

**How does the proclamation of Jesus as  
'the Lamb of God who takes away the Sin of the World'  
help us consider the possibility of restoration/revival  
on a personal level and in a global context?**

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## **Introduction**

Recently I had the opportunity to spend a week in Rome. I know the city but this time my trip was a little different as I was introducing it to my two teenage children. I found myself acting as an interpreter for them, explaining how and why the builders of the various churches had chosen their use of space and decoration. Above all else the explanation could be distilled into the fact that a story was being told in what was placed in each church and through the church building itself. In similar fashion John's Gospel tells the story of Jesus. Of course, in the case of the evangelist this is not carried out in the crafting of a physical building, and yet the same attention to detail is found in the *way* John tells the story of the Gospel. Indeed, *what* is said in the Gospel of John and *how* it is said are inextricably linked; as O'Day puts it: "In order to understand *what* John says about Jesus and God then one must attend carefully to *how* he tells his story."<sup>1</sup>

O'Day's argument regarding the theological claims being made through narrative mode in the Gospel is an important one for us as we consider the relationship between Charles Wesley's prayer for renewed zeal to love and evangelize "the sheep for whom the Saviour died" and the description of Jesus offered by John the Baptist in John 1:29. In order to consider the implications of John's description of Jesus for the twin themes of restoration and revival, we need to think about both the title used for Jesus and the action associated with him. Within interpretations of 1:29 a significant amount of attention focuses on the imagery associated with "The Lamb of God." While the action associated with the title does not always receive direct analysis, it does tend to get discussed as part of the overall imagery. For our purposes, though, it is important to consider adequately the nuances of the use of the title and of the associated action and to explore what this has to say to us about sin, restoration and revival. In order to do this, we will consider the use of "Lamb of God" title and the associated action by examining, briefly, the characterisation which occurs within the literary setting for the declaration, and then we will pay greater attention to the title itself within the narrative setting, and the associated action within the narrative structure.

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<sup>1</sup> See Gail O'Day, "Narrative Mode and Theological claim: a Study in the Fourth Gospel," *JBL* 105/4 (1986), 657-668. O'Day refers to R. Bultmann's contention in *Theology of the New Testament*, (New York: Scribner, 1955), 2.66, that the fourth evangelist "presents only the fact (*das Dass*) of the revelation without describing its content (*ihr Was*)." She suggests that Bultmann's distinction does not allow for the existence of a "revelatory dynamic" within the narrative of the Gospel, arguing that this is communicated through the "how" of the "narrative mode through which the fourth evangelist presents Jesus as revealer and communicates his theology of revelation." See 658, 661.

## Who is Who - Characters

Given that we are seeking to consider the role sin plays in the characters' engagement with Jesus, we need to look at those to whom the declaration in 1:29 is addressed, as well as looking at John the Baptist and Jesus. While the text does not make clear who else is present, it is important to consider the characters who are potentially involved and their connection to this declaration.

### *Priests and Levites from Jerusalem*

While the role played by the Priests and Levites from Jerusalem seems minimal, their contribution to the events of the episode should not be overlooked. In the strict chronology of John 1, their conversation with John the Baptist at Bethany takes place on the day before the declaration of 1:29. As 'walk-on' characters, nothing is revealed regarding any complexity in their character traits, their development or inner life, nor are they in a position to respond to Jesus.<sup>2</sup> Yet the questions which they ask introduce the issue of identity into the narrative's story, building on what has already been stated in the Prologue regarding both John and Jesus. The focus of their questions is the identity of John the Baptist, as they seek to associate his baptising activity with that practised by the prophets, Elijah or the Messiah.<sup>3</sup> However the questions are the vehicle to introduce John himself and to pave the way for John's declaration regarding Jesus' identity. Placed alongside the Baptist's proclamation of the identity of Jesus as 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world', their questions begin to point towards the significance of the issue of recognition or non-recognition of identity and how it will, in due course, be linked to the concept of sin.

### *John the Baptist*

On the other occasions when *hamartia* is found in the narrative it is used either by Jesus or by his opponents; yet in 1:29 it is the testimony of John the Baptist which gives first voice to Jesus' identity and his role in relation to sin. The fact that the declaration functions as a witness statement is in keeping with the overall portrayal of John the Baptist.<sup>4</sup> As we have already noted, it is the questioners' desire to ascertain John's identity that leads to the witness which also forms the first public affirmation of Jesus' identity. His second description of Jesus as Lamb of God in 1:36, alongside the response which he offers to the questions from his own disciples in John 3, builds on this picture. Moreover, although John does not perform this role again directly within the narrative, his witness is acknowledged in 5:31-35 and 10:41. While the importance of John's role has been rehearsed by those who advocate the cosmic trial

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<sup>2</sup> While Bennema uses these dimensions to analyse and classify the characters in the narrative, he does not consider these characters in John 1. See Cornelis Bennema, *Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John*. (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2009), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Susan E. Hulen, *Imperfect Believers: Ambiguous Characters in the Gospel of John*, (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 117, suggests that their joint action at this point in the Gospel "encourages the reader to see them collectively as a character."

