

## Johannes Oecolampadius: Exposition of Isaiah 53

By Diane Poythress

### BIOGRAPHY

Can you guess who this man is? Melancthon observed, “I honored [him] as nothing less than a father, his being superior in learning, prudence, and piety.”<sup>1</sup> Erasmus commented, “So far, I have praised no one with regard to magnificence or thought more...”<sup>2</sup> Concerning the explanation of the Lord’s Supper, Calvin wrote, “I was unwilling to do what has been done already. This was first performed with accuracy and skill by...”<sup>3</sup> Yes: it is the man God used as a Reformer in Basel, Switzerland, Johannes Oecolampadius.

Johannes Oecolampadius (1482–1531), was born in Germany, but served God primarily in Basel. In his day, he was considered the leading Biblical language expert, being the most competent in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and German. It is recorded that he also knew Aramaic, Italian, and French.<sup>4</sup> He even wrote a Greek grammar book which found use for a hundred years. His reputation brought him to the attention of Erasmus who called on Oecolampadius to check his Greek New Testament.

Like Luther, Oecolampadius began to study law and then switched to theology, eventually becoming a priest, a cathedral preacher, and a “lutheran” deviant denounced by Eck to Rome. He entered an Augustinian monastery, fled to hide in a German castle, and then went to Basel where he lectured at the University of Basel. The Basel City Council promoted him to be the cathedral preacher, the city’s architect for reformation, a full professor and the recreator of both the university curriculum and children’s education (for which he authored a catechism).

He seems to have had true faith in God from a young age. But at what point he became reformed is difficult to say. Seemingly, he came to his conclusions apart from and prior to Luther. Indeed, he found that Luther later echoed what he himself had believed. We know that he approved Erasmus’ Greek NT of 1516 which showed that

Mary was not a repository of grace. Apparently, he also wrote an anonymous satire against Eck in 1520.<sup>5</sup> There is no question that his full systematic theology was in place by the time of his Isaiah lectures.

His real work of Reformation took two forms: both doctrinal and pragmatic. His public university lectures on Isaiah in 1523 (which included chapter 53 herein) accomplished both goals. His doctrinal expositions offered a thorough explanation of biblical teaching and the Gospel. The tenets of the Reformation came naturally through the exposition of the text. Pragmatically, both scholars and laymen heard these truths, since they

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1. Philip Melancthon, *Melancthons Briefwechsel: Kritische und Kommentierte Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Christine Mundhenk et al. (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2009), vol. 10, 451–459 [453], letter number 2780; *Corpus Reformatorum* (Halis Saxonum: C.C. Zwetschke, 1834–1860), vol. 4, 715–722 [716], letter number 2418. This was written by Melancthon to the readers of the first edition of his works in 1542.

2. *Corpus Reformatorum* (Halis Saxonum: C.C. Zwetschke, 1834–1860), vol. 1, 688–694 [691], letter number 302, Erasmus to Melancthon, dated December, 1524.

3. John Calvin, “Partaking of the Flesh and Blood,” in *Calvin Theological Treatises*, trans. with notes by J. K. S. Reid (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 292.

4. John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 55.

5. See LW 48:149 fn 2, Luther’s Correspondence, 1:272–273, fn 3; where apparently Luther says Oecolampadius had confessed to Melancthon that he had authored the satire.

were delivered in Latin, followed by German. Hundreds of people closed shop, even in distant towns, to go hear God's Word expounded in their own language. Soon, people began demanding daily Bible studies in their mother tongue. Reformed morality was also addressed through frequent exhortations denouncing public usury, bribery, corruption, and pharisaical faith.

Oecolampadius became a fountain of reformed theology, including the concepts of elders, sessions, excommunication, fencing the table and the Word, spiritual participation in Communion, separation of church and state, covenant theology, election, and reformed liturgy. His hermeneutic rivals any present-day approach. His personal piety was never denied or besmirched, even by his enemies.

When the city of Basel declared itself to be Reformed, the City Council called upon him to suggest new city ordinances. His plan, which included a directory for church discipline, basically repeated a document he had submitted in 1526. He wanted elders and pastors to be examined biennially for doctrine and piety; and he wanted church elders involved in excommunication, requiring a certain church-state separation. The Council resisted.

