do it (Ps 33:5, 37:28, 99:4, Ho 2:21, Ps 89:15,97:2 and God requires justice as in Mi 6:1; Is 1:17; 56:1; 61:8). It is noted that in the MT, this word has *mishpāt*, while Qumran<sup>a</sup> inserts the conjunction *waw* and the suffix *ūmishpātō* (and his justice). Interestingly, in Isaiah, there are 42 occurrences of *mishpāt*, and three of them are repeated in Isaiah 42:1-4 alone, referring to justice. The repetition of *mishpāt* in the first song emphasizes the justice-bringing mission which the servant has received from the Lord. Baltzer observes that the formula "decree of justice... cause it to go out, bring forth" (*mishpāt* ... *yōšī'*) is found only in this first song (vv.1,3), indicating that and so these terms are significant (Baltzer, 2001). Lastly, since *mishpāt* can refer to divinely given laws or instructions and Israel's standard of justice is based on the character, actions, and demands of God (Schultz, 1997), *tōrah* (Torah, v.4) can be a reflection of the divine character, which is compassion. Thus, the phrase "and the coastlands wait for his teaching" can be paraphrased as "and the coastlands wait for the servant's compassion." The three-time repeated word *mishpāt* in this poem goes together with the servant's mission to bring forth justice and is linked with the twice repeated words *rāšūš* and *kēhāh* (as discussed below) results in the sense of compassion obviously.

*lō'* (vv.2-4): The negative particle *lō'* (not) is repeated seven times in verses 2-4, together with seven verbs in the imperfect singular third person form *yīts 'aq* (he will cry out), *yīssā'* (he will lift up), *yashmīa'* (he will cause to hear), *yishbōr* (he will break), *yekabbēnāh* (he will quench), *yikkheh* (he will grow dim), and *yārūts* (he will be discouraged). This phenomenon stresses the servant's nonviolence as he carries out his mission. The heart of his mission is revealed in how he treats others (v.3).

*rāšūš* and *kēhāh* (vv.3-4): The MT has *yekhabbennāh* (he will quench it) in the pill form with a third person feminine singular suffix, while Qumran A has *yekhabbeh* (he will quench), a form without the suffix, omitting ַ; conferring with the ancient versions. In the MT, in place of *rāšūš* in the qal imperfect form, the LXX has *thrausthēsetai* in the passive form, conferring with Targum, and the LXX reads *yērōš* (he will be crushed) in the niphil form. The parallelism of the two phrases – "a 'bruised' (*rāšūš*) reed he will not break and a 'dimly' (*kēhāh*) burning wick he will not quench" in verse 3- constitutes the profound meaning of "justice" as compassion. Moreover, it is striking that the verbs *yikkheh* and *rāšūš* in verse 4 have the same roots with the words *rāšūš* and *yekhabbennāh* in verse 3; thus they bear the same sense. This chiasmic use of the two verbs, *rāšāš* and *kāhāh*, shows that the two things cannot be separated (Baltzer, 2001). They are repeated; thus, they stand in a close connection

with the word "justice," which occurs three times twice in the poem. Therefore, justice is related to *rāšûš* and *kēhāh* and compassion, caring for the needy. The servant's gentle approach. He shares the fate of the people to whom he brings forth justice. His compassion goes beyond mere sympathy; it involves entering the experience of the person who suffers, even taking part of the burden of another person's suffering into himself. This task is difficult, but he will not fail, even in the end. If he does not break or quench others, he will not be broken or quenched in his mission. As a result, genuine compassion and the culmination of the servant's mission is to bring forth compassion to those who are weak and suffering from the tyrant and the unjust (Kissane, 1943).

*laggōyīm* and *'īyyīm* (vv.1&4): The sense of universalism of salvation is repeated in the expressions of *laggōyīm* (the nations, v.1) and *'īyyīm* (the coastlands, v.4). The word *laggōyīm* in noun masculine plural form of *gōy* occurs thirty-three times in Isaiah; and in the Old Testament, it is usually used to indicate non-Hebrew peoples (Brown, Driver, & Briggs, 1994). The term *'īyyīm* in the plural form of *'ī* occurs forty times in the Old Testament, and out of it, seventeen times are in the Book of Isaiah and seven times in chapters 40-42, and four times in chapter 42 (Ps 97:1; Isa. 13:22, 34:14, 40:15, 41:1.5, 42:4.10, 49:1, 55:5, 60:9; Jer 50:39; Eze 27:3.15). These statistics indicate that the theme of universalism of salvation is prominent throughout the Book of Isaiah. If justice mentioned the first time in Isaiah 1:17 is done within Israel only, toward the end of the Book (Isa 66:11), salvation is extended to all (Menezes, 2002). Moreover, in the first song itself, the parallelism of the phrases "until he has established justice in the earth" and "the coastlands wait for his teaching" (v.4) is noteworthy. The horizon extends further from *érets* (earth) -the land of Israel- to *'īyyīm* (islands, coastlands) - a wider view. The servant is a missionary to the Gentiles despite his being despised and helpless (v.4a).