<sup>4</sup> See Brown, Sherri. "John the Baptist: Witness and Embodiment of the Prologue in the Gospel of John," in *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*, ed. Christopher Skinner, (London: T&T Clark, 2013), 156; and Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 25. In 1:7-8, John the Baptist's role as a witness to Jesus is laid out for the implied reader. While stating what John's function is, the narrator also makes clear who he is not. The parentheses in 1:15 affirm this testimony role. The use of antithetical rhetoric, common in the Johannine narrative, in his exchanges with the Priests and Levites, establishes further John the Baptist's credibility as a witness, while also paving the way for the introduction of Jesus in 1:29. John's quotation of Isaiah 40:3 establishes him as the herald who prepares the way of the Lord.

dimension within the narrative, the significance for us lies not in his witness role per se but in what he actually says.<sup>5</sup> At the point of the first disclosure of who Jesus is, which constitutes the first public witness statement, John's significance lies in his description of Jesus' identity and Jesus' role in terms of sin.

The significance and reliability of John's recognition of Jesus' identity and role is signalled by the account of the process by which he came to his understanding. Verse 30 connects Jesus with John's earlier testimony regarding the Messiah. Yet, in verse 31, he makes it clear that at first he did not know that Jesus was the Messiah.<sup>6</sup> In verses 32 and 33 John tells of the baptism event, re-iterating in verse 33 that he did not know Jesus' true identity until the Spirit descended on Jesus and the one who sent both of them revealed the truth to John.<sup>7</sup> Du Plessis suggests that the water immersion carried out by John the Baptist is a symbolic act representing cleansing from impurity, whereas the act of baptising with the Holy Spirit ascribed to Jesus by John the Baptist, functions as a purifying activity that takes away sin.<sup>8</sup>

John's understanding is attested by the Johannine vocabulary that describes it. The witness has to 'see' that to which he bears testimony. The use of both the verbs ὁράω and οὐδᾶ in this section demonstrates that the sight John speaks of in verse 34 is more than physical sight: it is spiritual insight. In the same way, in John 9, Jesus points out that the Man Born Blind sees in a spiritual sense, as well as having new physical sight (verse 39). The connection between lack of such spiritual insight and the non-recognition of Jesus' identity is made in 9:41, as Jesus tells those who reject his identity that their sin remains. Similarly, in 12:37-40, the narrator describes the reaction of those who do not believe in spite of the signs performed in their presence by drawing comparison with those who did not believe Isaiah.<sup>9</sup> However, in 1:34 John witnesses that he has seen and testified that Jesus is the Son of God. This leads to the fulfilment of his role in verses 35 and 36 when, after the second declaration that Jesus is the Lamb of God, some of his disciples begin to follow Jesus instead of John.<sup>10</sup>

### ***John's disciples and those who become Jesus' disciples***

Following John's witness statement, Andrew, one of John's own disciples, acts as a witness himself, as he declares Jesus to be to the Messiah to his brother, Simon Peter, and brings him

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<sup>5</sup> See Anthony E. Harvey, *Jesus on Trial*, (London: S.P.C.K., 1976); and Andrew Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel*, (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000). See also Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 22-23.

<sup>6</sup> The same progressive awareness of Jesus' identity of is true of other characters in the gospel. Examples of such progressive revelation are found with the disciples as a group, as well as with individuals such as the Samaritan woman in John 4, the paralysed man who is healed in John 5, and notably the man born blind in John 9. In this opening chapter of the gospel, the journey of revelation to others begins as the Spirit testifies to the identity of Jesus.

<sup>7</sup> The repetition of 'καὶ ὁὐκ ᾔδειν αὐτὸν' in verse 33 accentuates the lack of knowledge. The fact that he baptises with water demonstrates that he is not the Messiah. The Baptist, however, reveals that the Messiah is the one who will baptise with the Holy Spirit. The symbolism attached to water and spirit is significant within the gospel: e.g. 2:1-11; 4:10; 7:38. A comprehensive treatment of the water motif is found in Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community*. 2nd edition. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 175-206. Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 23, contends that an important element in John's witness lies in his role as baptiser.

<sup>8</sup> P. J. Du Plessis, "The Lamb of God in the Fourth Gospel," in *A South African Perspective on the New Testament*, ed. J.H. Petzer and Patrick J. Hartin, (Leiden: Brill, 1986), see 143-5.

<sup>9</sup> See Isaiah 6:10.

<sup>10</sup> See Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 29; and Sherri Brown, "John the Baptist," 158.

to Jesus.<sup>11</sup> Jesus' subsequent encounter with Philip in Galilee results in Philip acting as a witness to Jesus' identity as he brings Nathanael to Jesus. While a direct relationship is not made between this Messianic aspect of Jesus' identity and sin, in this episode the detail in Philip's witness statement reminds the implied reader of the connection made in the Prologue between the Law of Moses and the grace and truth of Jesus (verse 17). This acts as a glance forward to Jesus' citation of the fact that Moses had written concerning him, as his defence against the Jews' charges of Sabbath law breaking and blasphemy made at the conclusion of John 5.<sup>12</sup> In this episode one specific character trait of these disciples is highlighted: their willingness to follow, which implies a level of response and trust in Jesus. Indeed, Bennema suggests that the language used to describe the words and actions of both Andrew and Philip demonstrates that they have some understanding of Jesus' true identity.<sup>13</sup> As the narrative unfolds, the implied author will use both the narrator and particular episodes to explore the depth and nature of the trust which has been manifested in the disciples' initial willingness to follow. It is significant for that it is John's declaration that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world which invokes this response from the first disciples.