His Reformed views bore marked maturity and

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6. For further information about the life and writings of Johannes Oecolampadius, see the following. Ernst Staehelin, *Das theologische Lebenswerk Johannes Oekolampads* (Leipzig: M. Heinsius Nachfolger, 1939); also edited by Ernst Staehelin, *Briefe und Akten zum Leben Oekolampads* (Leipzig: M. Heinsius Nachfolger, 1927–34); Diane Poythress, *Reformer of Basel: The Life, Thought and Influence, of Johannes Oecolampadius* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011); Diane Poythress, "Johannes Oecolampadius' Exposition of Isaiah Chapters 36–37," 2 vol. Ph.D. dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1992; Akira Demura, "Church Discipline According to Johannes Oecolampadius in the Setting of His Life and Thought," Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1964; Akira Demura, "Two Commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans: Calvin and Oecolampadius," in *Calvinus Sincerioris religionis vindex*, ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser and Brian G. Armstrong (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Pub., 1997), 165–188; Karl Hammer, "Der Reformator Oekolampad (1482–1531)," in *Reformiertes Erbe* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1993), 157–170; Olaf Kuhr, *Die Macht des Bannes und der Busse: Kirchengzucht und Erneuerung der Kirche bei Johannes Oekolampad, 1482–1531* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999); Eric Northway, "The Reception of the Fathers and Eucharistic Theology in Johannes Oecolampadius (1482–1531), with Special Reference to the Adversus Haereses of Irenaeus of Lyons," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Durham, 2009 (deposited 2011); Jeff Fisher, *A Christoscopic Reading of Scripture: Johannes Oecolampadius on Hebrews* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2016); Mickey Mattox, [*Johannes Oecolampadius*] *An Exposition of Genesis* [first 3 chapters of Oecolampadius' commentary], trans. Mickey Mattox (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2013); Gordon Rupp, *Patterns of Reformation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 3–46.

depth. Every systematic theological topic is addressed with scholarly acuity and piety. In his Genesis commentary, he speaks of the Trinity, image of God in man (similar to Jonathan Edwards' rational and ethical categories), the decree of the Fall, death before the Fall, days of creation, God's accommodation, free will, inspiration of Scripture, and *sola fide*. His Isaiah commentary provides equal breadth. Isaiah 53 alone touches on the inspiration of Scripture, *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, *solus Christus*, original sin, imputation, substitutionary death, perseverance of the saints, and the sovereignty of God.

As opposed to the accretions of his day, he denied the adoration of Mary, worship of the saints, transubstantiation, icons, clerical celibacy, auricular confession, required fasts and feast days, and sacerdotal interpretations of Communion or baptism (the only two sacraments).

Due to his apologetic prowess, he was called upon to substitute for Zwingli at the Baden debate, preach the Reformation in Bern, restructure Ulm, and debate Luther at Marburg. He was commanded by the emperor to represent Basel at the Diet of Augsburg. Later, Basel sent him to Zwingli to negotiate the Augsburg Confession.

Only about a month after Zwingli's death on the battlefield in 1531, Johannes Oecolampadius also left this life due to a sudden illness. His influence can be traced directly to Capito, Bucer, Calvin, and Melancthon and others in Britain, France, Italy, and Bohemia.

He was a prolific writer. Staehelin compiled over 500 letters written to and from him in the space of about 5 years, some of which involved Luther and the Lord's Supper controversy. He wrote commentaries on at least 21 books of the Bible. In addition, he translated numerous sermons by Chrysostom, works by Cyril of Alexandria and other Patristics. These writings would have been alongside his sermons, university lectures, frequent memos to the City Council, quarterly reports, and presentations for debates.<sup>6</sup> In between, he visited the sick, fathered 3 children in 3 years after marrying at age 46, and counseled Waldensians, Anabaptists, and heretics such as Servetus.

Perhaps his greatest contribution is his godly handling of Scripture with depth and a Christ-centered awe. It is a pity that only about 5–6 chapters of his commentaries have ever been translated into English, but here is a sampling. As he says in his commentary on Isaiah 6:1, "Observe here, whoever acts as a preacher, [the nature of] your office. For the task is, that with Isaiah you may first be a disciple rather than a teacher, and may be among those who have seen God, whom Scripture call 'theodidaktous' [taught by God].... That you may

be a surety of election, the task is, that in you may be prostrated Saul, and may rise up Paul; that you may no longer seek the things which are of the flesh, the things which belong to pharisaical righteousness, the things which are yours, but those of Jesus Christ, and those of others [who are] in Jesus...As therefore the Seraph was sent to Isaiah, in order that he might be cleansed, might learn, and might teach; so Isaiah or another [is sent] to us, that we might be cleansed, might learn, and after that we might undertake the office of teacher.”

