



THE LAMB OF GOD (*AMNOS TOU THEOU*) IN JOHN 1:29, 36 AND COMMUNAL REDEMPTION IN AFRICAN CHRISTIAN CONSCIOUSNESS

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Abstract

*The designation of Jesus as the “Lamb of God” (*amnos tou theou*) in John 1:29, 36 constitutes a central pillar of Johannine Christology and a profound theological metaphor within the New Testament. This study critically examines the historical, theological, and symbolic dimensions of the Lamb imagery by situating it within the broader context of Old Testament sacrificial systems, Second Temple Jewish expectations, and early Christian interpretive traditions. Particular attention is given to key interpretive models, including the Passover lamb (Exod. 12), the Suffering Servant motif (Isa. 53:7), and apocalyptic traditions reflected in later Christian writings. Furthermore, the study engages major scholarly debates concerning the precise referent of the Johannine “Lamb,” assessing whether the metaphor is primarily sacrificial, redemptive, vicarious, or eschatological in orientation. Moving beyond purely historical-critical approaches, the paper also explores the resonance of the Lamb motif within African religious and cultural contexts, where notions of sacrifice, communal atonement, mediation, and ritual cleansing play a significant role in maintaining social and spiritual harmony. The study argues that the Johannine portrayal of Jesus as the Lamb of God not only synthesizes diverse biblical traditions but also provides a meaningful theological bridge for African contextual theology. In this regard, the Lamb imagery offers a compelling framework for understanding Christ’s redemptive mission as both substitutionary and communal, addressing sin, restoring relationships, and mediating reconciliation between humanity and the divine.*

Keywords: Lamb of God, Passover, Paschal lamb, suffering servant, Apocalypse

Introduction

The proclamation “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” in the Gospel of John 1:29 introduces one of the most theologically loaded Christological titles in the New Testament. This declaration by John the Baptist encapsulates the mission of Jesus as both sacrificial and redemptive. The phrase *amnos tou theou* has generated extensive scholarly debate, particularly regarding its Old Testament background and theological implications.

Scholars such as C. H. Dodd argue that the Lamb imagery is fundamentally Messianic, while others connect it to the Passover traditions in Exodus 12 or to the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53. Yet, these interpretations often remain within Western exegetical frameworks. In African contexts, however, religion is profoundly communal and sacrificial. As John Mbiti observes, “Africans are notoriously religious,” and their worldview integrates sacrifice as a means of restoring harmony between the



visible and invisible realms.¹ Thus, the Johannine Lamb imagery provides fertile ground for contextual theological reflection.

Despite extensive exegetical work on the “Lamb of God,” most interpretations have not sufficiently engaged African cultural and religious realities. Western scholarship has largely focused on historical-critical debates, whether the Lamb refers to Passover, apocalyptic traditions, or the Suffering Servant, without adequately addressing how this metaphor functions within African cosmology.

African societies understand sin not merely as individual guilt but as a disruption of communal harmony requiring ritual restoration.² Therefore, a critical question arises: Can the Johannine concept of the Lamb of God adequately address African concerns of communal sin, spiritual imbalance, and the need for mediation? Kwame Bediako argues that Christianity must be interpreted within the categories of African experience to remain meaningful.³ Similarly, Justin Ukpung emphasizes inculturation hermeneutics as essential for African biblical interpretation.⁴ The lack of such contextual engagement creates a theological gap between biblical text and African lived reality.

The Concept of the Lamb of God

Jesus is given the title “*Lamb*” (*Amnos*). Scholars have interpreted this image in various ways; for instance, in the Old Testament narrative of the *Akedah* (Gen 22), on the way to the Mountain, Isaac asks his father about the lamb for sacrifice (Gen 22:7). Abraham answers, “*God will provide Himself the Lamb for a burnt offering my son*” (Gen 22:8). Scholars have said therefore, that when John called Jesus “The Lamb of God,” he may have referred to God’s provision of the lamb (John 1:29, 36, cf. Gen 22:8). Jesus is the *Lamb of God* divinely provided because He was sent from heaven to redeem the world (John 3:16). Dodd reveals that *lamb* is a mistranslation of the Aramaic word *youth*.⁵ But this word corresponds to the Greek word, *Pais*, which means *boy* or *servant*. But other scholars opposed these proposals.