### *Jesus*

Just as the role played by John the Baptist in this part of John 1 reinforces how he is portrayed in the Prologue, the Prologue's description of the Logos is played out in the scenes which follow. In the Prologue, the implied author uses the narrator to communicate that one will come, the Logos. From verse 19 onwards, it is John the Baptist who makes the connection between the one who has been spoken of and Jesus. Even though Jesus' voice is not heard until verse 38, he appears on stage as the subject of John's declaration in verse 29. In the narrative, it is this description of Jesus that appears to be the basis for the transfer of Andrew's allegiance from John the Baptist to Jesus. Thus, the declaration demonstrates that Jesus is one who is considered worthy of trust and worthy of discipleship, even before he has spoken. From this point on in the narrative, attention shifts from John and his activities, to Jesus' identity and role. It is in the exchange with Nathanael that Jesus first reveals his own identity. Nathanael's response to the knowledge that Jesus displays is one of belief in his identity.<sup>14</sup> Nathanael's confession of Jesus' identity foreshadows the narrator's statement of the gospel's purpose in 20:31. However Jesus' reply that he will see 'greater things' is not only directed to Nathanael but to others. The shift to the plural forms 'ὐμῖν' and 'ᾧψεσθε' in verse 51 widens the scope of Jesus' statement and is a reminder of John's declaration that Jesus' actions will have implications for the whole world, not only for Nathanael.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The narrator reports that two of John's disciples are the first people to follow Jesus. While he identifies Andrew as one of these, the other remains un-named. By the end of John 1, there are four named and one un-named disciples who have followed. Although the narrator of the gospel does not often name the disciples individually, the four named here - Andrew, Simon Peter, Philip and Nathanael - are also named in John 21.

<sup>12</sup> See 5:46-47 where Jesus might be referring to Deuteronomy 18:18 or more generally to The Torah as a whole., Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*. 2 vols. (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 662, argues that the reference in 5:46-47 may refer the reader (*sic*) back to the words of the Prologue's climax and suggest that Moses saw the glory of Jesus on Sinai when he received the Torah (Exodus 33-34; 1:14-18).

<sup>13</sup> 'Come and see' and 'finding;' see Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 48-49.

<sup>14</sup> See Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 67, who suggests that the messianic nature of Philip's testimony which he contends may have been more than is recorded in 1:45, prepared the way for Nathanael's own messianic confession and belief response.

<sup>15</sup> Donald. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John.*, (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 163; Keener, *John*, 489.

## “The Lamb of God” and the Narrative Setting

The examination of setting enables the narrative critic to consider the potential symbolic importance of the text as well as its place within the chronology of the story. Powell suggests that the settings for the interactions between characters in a story function as “adverbs” within a literary structure, providing the “when, where, and how” of the episode.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, while the setting can give a spatial or social location for an individual episode, it also provides a context or literary setting for the events within the narrative as a whole. Resseguie outlines different aspects of setting to consider.<sup>17</sup> He points to the physical, social-cultural, temporal and religious environment; the geographical, religious or architectural context; and the social, cultural, political or temporal circumstances of the events. Undoubtedly, each of these aspects of setting has an impact on the reading of the text. However, it is important to note that while the information on setting is found within the narrative, knowledge of the possible historical setting for the events is also needed when an analysis of the religious, social, cultural and political setting is undertaken.<sup>18</sup> Three types of settings need to be considered when we are examining the declaration in 1:29: literary, physical and theological. Each of these contributes to how we interpret this declaration and how we might assess its relationship to restoration and renewal.

In literary terms, John’s declaration of Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is set against the background to the narrative which is painted by the words of the Prologue. In the Prologue the Word is pictured both as God and as the incarnate Jesus Christ through whom God enables the world to be restored to relationship with him. The metaphorical language of darkness is used to describe the condition of the world. While there is something of a sense of mystery surrounding the precise identity of the Word, the character’s relationship to God is clearly established: ‘the Word was with God and the Word was God.’ In effect, this opening verse forms the first of many witness statements in the Gospel which will build together to provide a body of evidence to the implied reader pointing to who, precisely, this character is. His central role in the creation of the world (verse 3) and the allusion to his mission of restoration of that same world to God (verse 12) sets the scene for what is to follow, as do the descriptions of him as ‘the light’ (verses 4, 5 and 9), ‘the Word made flesh’ (verse 14) and ‘the father’s only son’ (verse 14). Within these opening verses of the gospel, the reality of opposition to and rejection of the story’s central character is also indicated. In verse 5, the narrator speaks of the existence of ‘darkness’ which will seek to overcome the ‘light,’ but which will not prevail. In verse 10, he acknowledges another key element of the unfolding story, when he describes ‘the world’ as a place and a body of people who will not respond positively to the revelation of the Word. The failure to recognise on the part of some is accompanied by deliberate rejection of the Word by those who might be expected to accept him (verse 11). Metzner’s suggestion that verses 5, 10 and 11 “function as an anticipation and a summary statement of what the gospel understands by sin” is in keeping with the proposition that sin within the gospel should be defined as unbelief.<sup>19</sup> The depiction of the positive reaction to the

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<sup>16</sup> Mark Allan Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism? A New Approach to the Bible*, (London: SPCK, 1993), 69.