TIMELINE

1482	Johannes Oecolampadius born in Weinsberg, Germany, to Johannes and Anna.
1499	Enters Heidelberg University.
1501	Receives his B.A.
1503	Receives his M.A.; enters Bologna Law School; returns to Heidelberg University; tutors.
1510	Assumes preaching position in Weinsberg, Germany.
1512	Publishes “On the Passion of the Lord”; resigns pastorate.
1513	Enters Tübingen University for theological studies.
1515	Begins NT Greek Bible collaboration with Erasmus in Basel; enters University of Basel; receives <i>baccalaureus biblicus</i> and <i>baccalaureus sententiarus</i> .
1516	Receives <i>baccalaureus formatus</i> ; interns at Weinsberg; receives <i>licentiatus theologiae</i> .
1518	Receives doctorate from University of Basel; becomes Augsburg cathedral preacher.
1520	Leaves pastorate and enters Altomünster monastery.
1522	January: leaves monastery and hides in Ebernburg castle; November: is a refugee, proof-reader for Cratander’s press in Basel, vicar at St. Martin’s Church.
1523	Lectures on Isaiah at University of Basel; draws hundreds; Basel Council opposes Pope Hadrian’s declaration to ban “lutheran” preachers and appoints Oecolampadius to theology teacher at University of Basel; Oecolampadius becomes chief priest at St. Martin’s; publishes <i>Isaiah Commentary</i> .
1524	Offers Communion cup to believers; lectures on Romans at University of Basel; clearly agrees with Zwingli about Eucharist.
1525	Produces earliest German Protestant liturgy; refuses to say Mass for the dead; preaches only evangelical sermons; receives theological chair at University of Basel; publishes <i>De Genuina Verborum Domini</i> in Strasbourg and <i>66 Sermons by Chrysoſtom</i> with his own comments on <i>sola Scriptura, sola fide</i> , and invocation of saints.

1526	Publishes <i>Antisyngamma</i> ; congregation sings, which is approved by Council making it the first Swiss city with an evangelical profession; Baden Disputation.
1527	Basel Council allows people to choose their own church and whether they will take Communion.
1528	Bern Disputation; mother dies; marries Wibrandis Rosenblatt; son Eusebius born; Small Iconoclastic Tumult; Council orders images removed from four churches.
1529	Basel Iconoclast revolt; Oecolampadius restructures University of Basel; submits <i>Agende</i> (earliest Protestant church ordinance, including church discipline); Basel enters Federation of Reformed Swiss Cantons; <i>Reformationsordnung</i> (constitution of Reformed church); Oecolampadius becomes head pastor at Münster cathedral and is over Basel clergy; Marburg Colloquy; daughter Eirene born; Emperor issues decree against Anabaptists.
1530	Publishes <i>Dialogue</i> ; outlines plan for lay elders and church discipline; Diet of Augsburg; Augsburg and Strasbourg Confessions; Aarau Conference.
1531	Assists in restructuring of Ulm; daughter Aletheia born; Servetus exiled from Basel; Zwingli dies October 11; Oecolampadius refuses Zurich leadership; dies November 21.

COMMENTARY ON ISAIAH 53 IN ENGLISH

[The numbers below in brackets refer to the page numbers in Oecolampadius’ 1523 Commentary on Isaiah.<sup>7</sup> The original book printed large sections of Scripture without any verse enumeration in the commentary. For the reader’s benefit, verses are designated, along with an ESV Bible translation.]

1 *Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?*

[p. 262v] Who has believed the report.) That is: how few believed? Scarcely any seed is left: for many are called, few chosen: and many with the mouth confess that they believe the Scriptures, but with the heart they deny [it]. Paul in Romans 10 says: who has believed the messages, according to the LXX. But the prophet says, “report,” because the apostles do not speak their own things, but that which they have learned and heard. And who are these few believers? Poor and humble, as in Matthew 11. The poor have good news preached to them. “The arm” is power and wisdom, Jesus crucified, to the Jews a scandal and to the Gentiles foolishness.

7. *In Isaiam Prophetam ΗΨΡΟΜΝΕΜΑΤΩΝ hoc est, Commentariorum* (Basil: Andreas Cratander, 1525).