### 3. Inter-Textuality

In this section, I develop the theme of justice by finding the meaning of *mishpāt* in the immediate and remote contexts of the Bible.

#### 3.1 In the Book of Isaiah

From the Book of Isaiah, I have chosen each passage from Proto-Isaiah, Deutero-Isaiah, and Trito-Isaiah, where justice carries the same sense of compassion.

**Isaiah 1:17** - The verse reads, "Learn to do good; seek justice (*mishpāt*); rescue the oppressed; defend the orphan; plead for the widow." This is the first occurrence of the word *mishpāt* in Isaiah. In the context of the injustice and oppression inflicted by the evil, corrupted rulers, the prophet shows what God truly desires: justice, which means doing good to the oppressed, the orphan, and the widow- those who are forsaken and vulnerable in opposition to a breach of justice. For the Jewish people, caring for such people reflects God's character as he reveals himself to them: a God of goodness and mercy (cf. Exo 34:6-7). God cares for the helpless, strangers, and outcasts, and he expects his people to emulate his compassion. Therefore, "do justice" in this passage is to act with compassion, goodness, and mercy toward the helpless, just as God does (Oswalt, 1986).

**Isaiah 51:4-5** - The passage, 51:4-5, says, "Listen to me, my people (*'ammî*), and give heed to me, my nation (*ūlā 'ummî*), for a teaching will go out from me and my justice (*mishpātî*) for a light to the peoples (*'ammîm*). I will bring near my deliverance swiftly; my salvation has gone out, and my arms will rule (*yišpōtū*) the peoples (*'ammîm*); the coastlands (*'īyyīm*) wait for me, and for my arm, they hope." The strophe starts with a double call to listen by the hiphil imperatives, *haqshîvū*; and *ha'āzînū*, in v.4 that make the admonition all the more urgent (Koole, 1998). The statement is addressed not only to Israel but also to the nations, as indicated by the shift from the singular *'ammî* to the plurals *'ammîm* (peoples) and *'īyyīm* (nation) in v.4a which continues throughout verse 5. This change signifies the universal scope of God's message. As a compassionate God, he offers salvation not just to a particular group but to all of humanity- demonstrating a universalism of salvation. God himself will rule over all people and nations, guaranteeing with his righteousness, divine justice, uprightness, and truth.

**Isaiah 61:8** - The verse here is, "For, I, the Lord, love justice (*mishpāt*), I hate robbery and wrongdoing (*gāzēl*)

*bə'ōlāh*); I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.” This is the final occurrence of the word *mishpāt* in Isaiah, referring to divine justice. The phrase *gāzēl bə'ōlāh* is employed for oppression by foreign enemies or abuses within Israel. It also conveys the sense of injustice or unrighteousness, individually under the pretense of justice or collectively as the law of war, which is probably here (Koole, 2001; cf. Deut 28:31; 3:14; 10:2). In this context, God speaks in the first person, using the divine name to confirm the servant's word. God is characterized by his actions: loving justice and, conversely, hating injustice. As God of promises, he guarantees justice for and demands it of all his subjects. He pledges to reward the Israelites and uphold the eternal covenant. God will accomplish wonderful things to fulfill his divine purpose and keep his promises- simply because of who he is. Since righteousness is part of the divine character, he loves justice accordingly (Job 34:17; Ps 9:16; Jer 12:1; see also Pss 33:5; 37:28). The declaration in this verse serves as powerful evidence of God's justice, grounded in his compassion (Oswalt, 1986).

To conclude this discussed section, the idea of justice expressed through compassion is obvious. The passages from Isaiah identify the object of justice as compassion: the poor, the widow, and the orphan. That also pronounces the subject of acts of justice or compassion, that is, the Lord who really loves justice and promises a covenant to those who practice justice. In light of this, the first servant song is the subject of the act of bringing forth justice to the nations and the coastlands as an object. No one is outside his plan of salvation and his compassion.