<sup>17</sup> James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2005), 87-88. He also suggests that minor or ‘walk-on’ characters as well as props may provide symbolic information pertinent to the interpretation of the events.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Marguerat and Yvan Bourquin, (trans. John Bowden). *How to Read Bible Stories: An Introduction to Narrative Criticism*, (London: SCM Press, 1999), 82. When they consider the element of social setting, they point to the need to consider social history and the pertinent historical culture.

<sup>19</sup> Rainer Metzner, *Das Verständnis Der Sünde Im Johannesevangelium*, WUNT 122, (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 31.

Word in verse 12 provides support for this in that it unveils the consequences of belief as enabling relationship with God.

Given that the physical setting for this declaration of Jesus as the Lamb of God is that of the initial encounter between John the Baptist and Jesus, the description of the Word and of John's role in relation to the Word is also important. The introduction of John the Baptist in verses 6 to 8 defines his role as that of witness and paves the way for his fulfilment of that role in 1:29. In chronological terms, the meeting of John and Jesus takes place immediately after John's testimony to the priests and Levites sent from Jerusalem by the Jews to investigate his baptising activity in Bethany.<sup>20</sup> Within 1:19-51 there are four inter-connected scenes narrated in chronological order: 19-28; 29-34; 35-42; 43-51. While the declaration of Jesus as Lamb of God occurs twice, at the start of both scene two and scene three, each scene holds significance for the interpretation of John the Baptist's declaration. Although each of the first three scenes takes place in Bethany, there is a sense of movement within the setting; for it is first the place of John's ministry, then the place for the declaration of Jesus' identity, and subsequently the place where some of John's disciples switch their allegiance to Jesus. In the fourth scene, the focus shifts entirely to Jesus' ministry as the physical setting moves to Galilee. While different characters move towards the centre of the action, the questions in each scene focus on the issue of identity: who John the Baptist is, or is not, and who Jesus is. Indeed, although Jesus does not appear until scene two and does not speak until scene three, he is the focus of each conversation. As the scenes progress, more and more details are revealed regarding Jesus' identity.

In this shift of attention from John the Baptist to Jesus, the words of 1:29 play a key role. By his declaration, John the Baptist unveils the man whom he encounters at Bethany as the Word of whom the Prologue speaks. In making this statement, John the Baptist fulfils the witness role already identified for him within the Prologue. However, while the Baptist's testimony to the priests and Levites constitutes the first public witness statement as to the character and identity of Jesus in John's Gospel, the words used also lead to speculation regarding a theological setting. The issue is how the implied reader should interpret the declaration, both at this point in the narrative and as the narrative unfolds. For both the implied author and the implied reader a number of different lamb images may be perceived in the Baptist's description of Jesus as the 'Lamb of God' and the ascription to him of the function of 'taking away sin.'<sup>21</sup> Indeed, it is the association of the title with the action that provides the clearest indication of how we should interpret 1:29 within the narrative of John's Gospel and which influences our understanding of the implications of John's description of Jesus for the twin themes of restoration and revival.

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<sup>20</sup> The time indications and the language used suggest that the events in John 1 appear to cover about four days in the story-time. See Brown, Raymond Edward. *The Gospel According to John: Introduction, Translation and Notes*, 2 vols. (Anchor Bible, 29, New York; London: Doubleday, 1966 – 1970), 105-107, regarding the cycle of days in John 1 and John 2 and the possible allusion to the days of the first Creation (Genesis 1-2:3). While both, R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 71, and D. Francois Tolmie, *Narratology and Biblical Narratives*, (Eugene; Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers), 2012. (previously published San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1999), 93-99, discuss the way narrative time moves more slowly in scenes towards the end of the gospel than in the summary sections of the narrative, the detailed chronology given to the events in John 1 is an indicator of the significance which should be attached to them.

<sup>21</sup> For an overview of the discussion surrounding the range of possible backgrounds to the use of 'Lamb of God' in 1:29 see Jesper T. Nielsen, "The Lamb of God: The Cognitive Structure of a Johannine metaphor," in *Imagery in the Gospel of John, Terms, Forms, Themes and Theology of Johannine Figurative Language*, ed. Jörg Frey, et. al., (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 227, 241; George L. Carey, "The Lamb of God and Atonement Theories," *TB* 32 (1981); and Christopher W. Skinner, "Another look at The Lamb of God," *BibSac* 161 (2004).

One possibility is that the use of the title ‘Lamb of God’ in 1:29 signals sacrificial imagery and that Jesus’ role in taking away sin should be thought of by the implied reader in the notion of sacrifice depicted in the Hebrew scriptures. However not all of the imagery is necessarily helpful. The picture of the sacrificial lamb in Jeremiah 11:19 being led willingly to slaughter provides an interesting parallel. However, while the later Johannine picture of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane highlights his willingness to give himself up to the cross, the idea of innocence and gentleness does not sit well with a sacrificial rite in which a lamb would have been dragged to the place of sacrifice, as Ashbey argues.<sup>22</sup> The use of lamb in temple sacrifices could also be thought to provide a theological background for 1:29. Yet, while a lamb was used in the most frequent sacrifice, the daily burnt offering cited in the Tamid (Exodus 29:38; Numbers 28:3), the intention of that sacrifice was not to be a sin or guilt offering and it was not viewed as performing any expiation.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the fact that goats or bulls were also sacrificed in the Temple as sin or guilt offerings helps to weaken the argument for a relationship to the “Lamb of God.”<sup>24</sup> The same argument dismisses possible links to the scapegoat imagery of Leviticus 16. More fruitful comparisons may lie in the Aqedah story of Genesis 22, the Servant imagery in Isaiah and the Passover story.