*2 For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground: he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.*

And he grew up like a shoot.) Hence it is wonderful, that like a shoot he grew up before the nations and peoples. For who will not marvel, if a shoot or root grows in dry ground, or a root sprouts without moisture? So who will not also marvel concerning the life of Christ? For the total human race was trackless ground and without water, destitute of the water of the grace of God. But one Christ grew up like a shoot in dry ground out of sinful flesh in the likeness of sin apart from sin. This also is wonderful, that from such humility Christ grew to such a height, and that such [was] the power of the cross. Behold there was no form or comeliness. For by blood, spit, thorns, and tears [his] face was covered, so that Pilate wondering said, "Behold the man." As if he says, he has not been handled by human custom, in greatest misery he deserves compassion.

And we saw him.) He had not appearance, that is beauty, whence also they called [him] son of a carpenter, sinner, and demonized. And he had no appearance, because though he was high priest, he was not from the tribe of Levi; he did not offer sacrifice; he was not distinguished with priestly vestment; [p. 263r] he did not enter into the holy of holies made with hands; and though he was king of kings, he did not wear a golden crown, and purple. He did not dwell in magnificent palaces; he was not accompanied by armies, but acted commonly like one from the midst of the common people. And we did not desire him.) But we abhorred [him], mocked [him], disdained, like the least of men, with slaps and lashes we crushed [him], and brought [him] to the cross.

*3 He was despised and rejected by men: a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

Despised and the least of men.) The Hebrew says, he departed from men. A man of sorrows, that is, full of sorrows. Knowing infirmity, that is, experiencing sorrows inflicted on him. Whence he says: my soul is sorrowful even unto death. And foreseeing everything before it happened, being in agony he sweat bloody sweat. And as hiding the face.) That is, we were like those hiding the face from him, not wanting to look at him. Matthew 27 "those passing by hurled abuse, wagging their heads," he appeared so contemptible. The Jews [falsely]

imagine that the gentile people would say such things about themselves, when glorified they go up to Jerusalem [the Jews interpret this passage as referring to the Jews, not Christ]: but nothing [refers] to them, although I would not deny that what is said about the head is also said concerning the body. For it is necessary that it be similar, and that one suffer with him [Christ], if with him he wants to be glorified. In which sense Ambrosius in the first letter to the Corinthians 15 tastefully says: all things are enclosed in faith, therefore under the role [persona] of the people the resurrection of the Lord to take place on the third day is described, for he says, after two days and on the third day we will rise again [Hosea 6:2]. In similar manner also in a psalm under the role [persona] of a man also he signifies concerning Christ, saying, All things have been subjected under his feet [Psalm 8]. And here openly it speaks of Christ.

*4 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.*

Certainly he has borne our griefs.) For he bore [them] in the wood of the cross. Matthew the Evangelist chapter 8 in his business used these words in another sense, teaching that Christ healed the diseases of the sick: but through this he teaches, that the healing of those diseases was a figure for the healing of the diseases of the soul. And this verse clearly pertains to sins, as 1 Peter 2. "He himself bore away in his body on the cross, by which dead to sin we might live to righteousness, through whose wound we are healed: for you were like straying sheep, but you were turned toward the shepherd and healer of our souls. And we considered him. [)] For they were saying, "Let him come down now from the cross." "You have heard the blasphemy, he is worthy of death."

*5 But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.*

And he was weakened from our sins.) Our sins which we ought to bear, he bore. Not only from original sin but from all sins he freed us, and so reconciled us to the Father, reconciling things in heaven and on earth. The Hebrew reads for "amendment of our peace" "complete amendment." And they [Jews] [falsely] imagine that it is as if the Gentiles will say one day that the Jews do not now stray, and we are more deserving of being punished

than they, and that they are punished on account of us. But who does not see the pride of a race making God unjust, in order to justify themselves? For everywhere they are reproved in Scripture that they are in exile on account of their sins. [p. 264v] And how truly, shall they [the Jews] carry our iniquity, when they are not able to carry their own? And in pledge [)] That is, in wound our sin is healed for us, that is, in the resurrection of Christ, because Christ died for our sins, and rose for our justification [Romans 4:25].