### 3.2 In the Book of Prophets

The concept of justice that involves a sense of compassion might be found in the Books of Prophets. I have chosen three prophets, all prophesized in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, as an illustration: 1) Amos, in the northern kingdom, who was very sensitive to injustice and had a heart for the oppressed and the voiceless in the world; 2) Micah, who prophecized in the southern kingdom critically appraised the moral corruption of Israel; and 3) Malachi, who lived during a time of great injustice, corruption, and poverty in Jerusalem. The word *mishpāt* is repeatedly used in various places in these books.

**Amos 5:21-24** - The concept of social justice in this verse is expressed by means of two words, *mishpāt* *uṣādāqāh* (justice and righteousness), which are synonymous. The word *ṣādāqāh*, translated as “righteousness,” is “a relational virtue connoting loyalty among covenantal partners who have to stand by one another through thick and through thin.” When this term comes together with *mishpāt* (v.24), they complement and enhance each other and mean practically the same thing, that is, the right of covenantal partners to be aided and protected by their fellows (Menezes, 2002). These are righteous (*ṣaddīq*) e.g. 2:6, needy (*'evyōn*) e.g. 4:1, poor (*dallīm*) e.g. 5:11-12, and afflicted (*'ānāwīm*) e.g. 2:6-8, who are no longer subjects of concern for the rich but rather objects of exploitation. Amos does not ask the rich and the powerful to practice charity on the poor but rather demands that they give back the inalienable rights of the poor members of their community, whom they oppress and deprive of their rights (Menezes, 2002). Thus, justice here, in a sense of compassion, may refer to giving back rights that are meant for the poor. Genuine social justice and right relationship with others should be constant, enduring, and abundant “like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

**Micah 3:1-3** - In this verse, Micah addresses the government officials responsible for ruling God's people, Jacob and Israel, yet who oppress the poor and grind them into poverty. He challenges them by asking, “Is it not for you to know justice (*mishpāt*)?” (v.1). Though they are fully aware of what “justice” means under the Mosaic Law, they deliberately choose not to practice it (Menezes, 2002). Micah vividly describes their injustice and oppression using hard imagery, comparing their actions to cannibals devouring people (vv.2-3). Rather than using their authority to serve the people, they exploit it. Instead of being compassionate shepherds who protect and provide for their flocks, they metaphorically kill, dismember, and consume the people's property. Their “abhor justice” (v.9) implies that they despise compassion, rejecting the responsibility to care for their people as true shepherds should. For their evil actions, they would face God's punishment (v.4). In contrast, God will rule his people with compassion, as foretold in chapters 4-5.

**Malachi 3:5** - This verse is part of the prophetic oracle to condemn and punish all who oppress the widows and the fatherless. The widow and the orphan in the community are often mentioned together with the alien (*gēr*). They are particularly vulnerable in the society. With the loss of a husband and father, a widow and fatherless child were deprived of the care they were entitled to and left unprotected in a harsh society, although the law is designed to promote justice for such members of society (Snyman, 2015). However, God will never pervert justice. He will come near to those who violate the needy and exercise *mishpāt*. The alien is an object of the Lord's care and consideration; thus, oppressing them shows contempt for God. That is why "to fear the Lord" also means to treat fellow human beings in the right way, as in the intimate relationship between the vertical and horizontal dimensions of human relationships (Snyman, 2015). In this verse, it is clear that judgment and justice are always together, and here *mishpāt* contains both these senses.

To conclude, the examination of some Old Testament passages above affirms God's very concern for those who are underprivileged and oppressed in any form and by any authority. Out of compassion, God sends his prophets to warn the oppressors and call for care of the oppressed, showing that God is always on their side and vindicating their rights, which God has inscribed in the Torah. Taking them away from the hands of the oppressors and wicked human rulers, God himself will rule over his people with justice and compassion. In light of this, the servant in the first servant song chooses and sends to those in suffering to bring consolation, hope, and judgment to those who violate them. That is not the compassion that draws from his nature.

### 3.3 In the New Testament

The New Testament develops the Old Testament theme of divine judgment and justice. Jesus's teachings expound more fully on the idea of justice expressed through his compassion. In his ministry, he demonstrates himself as the fulfillment of God's justice and compassion revealed to his people. Below are several illustrations.