The sense of God’s provision and the restoration of relationship provide significant parallels between the Aqedah and the Prologue. The story of Abraham sacrificing the lamb provided to him by God, in place of the sacrifice of Isaac, resonates with the Prologue’s depiction of the way The Word enters the human story, offering reconciliation between God and his people.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the use of the possessive genitive, τοῦ θεοῦ, in 1:29, gives a sense of God’s provision and serves as a reminder that only God was understood to be able to take away sins.<sup>26</sup> However

<sup>22</sup> Godfrey Ashbey, “The Lamb of God,” *JTSA* 21 (Dec 1977): 63.

<sup>23</sup> See Skinner, “The Lamb of God,” 91, who argues that the association is possible, so long as both are viewed in light of the Cross. However, the lambs sacrificed daily in the Temple were not understood to be a sin or guilt offering. See Tamid 4:1-3 in Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), 584-5. See E.P.Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63BCE-66CE*, (London: SCM Press, 1992), 104-105. Although Sanders himself has cast doubt on whether the Mishnaic rabbis give an accurate description of the temple or its procedures, he also asserts that there is no other source with regard to the daily burnt offering: see 507.

<sup>24</sup> In the purification or sin offering (*chatta’t*), bulls, goats, lambs, doves, or pigeons were burnt to symbolise purification after involuntary impurity: see Leviticus 4:1–5:13. In the reparation or ‘Guilt offering’ (*asham*) a ram was sacrificed to make restitution for deliberate acts: see Leviticus 5:14–6:7.

<sup>25</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 409-10, argues that Genesis 22:2 is specifically alluded to in 1:29 and 1:36, and suggests that the presentation of Jesus as the ‘one and only Son’ echoes the description of Isaac as Abraham’s ‘one and only son.’ Some patristic exegesis made the Aqedah the type (or antitype) of Christ’s sacrificial death – see Melito of Sardis and Stuart G. Hall (ed.), *On Pascha: And Fragments*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 75-77, Fragments 9, 10 and 11. Edward Kessler points to the visual representation of the Aqedah in early Christian Eucharistic art, as well as in funeral depictions. See Edward Kessler, *Bound by the Bible: Jews, Christians and the Sacrifice of Isaac*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 156ff. Skinner, “The Lamb of God,” 94, and P.R. Davies & B.D. Chilton, “The Aqedah: A Revised Tradition History,” *CBQ* 40 (1978): 514-546, 538-9 also consider the link in some detail.

<sup>26</sup> The vocabulary used in the Hebrew Bible includes a variety of verbs. *salach* is found as part of the sacrificial rite in which God is recognised as the one who is willing to forgive and forgiveness comes about because of the willingness of a gracious God to forgive: see Exodus 34:7ff, Leviticus 4-6 and Numbers 14, 15, 30. *kipper* conveys the idea of atonement or the paying of a ransom price: see Leviticus 4:20, 19:22; Numbers 15:25. *kipper* and *salach* also occur together, showing the close bond between atonement and forgiveness. *nasa’* seems to refer to the taking away of an offence and the lifting up or bearing sin in the sense of incurring guilt or responsibility: see Exodus 28:43; Leviticus 5:1, 17; or in the sense of removing or forgiving sin: see Exodus 34:7; Numbers 14:18; Psalm 32:5. See Stanislas Lyonnet and Léopold Sabourin, *Sin, Redemption, and Sacrifice: A Biblical and Patristic Study*, (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970), 127ff; and Vincent Taylor, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: A Study in New Testament Theology*, (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (London; New York: Macmillan: St. Martin’s Press, 1960), 23-27. For a fuller discussion of the concept of forgiveness see Gregory L. Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological*

Skinner's argument that the focus of Genesis 22 is more on the test of Abraham's faith, and that thus the connection with the Aqedah should be made at the end of Jesus' life rather than at the beginning of his ministry, also has merit.<sup>27</sup> The Servant Songs in Isaiah may provide a comparable sacrificial image.<sup>28</sup> Although the argument that the use of Lamb of God in 1:29 represents a mistranslation of the Aramaic title 'servant of God' in Isaiah 53 is of little merit, the association of the servant with the taking away of sin suggests at least some contribution to the background.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, integral to the Songs is the notion of an innocent servant who vicariously suffers on Israel's behalf, following Israel's failure.

The Lamb of the Passover story offers a further possible association of sacrificial imagery with 1:29.<sup>30</sup> Indeed the presentation of Jesus as the Lamb at the beginning of the gospel provides an 'anticipation' of his death during the Festival of Passover at the end of the gospel, even if this is not what John the Baptist himself intended in the statement.<sup>31</sup> Although the idea of atonement is more readily related to other sacrifices, a connection was made between Passover and atoning sacrifice within Judaism.<sup>32</sup> Other allusions within the narrative lend credence to the Passover's contribution to the theological setting. There are a number of references to Moses within the first nine chapters of the Gospel.<sup>33</sup> However, those in John 8 are particularly relevant. The Temple setting during the Feast of Tabernacles, the imagery of deliverance from slavery and the portrayal of Jesus as a Moses type redeemer, each provide strong associations with the

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*Analysis*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1995), 105-113; and Tobias Hägerland, *Jesus and the Forgiveness of Sins: An Aspect of His Prophetic Mission*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 132-178.