*6 All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned— every one— to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

All we like sheep have gone astray.) Here clearly it appears that none is without sin, and all we have need of Christ the redeemer: we have gone astray from Christ the shepherd, who brought us on [his] shoulders to the fold. Everyone to his own way.) We fall to our own way, when we do what is in us, left to ourselves, which we do when we sin. Our way is opposed to the way that God shows. He says, we have turned, according to Hebrew, by which is indicated the internal passion of sinning. And the Lord made to invade.) That is, he put on him our sins, as also above.

*7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.*

He was punished.) which properly refers to money. [2 Kings 23:35 uses the same Hebrew root for exacting tribute.] Truly the blood of Christ is precious [1 Peter 1:19], which is reckoned [Isa. 53:11] for our sins. He was afflicted in body. And he did not open his mouth.) So Peter the apostle as well as Philip have interpreted this concerning Christ [1 Peter 2:23, Acts 8:35–36]: truly before Pilate like a lamb he was silent, so that the guard wondered exceedingly.

*8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?*

For distress and judgment.) Now follow more joyful things. For Christ who suffered such things, escaped in the resurrection from distress, that is the violence of the crucifiers. And who will describe that generation.)

That is, who may explain, how much fruit will follow from such suffering? As if he said: O how many believing people will approach the exalted Christ in the cross. For unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground, it remains alone. Our [interpreters] are accustomed to expound [it] concerning the divine nativity of Christ, of which the mysteries are ineffable. Or also concerning the human nativity from the virgin Mary, but [it] fits less well. For the word דור [means] not birth, but generation, that is age or multiplication of descendants, and signifies race, as the Lord says a wicked and adulterous generation. For he was cut off from the land of the living.) That is, for his seed was dead. And how could he die who gives life to others, he says: he was afflicted from the sin of my people, that is, he died not for his sins, but for the sins of the people. How could this harmonize with the Jews [how can we read this passage as referring to the Jews]? When did they die for others?

*9 And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.*

And he made his grave with the impious.) That is, crucifying kills as impious him who did no sin, for Christ was crucified between thieves. And he dies like a rich man, who not for wicked deeds but heavenly is killed. Jerome puts the sentence double. First that in the death of Christ the impious Gentiles are gathered with rich Jewish things. Second, impious Jews are delivered to the Romans. His high things.) That is splendid sepulchres, as would correspond to sepulchre. Although he had done no violence.) It expounds what it is to receive a burial with the impious.

*10 Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief, when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.*

And the Lord wished to strike him.) The Septuagint says, καθάρσας [p. 264r] αὐτὸν τῆς πλήγης, [cleansed him from the blow] by which it indicates the resurrection. But more correctly you should understand [it] of the suffering. Do not marvel that he allots this to the Lord. For Zechariah also says, to raise up the spear over the shepherd. And the Lord himself cries that he is forsaken by the Father. And Romans 8: who did not spare his own son, but delivered him up for us all. The Jews would not have been able to seize him or crucify him,

unless the Father delivered him up. When he makes sin soul.) That is, when he makes himself to be reckoned as a sinner. For he was made sin, in order that he might deliver us from sin. Then he speaks of the fruit, saying, he will see offspring, that is, great harvest and length of days. He will certainly rise up, and he will be successful in what he wants. But he wants to kindle a fire, which he has come to send into the world, that is, in order that the whole world might believe.

11 *Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.*

Concerning the labor of his soul he will see.) The text explains concerning the labor of the soul: because he labored and suffered so much, he will see many good things, and will be satisfied with the salvation of believers, which [salvation] he hungered for. In addition, it refers also to his teaching, by which the earth will be filled. Many nations will be justified: because he himself is the just servant of God, having power also to make others just. For he himself is our righteousness, and bore iniquities, making satisfaction for them. Where now are those who attribute righteousness to works, as if they could make satisfaction on the basis of them?

12 *Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.*

Therefore I will divide for him.) This also is the reward of Christ's passion, that he triumphed over opposing powers, the Pharisees, and the wise of this world, who are confounded by the world of the cross, and made foolish and wrecked, who in another place are called Gog and Magog. Here they are called the strong and the many. But our souls, captured and seduced by demons,