To offer an accurate interpretation of the “Lamb of God” metaphor among an innumerable number of scholars, Charles Dodd proposed that the title “The Lamb of God” is Messianic, meaning the *lamb* (*Amnos*) is a symbol of the Messiah. Dodd explained that a different word for lamb (*arnion*) is used throughout the Apocalypse of John as a title for Jesus.⁶ The association of violence and power in Revelation with the figure of the lamb rhymes with the present Kingly and glorified nature of Christ (Rev 6:16; 7:17; 14:1-5; 17:14, etc.).

Further, as Dodd notes, ‘Lamb of God’ could be explained in light of the Jewish apocalyptic tradition during the intertestamental period. For instance, 1 Enoch 90:37 describes the seven-horned lamb as being militant and conquering his enemies. Dodd, however, links John the Baptist’s image of the lamb to the lamb imagery found in the Apocalypse and later suggests that John the Evangelist understood “The Lamb of God” to be a synonym of “Messiah.” Dodd relies on the scriptural passage as verification: The Baptist says, “*Behold the Lamb of God*” (John 1:28, 36), Andrew hears him and later finds his brother Simon and said to him: “We have found the Messiah” (John 1:41). According to Dodd, “*to bear sin*” means to abolish sin. 1 John 3:5 says: “You knew that he appeared to take

¹ J. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 1.

² Mbiti, 210.

³ K. Bediako, *Theology and Identity* (Oxford: Regnum, 1992), 225.

⁴ J. Ukpung, “Inculturation Hermeneutics,” *African Biblical Studies* (2001): 17–32.

⁵ C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, (Cambridge University Press, 1968) 235.

⁶ Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 230–235.



away sin.” The task of the Jewish Messiah was to make an end of sin, *the Lamb was a traditional Messianic title*, and the Baptist may have used it in its apocalyptic sense.⁷ But some scholars reject the idea that the Apocalyptic Lamb was the Evangelist’s intended idea; instead, it was the meaning intended by John the Baptist, says Skinner.⁸ Many scholars have decided that the view of the “Lamb of God” refers to the Passover Lamb. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the Evangelist later identifies Christ’s sacrifice with the Passover lamb (John 19:36; cf. Exodus 12:46).

Objections and Alternative Interpretations of the “Lamb of God”

Despite the widespread identification of the “Lamb of God” with the Passover lamb, several objections have been raised against this interpretation. One major argument is that the Passover victim, in its earliest Jewish context, was not originally understood as an expiatory sacrifice for sin but rather as a commemorative and protective ritual marking Israel’s deliverance from Egypt (Exod 12).⁹ Nevertheless, by the first century AD, sacrificial theology had developed such that many sacrifices, including those not originally expiatory, were interpreted within an atoning framework.¹⁰ This development allows for the possibility that early Christians could reinterpret the Passover lamb in expiatory terms when applying it to Jesus.

Another significant line of interpretation understands the “Lamb of God” figuratively, drawing from prophetic traditions of innocent suffering. In Jeremiah 11:19, the prophet describes himself as “a gentle lamb led to the slaughter,” a metaphor of unjust suffering. Similarly, in Isaiah 53, the Suffering Servant is portrayed as one who bears the sins of others, “like a lamb that is led to the slaughter” (Isa 53:7). This passage, especially in its Septuagint (LXX) rendering using *amnos*, significantly shaped early Christian Christology.¹¹ As noted by John Skinner, the Servant’s silent submission—“as a lamb before its shearers is silent”—became a powerful lens through which the early Church understood the passion of Christ.¹²

This interpretive trajectory is explicitly reflected in the New Testament. In Acts 8:32–35, the Ethiopian eunuch’s reading of Isaiah 53 is directly applied to Jesus, affirming Him as the suffering Messiah who submits to death without resistance.¹³ First-century Christians, therefore, perceived Jesus not only as a sacrificial figure but as the fulfillment of the prophetic model of redemptive suffering. His crucifixion was interpreted as the climactic moment in which He, though “oppressed and afflicted,” willingly endured death for the salvation of others.

The relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist further illuminates the theological significance of the “Lamb of God” title. Jesus’ submission to John’s baptism demonstrates both continuity and fulfillment within God’s salvific plan. According to the Gospel of Matthew, when John hesitated to baptize Him, Jesus insisted, stating that it was necessary “to fulfil all righteousness” (Matt 3:15).¹⁴ The Gospel of Mark presents Jesus’ baptism as divinely sanctioned and later affirms John’s prophetic authority, as seen in Jesus’ rhetorical question: “Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?”

⁷ Dodd, *The Interpretation*, 1968, 236-238.

⁸ J. Skinner, “Another Look” in Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 25.

⁹ J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1966), 222–226.

¹⁰ L. Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 125–130.

¹¹ R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 59–60.

¹² J. Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), 389.

¹³ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 180–182.

¹⁴ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 108–110.



(Mark 11:30).¹⁵ Jesus further identifies John as the forerunner who fulfills the expected role of Elijah (Mark 9:13).

In the Gospel of John, the baptismal scene is reinterpreted christologically, serving as the occasion for John the Baptist's public proclamation of Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).¹⁶ This close theological and historical relationship between John and Jesus may also explain why some of John's disciples later followed Jesus, recognizing in Him the fulfillment of their teacher's witness.

The identification of John the Baptist with Elijah is deeply rooted in Jewish eschatological expectation. When introducing John, the Synoptic Gospels present him in Elijah-like terms, reflecting the widespread belief that Elijah would return before the coming of the Messiah (cf. Mal 4:5).¹⁷ During the Transfiguration, Jesus explicitly affirms this identification, stating that "Elijah has already come," referring to John (Matt 17:12–13).¹⁸ The Gospel of Luke further supports this understanding by declaring, even before John's birth, that he would go "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17).¹⁹ However, the Fourth Gospel presents a nuanced perspective. When questioned by priests and Levites from Jerusalem, John explicitly denies being Elijah or the Messiah (John 1:21). Instead, he identifies himself as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness," echoing Isaiah 40:3.²⁰ This apparent tension reflects differing theological emphases: while the Synoptics interpret John typologically as Elijah, the Johannine tradition emphasizes his role as a witness who points beyond himself to Christ.

Thus, the title "Lamb of God" emerges from a rich confluence of sacrificial, prophetic, and eschatological traditions. Whether understood in relation to the Passover lamb, the Suffering Servant, or the broader theology of atonement, it ultimately functions as a profound declaration of Jesus' identity and mission within first-century Judaism and early Christianity.

At the beginning of John's Gospel, the Evangelist purposely introduces the Baptist's testimony as he refers to Jesus' first public appearance. After experiencing a theophany, the Baptist proclaims that Jesus is the "Lamb of God" whose mission is to "take away the sin" not only of Israel, but "of the world" (John 1:29, 36). The Baptist also refers to the pre-existence of Jesus (John 1:30), to his atoning death (1:29), and to His being the Son of God (1:34). The "Lamb of God" is the "Son of God." John the Baptist's eyewitness account offers a prophetic understanding of Jesus' mission and identity. As a witness to Jesus' death and resurrection, the author of John believed Jesus is the Lamb of God.

The "Lamb of God" as a Title in First-Century Judaism and Christianity

The designation "Lamb of God" (Greek: *amnos tou Theou*) is one of the most theologically rich Christological titles attributed to Jesus in the New Testament. Its background must be understood within the sacrificial traditions of Israel as well as the interpretive frameworks of Second Temple Judaism. The imagery of the lamb is deeply embedded in Jewish cultic practice, particularly in relation to atonement and covenantal remembrance. In the Old Testament, lambs were frequently employed in sacrificial rituals, including daily offerings (Exod 29:38–42), sin offerings (Lev 4:32–

¹⁵ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 443–445.

¹⁶ A. J. Köstenberger, *John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 53–55.