<sup>27</sup> Skinner, "The Lamb of God," 95.

<sup>28</sup> Brown, *Gospel 29*, 61. Brown suggests that the imagery of Isaiah 53:7 lay behind some early Christian interpretations of the use of the title Lamb of God, particularly that of the Eastern Fathers. However, D. Brent Sandy, "John the Baptist's 'Lamb of God' affirmation in its canonical and apocalyptic milieu," *JETS* 34 (1991): 448, identifies seven reasons against this traditional view and argues instead that the title identifies Jesus as messianic deliverer.

<sup>29</sup> The argument rests on the idea of an original Aramaic source behind the gospel within which the Aramaic expression 'Servant of Yahweh' is translated as ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ. See Joachim Jeremias, "ἀμνός," in Kittel, *TDNT*, vol. 1. 339; C.F. Burney, *The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel*, (Oxford, 1922), 104-8. However, while *tayla* can be translated 'servant,' 'boy' or 'lamb,' it most commonly means 'boy' and therefore does not provide the most obvious translation of *ebed* in Isaiah 42. The idea of such an Aramaic antecedent in Isaiah 42:1-4, Isaiah 49:1-6, Isaiah 50:4-9 and Isaiah 52:13-53 has not been widely adopted. See Charles K. Barrett, *The Gospel According To St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London: S.P.C.K., 1978), 176; Brown, *Gospel 29*, 61; and Severino Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel: The Torah and the Gospel, Moses and Jesus, Judaism and Christianity according to John*, (NovTSup, 42. Leiden: Brill, 1975), 349. See also Nielsen, "Lamb of God," 228-233, who examines both the MT and LXX versions of Isaiah and suggests that comparison of the servant and the lamb lies in the "innocence and meekness" when "confronted with suffering." For the association of Isaiah 53 with 1:29 see the discussion by Paul Hoskins, "Deliverance from death by the true Passover Lamb: A significant aspect of the fulfilment of the Passover in the Gospel of John," *JETS*, 52 (2009), 285-99; see also Barrett, *John*, 176-7 and Lyonnet and Sabourin, *Sin*, 254-256, 261-3. See also Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2003), 453. Keener's suggestion that a connection between the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53:7 and Mark 10:45 would have been 'widely accepted as authentic' by the time of the gospel is an interesting one, but beyond the remit of this study.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity*, (London: SCM Press, 1970), 50, suggests that ἀμνός used for lamb in 1:29 occurs in the LXX 100 times in reference to sacrificial lambs.

<sup>31</sup> Craig R. Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John's Gospel*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 113. Keener, *John*, 454, argues that in the narrative Jesus' death is portrayed in terms of the Passover lamb and that the gospel "points to the context of a 'new exodus' and a new redemption (1:23) expected by Judaism," even if it is not what the Baptist would have intended by the use of the term.

<sup>32</sup> Lyonnet and Sabourin, *Sin*, 170-172; Hoskins, "Deliverance," 286-289. However, see also Nielsen, "Lamb of God," 239, who rejects the idea that the Passover Lamb was viewed as an atoning sacrifice in early Judaism, arguing instead that the meaning of the Passover and the Passover Lamb is to be found in the "transferral" from slavery to freedom.

<sup>33</sup> 1:17, 45; 3:14; 5:45-46; 6:32; 7:19, 7:22-23; 8:5; 9:28-29.



Passover/Exodus story.<sup>34</sup> In addition, the relationship of the final scenes of the gospel to the Passover should not be overlooked. The sharing of a meal on the night before Passover itself, through to the correlation between the timing of the events of the crucifixion and those of the sacrifice of the lambs on Passover day, give evidence to support the contention that the narrative should be read as leading to Jesus' cross bearing action.<sup>35</sup> Yet, while the arguments regarding Passover allusions are strong, there is a difficulty in suggesting that the Passover lamb forms the sole theological setting for the Lamb imagery of 1:29, given that the action of 'taking away sin' was not directly associated with the Passover lamb.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, despite his own proposal of a Passover setting for the use of Lamb of God, Koester acknowledges that problems arise.<sup>37</sup> If a connection is to be made to the sacrificial imagery of Passover, it is important to consider how that sacrifice would have been understood by the implied reader of the Gospel text. Associating deliverance imagery with the use of the title Lamb of God in 1:29 provides a direct connection between the title and the action contained in John the Baptist's declaration.<sup>38</sup> The association of the Passover with deliverance also provides a more compelling argument for identifying it with 1:29. For, when the events of the Passover were recalled, it was the deliverance of Israel from slavery which was fundamental to the celebration, rather than a sense of sacrifice for sin.<sup>39</sup> The idea of Jesus as the Lamb who provides deliverance and freedom for the world is consonant with the way his identity is revealed, both in the Prologue and in the scenes which follow it.<sup>40</sup> The offering of himself to the world provides the means of restoration to God.<sup>41</sup> This is achieved by the liberation of the world from sin. This overcomes the problem that the notion of Jesus as a Lamb of sacrifice is not frequently apparent for the implied reader within the text of the Johannine narrative.