8. Verse 1: Mt. 22:14, Mt. 11:5, Rom. 10:9–10, 16: Mt. 11:25, 1 Cor. 1:23. See also verse 2: Jn. 19:5, Mt. 13:55, Heb. 7:14, Heb. 10:10–14, Heb. 9:11–14, Mt. 8:20, Jn. 19:1–3, 23–24, Jn. 18:22, Mt. 26:67, Hos. 6:2, Ps. 8. Verse 4: Mt. 8:17, 1 Pet. 2:24–25. Verse 7: 1 Pet. 2:23, Acts 8:32–35, Lk. 23:47/Mk. 15:39. Verse 8: Jn. 12:24, Mt. 16:4. Verse 9: within context of other parts of verse 9. Verse 10: Zec. 13:7–9, Mt. 27:46 5:21, Lk. 12:49. Verse 11: Is. 2:2–3, Is. 11:9, Hab. 2:14, 1 Cor. 1:30, Heb. 1:3, Is. 45:25, Rom. 5:17–19. Verse 12: Col. 2:15, 1 Cor. 1:18, Lk. 23:34, 1 Tim. 2:5, 2 Cor. 5:18, Col. 1:20.

9. The following are some typological and metaphorical equivalents which he mentions. v. 1: see=those who believe as in the seed of Abraham; plant grown up=Christ's humiliation in the incarnation moving toward ascended glory; v. 2: shoot/root=Christ; dry ground=sinful flesh; dry waste=human race; dryness=lack of grace; v. 3: man/person=Christ (and to some degree His body/church); v. 4: healing of griefs/diseases=healing of soul; v. 6: straying sheep=all

were brought back by Christ, and he as a victor brought away plunder from them. Because he poured out.) Such a great reward came to Christ, because he died voluntarily, and did not disdain to be counted with sinners, and by the Holy Spirit prayed for transgressors, saying: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. For our only mediator is Christ, and he reconciled us to the Father. It is trivial to refute [the view] that some expound this saying concerning Moses. For he [Moses] did not make satisfaction for the Gentiles, or for the Jews, or even for himself.

#### HERMENEUTICS

How was a Reformer able to extract Biblical meaning 500 years ago? Today we have innumerable resources from around the world available at the touch of a button. In addition, we have had Reformed exegetes who have gone before us. What if all our surrounding culture were Roman Catholic, libraries were distant, and books scarce? Where would we begin?

As a scholar and Patristics expert, Oecolampadius consulted sources available to him which, for Isaiah 53, included the Septuagint, Ambrosius' commentary, Jerome's comments, traditional Jewish interpretations, and contemporary Roman Catholic interpretations.

As a linguistics expert, he delved into the Greek of the Septuagint as well as the original Hebrew (vv. 1, 3, 5–9). Sometimes grammar came into play as in the explanation of metonymy or *persona* used in discussing Christ and those joined to him by faith (v. 3).

Primarily, he used the foundational principle of hermeneutics: Scripture interprets Scripture. This presupposes the accurate, inspired transmission of God's Word, which he affirmed (vv. 1, 7). His references to parallel passages are both overt and implied as he ranges from one end of the Bible to the other gathering treasure to add to the wealth of the current verse he is examining. For example, within his explanation of Isaiah 53:1 alone, he employs at least seven other Scriptural references.<sup>8</sup>

His outstanding hermeneutical characteristic is his Christological interpretation, buttressed by a thoroughgoing, Bible-based typology. There is no question that he sees every verse as referring to the Savior. The first verse, which mentions the arm of the Lord, is understood as being God's powerful work of redemption through Christ on the cross. Another example is the "spear" in Zechariah 13:7–8, which is pictured as the judgment of God on the Son (the Shepherd) at the cross, as in Isaiah 53:10.<sup>9</sup> This approach might seem obvious in a Messianic chapter such as Isaiah 53. However, he applies this focus in all of his commentaries.

The exegetical component of application has as its goal that all men be brought to Gospel faith.

His evangelistic outreach is both subtle and direct. These exhortations are not left until the end of the chapter but are woven into the verses. As an example, if we were to paraphrase his preaching in verse one for today, we might write, “Are you cynical about the Gospel as are Jews and Gentiles? Do you say with your mouth that you believe, yet deny God in your heart? Are you among the few or the many?”

Sins are called out. Therefore, he quite plainly says in verse 5 that it is prideful to accuse God of injustice in an attempt to justify ourselves. He bluntly confesses in verse 3 and 4 that we are the ones who mocked, slapped, and lashed Christ. We are the ones who brought Him to the cross. Then he comforts the guilty soul with the observation that Christ is our Shepherd and healer of our souls, and that it was the Father’s purpose that Jesus should bear our sins so that the world might believe (vv. 4, and 10).