¹⁷ C. S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 426–428.

¹⁸ D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, 392.

¹⁹ J. B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 72–74.

²⁰ Brown, *John I–XII*, 47–48.



35), and most notably the Passover sacrifice (Exod 12:1–13), which commemorated Israel's deliverance from Egypt. These sacrificial uses shaped the symbolic world in which early Christians interpreted the identity and mission of Jesus.²¹

Beyond cultic sacrifice, the Old Testament also presents the motif of vicarious suffering, most prominently in the Servant Songs of Isaiah. In Book of Isaiah 53:7, the Servant is described as “like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,” suggesting an innocent figure whose suffering bears redemptive significance for others. This imagery contributed to early Christian reflection on Jesus' death as both sacrificial and substitutionary.²² In Second Temple Jewish literature, themes of righteous suffering and redemptive martyrdom further developed this conceptual framework, preparing the ground for the application of sacrificial language to individuals.

Within this theological context, the Gospel of John presents the explicit identification of Jesus as the “Lamb of God.” In John 1:29 and 1:36, John the Baptist proclaims, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” This declaration encapsulates a synthesis of sacrificial, Passover, and Servant imagery. The phrase “who takes away the sin of the world” extends the scope of Jesus' redemptive work beyond Israel to humanity at large, emphasizing both the universal and efficacious nature of his mission.²³

The Johannine narrative subsequently develops this title within a Passover framework. Jesus' public ministry is structured around key Jewish festivals, and his crucifixion coincides with the preparation of the Passover (John 19:14), reinforcing the portrayal of Jesus as the true Paschal Lamb. Unlike the Baptist, who bears witness without seeing the fulfillment (John 1:32–34), the Evangelist claims eyewitness testimony to the completed work of Christ, “so that you also may believe” (John 19:35).²⁴ Thus, the title “Lamb of God” functions not merely as a metaphor but as a theological proclamation that integrates Jewish sacrificial tradition with the early Christian understanding of Jesus' atoning death.

The Passover Lamb Motif

Exodus marks the beginning of the Israelites' transition from being clans to becoming a nation unified by its call to faithfulness to the Lord God. Before the tenth and final plague in Egypt, God commanded Moses on how to celebrate the first Passover (Exodus 12). God commanded the following concerning Lambs:

“Tell all the congregation of Israel ... your Lamb shall be without blemish...from the sheep or from the goats” (Exodus 12:3-5); “Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood...and touch the lintel and the two doorposts...the Lord will pass over...and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to slay you” (Exodus 12:22-23); “You shall not break a bone of it” (Exodus 12:46).

The first Passover becomes an ordinance to be celebrated forever (12:24). The blood of the Passover lamb becomes the sign of bringing deliverance to the firstborn of Israel (12:12). Even though the Passover must be celebrated annually, some of the commands are applied to future celebrations in the

²¹ R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 58–63.

²² R. Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 186–189.

²³ L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 146–150.

²⁴ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), 134–138.



land of Canaan (12:19, 48-49; 1:5-14). Nielsen²⁵ asserts that the narrative in Exodus indicates the Passover Lamb was not a sacrifice of expiation for sin or a means of atonement. Instead, its purpose was to ward off evil, protecting Israel from death. Later, Jewish tradition gave a redemptive value to the blood of the Lamb. In the biblical texts, some passages reveal the Paschal victim was for a sin offering; for example, in Numbers, the Lord commanded Moses as part of the Passover offering: “One male goat for a sin offering, to make atonement for you” (Numbers 28:22).

Also, in Ezekiel, on the feast of Passover, the Lord commanded: “The prince shall provide for himself and all the people...a bull for a sin offering” (Ezekiel 45:22). Other Old Testament narratives discuss historical events as well as rituals surrounding the celebrations of Passover, e.g. Passover at Sinai (Numbers 9:4-11); first Passover in Canaan (Joshua 5:10-11); Solomon’s celebration of the three annual festivals after construction of the Temple (1 Kings 2:25; 2 Chron. 8:12-13); Hezekiah’s Passover (2 Chronicle 30); and Josiah’s Passover (2 Kings 23:21-23).