While Keener accepts the association of apocalyptic imagery with the title, he makes the interesting suggestion that it should be attributed to the usage of Lamb of God in 1:36, rather than in 1:29.<sup>42</sup> He bases this on the association of the Lamb with deliverance, rather than with

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<sup>34</sup> Paul Hoskins, "Freedom from Slavery to Sin and the Devil: John 8:31-47 and the Passover theme of the Gospel of John," *Trinij* 31 NS (2010), 47-63.

<sup>35</sup> See Brown, *Gospel*, 29, 61; Lyonnet and Sabourin, *Sin*, 263-264; Metzner, *Sünde*, 156.

<sup>36</sup> See Exodus 12. See Barrett, *John*, 176; Koester, *Word of Life*, 113; and Pancaro, *Law*, 348-9. While Brown, *Gospel* 29, 62, argues that in the LXX πρόβατον rather than ἄμνος is used for the paschal lamb, Pancaro, *Law*, 348, suggests that the two designations had become synonymous.

<sup>37</sup> Koester, *Word of Life*, 113.

<sup>38</sup> It may also overcome the issue that the verb αἴρω is only found twice in the LXX in the sense of forgiveness of sins (1 Sam 15:25, 25:28): See I.H. Marshall, "Lamb of God," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, (ed. J. Green et. al; Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 433.

<sup>39</sup> Metzner, *Sünde*, 158, argues that liberation should be the dominant imagery, arguing that the connection lies in the liberation provided by the Lamb in the Passover release from slavery and in the world's liberation by the 'end-time Passover Lamb.' Hoskins, "Deliverance," 291. See also J. Van Baal, "A neglected crux in the interpretation of the sacrifice of Christ," *NTT*, 37. (1983): 243-5. Although some Atonement models suggest that the expiation of sins through vicarious suffering arises from the celebration of the Day of Atonement, Van Baal argues that if resonance with the Day of Atonement had been intended then the events would have taken place at the time of that Holy Day. Van Baal points to the idea that this possibility is suggested by some of the atonement theology models. He also suggests that the combination of paschal lamb imagery with that of the goat of atonement is 'controversial,' arguing that the identification of Jesus with such a model could not have arisen from Jesus himself, but from the feelings of the disciples as they experienced the resurrection and its accompanying confirmation of the forgiveness of their betrayal, denial and sin.

<sup>40</sup> Skinner, "The Lamb of God," 103-4, argues for a sense of messianic expectation in keeping with John the Baptist's own pronouncements along with added theological meaning that arises from the gospel's emphasis on a Messiah who bears sin.

<sup>41</sup> Koester, *Word of Life*, 113-4.

<sup>42</sup> Keener, *John*, 452. Although John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (2nd ed., Oxford: University Press, 2007), 162-4, comments that the Greek word used for Lamb in Revelation is ἀρνίον, he sees the suggestion of an apocalyptic background for the title as preferable to either that of the Suffering Servant or the Paschal Lamb

sin-bearing, in apocalyptic literature.<sup>43</sup> Keener's distinction is helpful and assists us as we consider this idea of a theological setting. Jesus' offering of himself to the world provides the means of restoration to God.<sup>44</sup> This is achieved by the liberation of the world from sin. The connotations of deliverance and the use of deliverance imagery elsewhere in the narrative provide association for the title. While Skinner argues that when the action and the title are considered together, 1:29 should be thought of as depicting the 'ultimate Passover lamb,' he also suggests that the picture creates a sense of messianic expectation in keeping with the gospel's emphasis on a Messiah who bears sin.<sup>45</sup> Thus, while the Passover lamb could provide the primary theological setting for 1:29, the implied author may intend that other deliverance imagery should also influence the overall depiction of the Lamb as the one who takes away the sin of the world. In this case, the deliverance imagery of the Passover Lamb could be combined with that of the Lamb in Isaiah 53:7, or even the deliverance of an apocalyptic lamb.<sup>46</sup>

While the highly symbolic language used in 1:29 to describe Jesus' identity and role indicates that theological significance should be attached to the statement, it is difficult to identify a single image even if some provide a more plausible background than others. This suggests that we may not be dealing with a single theological setting for the declaration in 1:29. Indeed the combination of the title with the associated action and the portrayal of Jesus reinforces this. For, while Jesus is described as a lamb, he should not be thought of as simply a lamb which is part of a traditional ritual. Unlike the lambs offered by the human participant in sacrificial rites in the Temple, 1:29 speaks of the one who is the Lamb of God: *the* Lamb provided by God. The Prologue states that he is the one provided so that God's people may be restored to him

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which he considers to be the 'other two leading candidates,' Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh. *Social Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 50-52, also look to Revelation when they put forward the possibility of an astrological background, suggesting that the depiction of the Lion of Judah in Revelation 5:5 is in keeping with the identification of Jesus as the Lamb of God in 1:29, and his subsequent naming as the Messiah by the disciples in 1:40.