Employing apologetic critiques, he wishes to warn men concerning false notions. He refers to incorrect interpretations by scholars concerning Jesus’ mother and concerning Israel being mistaken for the Messiah. Oecolampadius had a great desire to see the Jews come to a saving knowledge of their Messiah. For this purpose, he even accommodated them by transliterating certain Biblical names according to their custom. But that also meant that he often tried to dissuade them from incorrect interpretations.

#### DOCTRINE

Which doctrines of the Reformation can we find addressed by Oecolampadius in Isaiah 53 in particular? Because this is a commentary, and not a systematic theology, we are forced to our own observations. He speaks of the inspiration of Scripture, original sin, *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, *solus Christus*, the imputed and substitutionary nature of Christ’s death, Christ’s incarnation and exaltation, God’s sovereignty, and perseverance. We will look at this early Reformer’s comments within this passage. However, his doctrines can be culled more thoroughly from an extended examination of more of his writings.

#### Inspiration of Scripture

The first verse affords him opportunity for a strong exhortation to his readers to know that no Scripture is invented by man, but rather is a reporting of God’s own Word in truth. Later, he commends Peter’s and Philip’s explanations of Isaiah 53 to be true (v. 7). He never doubts the truthfulness of each word of Scripture, including the Luke 22:44 reference to Christ’s sweating blood in the Garden (v. 3).

**Original Sin.** He confirms original sin in verse 5, saying that Christ freed us from both original sin and ensuing sins. In verse 6, he defines sin as a turning away from God and an opposing of God’s revelation. Such opposition comes from that inner heart which wants to sin. So, we do naturally what is in our sinful heart, that is, we sin. All people have sinned. In fact, we ourselves were the ones who mocked Christ and brought Him to the cross (v. 3).

**Sola Fide.** Faith is the way in which we receive Christ and all that is His, including resurrection and dominion (v. 3). This overlaps with the next two categories.

**Sola Gratia.** He clarifies that all have sinned and therefore all need Christ as savior (v. 6). All of our righteous works count as nothing toward satisfying God’s judgment (v. 11). Not even Moses nor the nation of Israel could satisfy God’s judgment for sin (vv. 5, 12). It is Jesus who has the power to make people just. He is our righteousness (v. 11). He is the redeemer whose blood sacrifice on the cross paid for our sins (v. 6).

**Solus Christus.** The sinless Christ alone bore our sins on the cross, voluntarily chose to be counted among sinners, was punished for/instead of us, used His life blood to pay for our sins, and prayed for our forgiveness (vv. 5, 6, 8, 10, 12). As our only mediator, he reconciled us along with all things to the Father, through His blood (v. 12).

**Imputation and Substitution.** We should have been punished for our own sin, but Christ was punished instead (v. 5). God’s justice demanded that the Son who was rich in righteousness must be counted among sinners and be made sin in order to deliver us from sin (vv. 9, 10). We receive justification and healing of sin through Christ’s death and resurrection (v. 5). We are carried on his shoulders and brought to His fold (v. 6). He is our righteousness and has the power to make others just (v. 11). He will succeed in this salvific work toward us (v. 10).

**Christ’s Incarnation and Exaltation.** In Christ’s incarnation, he truly experienced humiliation. Physically, he knew manhood in the likeness of sinful flesh, sweat blood, was slapped, lashed, and knew pain and violence when crushed on the cross (vv. 2, 3, 8). He knew sorrow, agony, mockery, disdain, and contempt. He did not wear the deserved kingly crown and purple robes, live in a palace, or have the escort of armies. Although He

people; Shepherd=Christ; sheep=us; fold=Christ’s home/kingdom; v. 8: that generation=those believers saved through the cross; v. 10 spear=God’s judgment; harvest=new believers; fire=God’s judgment; fruit/offspring=believers; v. 12: Gog and Magog=those confounded by the cross.

was the High Priest, he did not enter into the Holy of Holies made with hands, or wear the priestly clothes, or offer Temple sacrifices (vv. 2, 3). Rather, He became sin for us, was counted among sinners—even as he was crucified between two sinners and buried as a member of the entire sinful human race (vv. 9, 10).