Also, the Passover offerings in Josiah’s time were “small cattle and...oxen” (2 Chron. 35:8, 9; also, lambs, kid goats, etc. mentioned). One can therefore conclude that other animals were slaughtered during the Passover observance. Outside biblical texts, Philo of Alexandria (20 BC–45 AD) developed a philosophical understanding of the Old Testament within Alexandria’s Hellenistic culture. In his writing, Philo treats the Passover not only historically but also allegorically. The Passover means a passing over with promptness, without turning back from the passions to gratitude to God the Saviour. In his writings, Flavius Josephus (AD 27–100), a prominent figure in first-century Judaism, does not specify the kind of animal used during the Passover, yet he describes the blood as having a purifying function.²⁶

Pauline and Petrine Appropriations of the Paschal Lamb Motif

The Apostle Paul, a near contemporary of Philo of Alexandria and Flavius Josephus, appropriates Passover imagery in a distinctly Christological and ethical manner. In his exhortation to the Corinthian church, Paul urges believers to abandon their former sinful practices, symbolized as “the old leaven,” and to become a renewed community, “a new dough.” He grounds this ethical transformation in the redemptive work of Christ, declaring that “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor 5:7).²⁷ This statement reflects not only a metaphorical identification of Jesus’ crucifixion with the slaughter of the Passover lamb but also suggests that an early Christian Paschal tradition was already in circulation prior to the composition of Paul’s letters.²⁸ The sacrificial death of Christ, therefore, is presented as inaugurating a new mode of existence characterized by moral purity and communal holiness.

Similarly, the First Epistle of Peter employs Passover imagery to exhort believers toward ethical vigilance and spiritual readiness. The admonition to “gird up the loins of your mind” (1 Pet 1:13) echoes the Passover instructions in Exodus 12:11, where Israel was commanded to eat in readiness for deliverance.²⁹ This allusion is further developed in the assertion that believers have been “ransomed... not with perishable things... but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Pet 1:18–19; cf. Exod 12:5).³⁰ Here, the author explicitly connects the

²⁵J.T. Nielson, “The lamb of God: The Cognitive Structure of a Johannine Metaphor,” *The Imagery in the Gospel of John*, ed. John Frey, (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006).

²⁶ Nielson, *The lamb of God*.

²⁷ G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 229–231.

²⁸ J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1966), 223–225.

²⁹ K. H. Jobes, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 105–107.

³⁰ P. J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 124–126.



salvific work of Christ with the Passover lamb, emphasizing both the purity of the victim and the redemptive efficacy of His blood.

The imagery of Christ as the lamb thus resonates deeply with the Exodus narrative, where the blood of the lamb secured Israel's deliverance from bondage. In early Christian interpretation, Jesus is understood as the true Paschal Lamb whose sacrificial death brings about ultimate redemption. This typological reading transforms the historical memory of the Exodus into a theological paradigm for salvation, wherein Christ, as the slain lamb, grants deliverance and new life to the faithful.³¹

The Suffering Servant Motif

The theme of charging an animal or a person with the sin or transgression of a group for atonement evokes the poem of the suffering servant of Isaiah: "God has laid on Him the iniquities of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). The poem of the suffering servant of Isaiah (Isaiah 52:13–53:12) speaks about the servant of the Lord or "my servant" who shall be exalted and lifted and shall be very high (52:13) ... yet this servant accepted suffering, and was like a *lamb that is led to the slaughter...*" (53:7). The servant of the Lord willingly accepts death. Jesus, in His meekness, appearing as a lamb led to the slaughter, silent... is the one dying for the sins of His people. Many of the Christian writers referred to the servant as a figure of Jesus Christ. The first-century Christians took Isaiah 53 as a prophecy of their suffering Messiah. Jesus Christ is pictured as the Lamb led to the slaughter in His meekness and submission to His death on the cross for the sake of the world... mention could be made of some apocalyptic writings dated earlier than the first century AD, where the lamb is represented as triumphant over his enemies. Sandy³² points out: "Example is the Testament of Benjamin (T. Benj. 3:8) and Testament of Joseph, T, Jos. 19:8 – 12." In a synopsis, the above section has presented the most commonly accepted views of the background of the "lamb of God" title in first-century Judaism and Christianity.