**Matthew 12:18-21** - In this passage, Jesus quoted the entire first servant song in Isaiah (42:1-4), the most extended passage quoted in Matthew. The word *mishpāt* of the MT (42:1) is equivalent to *krisin* of the LXX (*krisis* in a nominative case). The word κρίσις here refers to "justice" rather than "judgment." In Matthew's Gospel, justice is the central motif associated with salvation. Matthew uses the quotation to point out the contrast between Jesus and the Pharisees. In the literary context, the spiritual Jewish leaders, the Pharisees, make a harsh, unmerciful treatment of their people, oppressing them through their zeal to maintain Halakah. On the contrary, Jesus is presented as the humble Messiah full of compassion, reminding us of God's desire for mercy toward the oppressed. He who establishes God's will proves himself to be gentle, merciful, and compassionate in his ministry to the weak. Matthew's citation announces that justice is evidenced in Jesus' ministry of working out for God's good purpose of the nations' salvation (Beaton, 1999). His power is manifested in humble, compassionate service (Turner, 2008).

**Matthew 23:23** - This verse is the fourth woe addressed by Jesus to the Pharisees, saying, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you tithe, mint and dill and cummin, and you have neglected the weightier matters of the law: "justice and mercy and faith" (*tēn krisin kai ton eleon kai tēn pistin*). It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others." With the double use of "neglect" (*aphiēmi*, also means to "let go, send away). Jesus was against the Jewish religious leaders for their resultant neglect of things that really mattered. They fail to give heed to the more important things. Jesus thus reminds them of the primary obligation to practice first. "Justice" in this context is a central value linked with mercy and faithfulness. These three virtues are at the heart of the Old Testament and should be prioritized (Turner, 2008).

**Luke 18:7-8** - In the narrative of the unjust judge and the widow, the "widow" is collectively compared with the "chosen ones" (*hoi eklektoi*), symbolizing the remnant of Israel. These chosen ones cry out a cry arising out of suffering and appear for help. It is because they are still deprived of their rights, their legitimate existence, and their true life; they suffer in a hostile world that marginalizes them. In Israel, the judge was essentially the one who defended people's rights against those people who tried to violate them. The phrase *poiēsē tēn ekdikēsin* is rendered to "vindicate" (RSV) or "bring about justice" (NIB). Jesus declares that as judge, God will come quickly to judge

and restore justice, to offer his chosen ones an eschatological rehabilitation (Brown, 2013). These verses reflect the Old Testament assurance that God will grant justice to the oppressed members of society out of his compassion. This nuance allows one to have hope in God, who is faithfully present and sure to intervene in the end (Brown, 2013).

To conclude, as discussed above, these New Testament passages reveal the continuity of the theme *mishpāt* throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament. They also show the importance of *mishpāt* in relationships between God and human beings and that among humanity in Jesus' life and teachings. The study of these passages indicates that Jesus is the fulfillment of Scripture in general and in the first song of the suffering servant in particular. He does his mission and becomes a perfect example of compassion in bringing healing and restoration by opening eyes that are blind, freeing captives from prison, and releasing from the dungeon those who sit in darkness (Isa 42:7).

#### 4. Contextualization

**Pre-suppositions** - What is discussed above establishes the following points: First, justice is deeply connected to caring for the needy. This theme repeatedly appears throughout the Book of Isaiah. The passages in Isaiah and the prophets we discussed above present who are the oppressed, namely the poor, the orphan, and the widow, why one, especially rulers, should do justice to the unprivileged, and what consequences are to one who does oppress the needy. Moreover, justice portrayed here is not merely legal fairness but a divine mandate to protect the vulnerable. Second, compassion is at the heart of God's justice. God's justice is inseparable from his compassion. The passages from the New Testament we mentioned above highlight that the primacy of Jesus' mission is to bring justice to his people throughout his ministry. In Jesus, God shows his people what is really the central of justice and how valuable compassion is in his people's lives. God's compassion is revealed fully in the person of Jesus, his chosen, beloved one. Finally, justice involves a constant invitation to be an evangelist of compassion. The servant in this poem is considered an evangelist of compassion in the sense that the servant is sent to proclaim to the suffering exiles the good news of restoration and redemption, delivering a message of hope to the oppressed. The statistics of a number of the occurrences of the noun *mishpāt* and the verb *šāfaṭ* in the Old Testament as a whole are striking. Here, it is once more time to affirm that since God shows his unending compassion on us first in our relationship with him, we are then invited to faithfully respond to it by doing justice and displaying compassion toward our fellow humans. There will be a time when all are in God's kingdom ruled by the ever-compassionate God.