The resurrection is His triumph over the pain of death (v. 8). Because the Father is satisfied, a reward of eternal life is given. This may apply both to Christ and to His offspring since Oecolampadius is vague, as is the verse (v. 10). The Reformer previously discusses the complexity of references to Christ which often included His body, the Church (v. 3). In Christ's exaltation, His goal of saving sinners to be with Him (as expressed through His intercessory prayer), will be accomplished (vv. 8, 11, 12). He also triumphed over opposing powers including unbelievers and demons (v. 12). Therefore, His work will effect the gathering of believers from the entire world (v. 10).

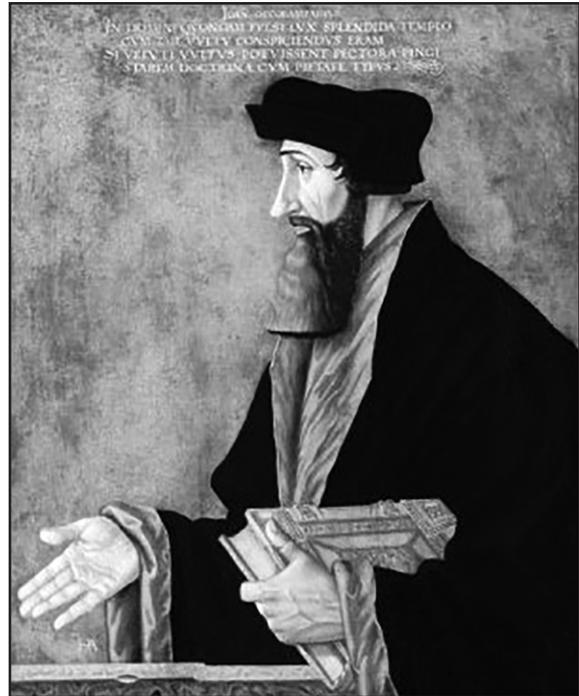
**God's Sovereignty.** Clearly, the work of redemption was an act of God, according to Oecolampadius. The sufferings of Christ were inflicted on Him by the Father, confirming Scriptural teaching as found, for example, in the prophecy of Zechariah 13:7–9 and in Romans 8 (vv. 3, 10). But it was also Christ's voluntary choice, by His own will, to accomplish redemption in this manner (v. 12). Jesus knew His future coming ordeal and submitted (vv. 3, 12). No men could do anything against Him on their own apart from God doing it (v. 10). God has the power to justify men, and will cause His will and Word to be accomplished (v. 11). In verse 9, Oecolampadius may be referencing the covenant of redemption, and the Old Testament covenant by which the Gentiles now receive riches. The message concerning the fire of judgment which fell on Christ will go into the whole world, because it is God's will to save people through the Son (v. 10).

**Perseverance.** The perseverance of the saints seems to be implied in verse 10, based on the faithfulness of God. Christ interceded for us, and the Father's reward for Him was offspring who would be everlasting (v. 12). Therefore, the implication is that the heirs will persevere into eternity.

Other strands of doctrine could be noted. The central focus of this chapter, however, is Messianic gospel truths. Oecolampadius' strongest contribution to the Reformation and to us is his scholarly and godly handling of Scripture. He himself recognized the power lying uniquely in the infallible Word of God. "But only

10. *Johannes Oecolampadius: An Exposition of Genesis*, trans. Mickey Mattox (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2013), 41.

[the Scripture itself] is most holy and incomparably fruitful. For only Scripture itself exposes all the errors of all the ages, disproves and refutes them. It alone teaches the highest virtue free from any hypocritical disguise. It alone brings firm hope of blessedness and of life, true and eternal. It alone makes known the hidden treasures of divinity."<sup>10</sup> ■



Johannes Oecolampadius by Hans Asper.

### *In Brief: Commentaries of Oecolampadius*

Oecolampadius's most important contribution to the Reformation were his biblical commentaries. He published commentaries on Isaiah (1525), Romans (1525, 1526), Malachi (1526), Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi (1527), and Daniel (1530) during his lifetime. His lectures on John (1533, 1535), Jeremiah (1533), Ezekiel (1534), Hebrews (1534), Hosea, Joel, Amos and Obadiah (1535), Matthew (1536), and Colossians (1546) were transcribed and published as commentaries after his death in 1531. In addition to these commentaries, he published numerous sermons, theological treatises, translations of patristic texts, disputation theses and polemical tractates, all of which are meticulously catalogued in E. Staehelin's *Oekolampad-Bibliographie. Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. Donald K. McKim (IVP, 2007), 782. ■