Apocalyptic and Messianic Lamb

In apocalyptic literature such as 1 Enoch and later in Book of Revelation, the Lamb becomes a symbol of victory and conquest. C. H. Dodd links this tradition to Johannine theology, suggesting that the Lamb is a Messianic figure who conquers sin.³³ This image corresponds with African notions of a victorious spiritual champion who defeats evil forces on behalf of the community.

The portrayal of Jesus as the perfect sacrifice in John's Gospel culminates the Passover and Exodus themes that unfold throughout the Gospel. The theme of Jesus' death is introduced near the end of John's Gospel. Notably, the timing of the gathering of the Sanhedrin (vs. 47) relates to "the Passover of the Jews" which was at hand (John 11:55). During this Council, Caiaphas the High Priest prophesied, "*It is expedient for you that one man should die for (on behalf of) the people, and that the whole nation should not perish*" (John 11:50).³⁴ As a result, Jesus is sentenced to His death in substitution for the Jewish nation: unless He dies, the Jewish nation and its leaders will perish at the hands of the Romans. Caiaphas's pronouncement, although purely political, is in accord with God's will for Jesus.³⁵ Meanwhile, the Evangelist conveys a more profound implication: Jesus' sacrificial

³¹ L. Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 129–132.

³² D.B. Sandy, "John the Baptist Lamb of God," *Affirmation in its Canonical and Apocalyptic Milieu*, (JETS, 1991) 454.

³³ C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 233.

³⁴ A. J. Kostenberger, *Theology of John's Gospel and Letters: The World, the Christ, the Son of God, Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press, 2009) 252-253.

³⁵ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 618.



death will also unify all the scattered children of God, fulfilling Jesus' prediction: "*there shall be one flock, one shepherd*" (John 11:51-52; cf. 12:32; 10:16).

Similarly, the sacrificial death of Jesus "*the lamb of God*," as portrayed by the Baptist, prevents the death that would result from "the sin of the world" (John 1:29, cf. John 3:14-16; 6:51). Following Caiaphas' pronouncement, Mary anoints Jesus at Bethany "Six days before Passover" (John 12:1). "While the two references to Passover are time markers, Jesus own words concerning Mary's action, 'Let her alone, let her keep it for the day of my burial' portrays Him as the Paschal victim prepared for sacrifice, (John 11:55; 12:1; 12:7)."³⁶

In His meekness, Jesus is interestingly compared to a lamb led to the slaughter (to be eaten). *Isaiah is not referring to a sacrificial slaughter; instead, he uses the lamb that is slaughtered for food.* In the Old Testament, the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb was associated with the consecration to the Lord of the firstborn of Israel, both man and beast (Exodus 13:2). Thereafter, the firstborn male animals were to be consecrated or set apart to the Lord as a sacrifice. The firstborn of Israelites is to be redeemed through animal sacrifice in memory of the Exodus (Ex 13:11-16; Deut. 15:19-20), as Jesus sanctifies Himself, He reveals that one of the motives for His sacrificial death is to consecrate His disciples, as the Paschal Lamb consecrated the firstborn of Israel, to the Lord. As the Baptist has seen and has borne witness that Jesus is "the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29). So, the Evangelist has portrayed Jesus as the perfect Paschal sacrifice. The eye-witness testimony of the beloved disciple is similar to that of the Baptist: "He who saw it has borne witness – his testimony is true... that (we) may believe" (19:35), and in believing, "have life in His name" (20:31).