**Concrete Expression** - God's compassion, manifested in his universal plan of salvation, continues to be a source, a model, and an inspiration for the evangelization of missionaries in the current global context, where injustice and suffering are widespread, and many people turn a blind eye to the pain of others. In a concrete way, in Vietnam, the mission of charity in daily life is always emphasized and included in evangelization. It is a living mission of every Christian to have. This charity stems from compassion paired with a deep, empathetic feeling for others' suffering and the desire to help those in need, even though it presents a challenge. This meaning of compassion is clearly appropriate to the context of Vietnam. In the dioceses of the Catholic Church in Vietnam, in particular, the most prominent missionary works comprise free education classes for underprivileged children, scholarship programs for poor students, free medical examinations and medication distribution, visits and aid to centers for the elderly, disabled, and lepers, burying the dead who have no one to care for them, providing attention and care for HIV-AIDS patients in centers built by the diocese, supporting migrants from rural areas, for whom parishes find ways to assist.

The analysis and significance of the first song of the suffering servant – who was sent by God to carry out his mission by showing compassion to the suffering – reinforce the efforts of all those engaged in the evangelization of the Catholic Church in Vietnam. Moreover, the mission of the servant to go forth and show compassion to all the nations also calls upon Vietnamese Christians, including the religious, who believe that indirect evangelization, such as teaching, praying, or performing daily tasks, is sufficient. While this is not wrong, the courage to reach out

to as many suffering people as possible to bring them love and compassion remains a constant call. Becoming a servant of compassion is the most effective way to bear witness. As Pope Paul VI affirms, “modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (EN 41).

**The Theology of Restoration** - In the Hebrew Bible, justice (*mishpāṭ*) is often linked with restoration (*šûb*). The word *šûb* basically means to “turn back” or “return.” In Isaiah, as a transitive verb, this verb is used figuratively in the sense of restoring captivity (Is 52:8,12) or of “bringing back to mind, taking into consideration” (Is 44:19; 46:8). It can also imply the restorative act because God’s restorative work often involves a return to justice and the restoration of a right relationship with God and with others. This act is grounded in genuine compassion. In light of this, justice through compassion brought by God’s gentle servant to the needy, that is, the exiled Israelites, comforts them in their suffering and gives them hope. The servant is an embodiment of God’s compassion. His justice is not retributive but restorative, seeking to heal the broken, lift up those who are fragile and oppressed, bring them back from both physical and spiritual slavery to wholeness, and restore their identity as his chosen people. In other words, justice through compassion is restoration in its ultimate goal.

**Plan of Action** - When we apply this view of God’s compassionate justice as restoration into the context of evangelization in Vietnam, we realize that evangelizing is not merely preaching the Gospel to convert people to Christianity but rather being active in the healing and restoration of individuals or communities. If I respond to the call to participate in this mission, I would actively take every opportunity to perform compassionate actions that enable people to lift up, feel loved, and move forward unstoppably in faith and hope in the Lord’s divine justice.

**Educational Implications** - The emphasis of Isaiah 42:1-4 is the servant’s deep compassion in carrying out his mission. Not only in the religious realm but also in daily life of humanity, compassion ever matters in our world today, where injustice, violation, oppression, wars and so forth are increasing and expressions of lacking compassion among humans. Because of that, it is essential to incorporate the theme of compassion into educational program at various levels to foster understanding and motivating caring actions. Exposures through which love and compassion can be shown toward those are weak, suffering, and vulnerable are highly valued. By doing this, many people may feel loved, and in turn, they will show compassion toward others. The world will become beautiful again and even more so.

## 5. Conclusion

In the above presentation, my main focus was Isaiah 42:1-4. In this song, the concept of justice through compassion is conveyed. Analyzing its theme throughout the song itself, other passages in Isaiah and the Book of the Prophets, and the New Testament, I combined it with hermeneutical analysis and contextualization. In this paper, I also localized it to evangelization in Vietnam. I am convinced that this first servant song shows that justice through compassion is in the context of the restoration mission. This presupposes the inherent potentiality and actuality of being missionaries of God’s compassion in expressing it in concrete actions. It finally shows that the restoration of God is universally offered for all.

**AI Use Disclosure.** I used Grammarly for English editing. All outputs were reviewed, verified, and edited by the author. No confidential or personally identifiable data were entered into AI tools. The author takes full responsibility for the content.

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