The Lamb as Symbol of Conquest

During the intertestamental period, particularly in the era of the Maccabean revolt, Jewish history was marked by intense struggle, martyrdom, and eventual victory over oppressive foreign powers. Within this historical and apocalyptic milieu, symbolic imagery developed in which the lamb, especially the horned lamb—came to represent not weakness, but divinely empowered conquest and victory. This is evident in Jewish apocalyptic literature such as *I Enoch*, where a horned lamb emerges as a victorious and militant figure who triumphs over enemies on behalf of God's people.³⁷

Against this background, the Johannine identification of Jesus as the "Lamb of God" acquires a richer theological dimension. Rather than signifying mere passivity, the Lamb embodies divine authority, victory, and redemptive power. As such, Jesus is portrayed as God's champion who confronts and overcomes the powers of sin and evil. This imagery finds further development in the Apocalypse, where the Lamb is depicted as both slain and triumphant, conquering through sacrificial death (Rev. 5:5-6; 17:14).³⁸ Thus, the Lamb of God represents a paradoxical yet profound symbol of conquest—one who achieves victory not through military force, but through self-giving sacrifice that decisively defeats sin and establishes divine sovereignty.

The Lamb of God in African Theological Perspective

African Traditional Religion places strong emphasis on sacrifice, mediation, and communal identity. Sacrifices are often offered to restore harmony between humans, ancestors, and the divine. John Mbiti notes that sacrifice in Africa is both relational and communal, not merely individual.³⁹ Similarly,

³⁶ Kostenberger, *Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 359.

³⁷ G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *I Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of I Enoch* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 394–398.

³⁸ R. Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 72–78.

³⁹ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 58.



Kwame Bediako argues that Christ fulfills the role of the ultimate mediator, surpassing all traditional intermediaries.⁴⁰ Within this framework, Jesus as the Lamb of God becomes:

- The perfect sacrifice replaces repeated rituals
- The mediator between God and humanity
- The deliverer from spiritual and existential threats
- The restorer of communal harmony

Thus, the Johannine portrayal of Jesus as the “Lamb of God” speaks powerfully to African existential realities. In the Fourth Gospel, Christ’s sacrificial role is presented as effectual and definitive—one who removes the sin of the world (John 1:29) and liberates believers from its penalty. Within many African Traditional Religious contexts, sacrifice functions as a vital means of appeasing divinities, restoring broken relationships, and seeking favour or protection. Such rituals often require costly materials—animals, food items, or other culturally prescribed offerings, which can be difficult to obtain and place a significant burden on adherents.

In contrast, the Johannine declaration of Jesus as the *amnos tou theou* presents a radical theological reorientation. The need for repeated material sacrifices is transcended in the once-for-all redemptive act of Christ. As the definitive Lamb, Jesus embodies both the sacrifice and the mediator, offering a complete and sufficient atonement that renders further ritual appeasement unnecessary (cf. Heb. 10:10–14). This understanding provides a compelling point of contact for African theology: Christ’s sacrifice not only fulfills the deep-seated religious quest for reconciliation and purification but also removes the economic and ritual burdens associated with continual sacrificial practices. In this way, the Lamb of God becomes the ultimate provision of divine grace, addressing both the spiritual and existential needs of humanity.

Conclusion

The title “Lamb of God” (*amnos tou theou*) in John 1:29, 36 represents a rich convergence of theological traditions, Passover deliverance, vicarious suffering, and apocalyptic victory, within Johannine Christology. While Western scholarship has made significant contributions in elucidating these dimensions, an African contextual reading uncovers additional layers of meaning that resonate deeply with the lived religious experience of African communities.

In African thought, where life is inherently communal and spirituality is holistic, Jesus as the Lamb of God emerges as the definitive and all-sufficient sacrifice who restores broken relationships, defeats the forces of evil, and reconciles humanity to God. His sacrificial death both fulfills and transcends traditional systems of atonement, which often involve repeated rituals and material offerings. In Christ, these provisional means give way to a once-for-all act of redemption that addresses sin, guilt, and spiritual alienation in a comprehensive manner.

Therefore, the Lamb of God is not merely a biblical designation but a dynamic theological reality with profound relevance for African Christianity today. It proclaims that in Jesus, God has provided the ultimate sacrifice—one that removes the burden of continual ritual obligations and establishes enduring reconciliation. In this light, Christ’s sacrifice stands as the supreme expression of divine love and grace, offering African Christians a transformative foundation for faith, identity, and communal life.

⁴⁰ Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 240.



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