<sup>43</sup> A sense that deliverance imagery is intended by 1:29 has also led to the idea that the portrayal could be akin to that of the warrior lamb found within some early Jewish material, drawn from apocalyptic, wisdom and prophetic traditions: the Lamb as a metaphor for deliverer or as a symbol for a Messianic leader, and involving Kingdom imagery. Some interpreters look to the imagery found in 1 Enoch 90:6-19 and in the Testament of Joseph 19:8-12. See Ben Witherington, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel*, (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 66. Drawing upon its use in the Testament of Joseph 19:8, Witherington suggests that the original basis for the phrase could be that of "a conquering lamb who comes for judgement on all things dark and dangerous." Skinner, "The Lamb of God," also looks to the Testament of Benjamin 3:8, 101-2, for a connection. Sandy, "Lamb of God," suggests that the Lamb is used as a metaphor in the Second Temple period, basing his supposition on messianic apocalyptic texts, 458. Charles H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), 238, argues that the idea of the eschatological lamb as the symbol for a Messianic leader is a possible background image. George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, WBC 36 (2nd ed., Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 24-5, points to the figure of a Lamb leading the flock of God, delivering them from their foes and ruling them in the Kingdom of God. He also argues that the intention of the Baptist is to indicate a Lamb of God who acts as judge of the wicked and the righteous. In addition, however, he suggests that the hand of the Johannine circle may be at work and that the 'submissive lamb' of Isaiah 53 and Genesis 22 may have been linked to the figure. Note that in Revelation the apocalyptic lamb is usually described using ἀρνίον rather than the ἄμνος of 1:29.

<sup>44</sup> Koester, *Word of Life*, 113-4.

<sup>45</sup> Skinner, "The Lamb of God," 103-4, bases his conclusion on an examination of the meaning of the phrase 'ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου'.

<sup>46</sup> See Carey, "The Lamb of God," 111, 120; Keener, *John*, 452, 456; Koester, *Word of Life*, 113; and Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St John*. Black's New Testament Commentaries. London: Continuum, 2005, 113. Although Nielsen refers to a wide range of possible semantic backgrounds, he also connects the Passover Lamb and the Suffering Servant imagery. Using what he terms as a 'conceptual integration model', he argues that it is possible to view the Johannine title 'ὁ ἄμνος τοῦ θεοῦ' as having its own particular meaning within which is contained the whole range of understanding that the two images convey. See Nielsen, "The Lamb of God," 227, 241.

(1:12). Thus, as Moloney argues, Jesus is not a ‘cultic offering’ or ‘cultic victim’ because he is *of* God:

The traditional way of gaining pardon and communion has been transcended through the Lamb of God. Jesus is not a cultic victim but the one through whom God enters the human story, offering it reconciliation with him. As so often in the Fourth Gospel, an old symbol is being used in a new way.<sup>47</sup>

### ‘Sin,’ ‘The World,’ and ‘Taking away’ and The Narrative Structure

Analysing the structure of episodes in the Gospels enables us to pay attention to both the content of the episode and its form. In the examination of structure, we can pay attention to rhetorical devices employed within the narrative. These include the use of misunderstanding, irony, metaphor and symbolism, as well as the role of a narrator.<sup>48</sup> Structural analysis enables us to look at both the literary and the thematic pattern of the episode to see how language features within both. Considering the linguistic features of an episode such as the use of time, verb tenses and the constructions enables us to explore the relationship between the events in the episode. On this occasion our consideration of structure will be limited to the declaration itself.

While the associated action is only included with the title in 1:29, the repetition of Lamb of God in 1:36 provides a singulative frequency within the narrative, in that the declaration happens twice and is narrated twice.<sup>49</sup> This repetition of the title is, perhaps, one of the reasons why a significant amount of attention focuses on the imagery associated with John the Baptist’s use of the descriptive title ‘Lamb of God.’<sup>50</sup> Given that we have already devoted considerable time to the title, it is essential that we also explore the role and function of the words used within the action statement. Three key elements need to be examined: ‘sin,’ ‘the world,’ and the use of the verb ‘take away.’

Within Jewish tradition, the concept of sin was understood in terms of transgression against God’s law and within the Hebrew world-view, the right to forgive or to take away sin was seen as resting exclusively with God.<sup>51</sup> Accordingly, the declaration that Jesus is ‘the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ raises questions regarding the understanding of the term ‘sin’ and issues about the identity and the role of Jesus in relation to that sin. This episode provides the first occurrence of *hamartia* in the Johannine narrative, but it also has the only Johannine example of the singular form of *hamartia* used in direct relationship with *kosmos*. Although both ‘sin’ and ‘the world’ appear in the same sentence in 1 Jn 2:2, *hamartia* is in the plural form and the two nouns are not directly linked in the possessive way they are connected in 1:29. The use of the singular noun, ‘sin,’ in 1:29, suggests that John the Baptist is referring to the more all-encompassing condition of sinfulness rather than to a variety of sinful deeds or actions which might be represented by the use of the plural. This is the state which is highlighted by the symbolic darkness depicted in the Prologue. Indeed, the Prologue’s

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<sup>47</sup> Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina, (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1998), 59.

<sup>48</sup> See the summary offered by Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 56-75. The range of roles available to the narrator are helpfully summed up by Marguerat and Bourquin, *How to read Bible Stories*, 27: outside the story: extradiegetic; inside the story: intradiegetic; inside and exhibiting a relationship to the events, but not figuring or intervening: heterodiegetic; inside and present in the story: homodiegetic.

<sup>49</sup> See Tolmie, *Narratology*, 100.

<sup>50</sup> See Ashton, *Understanding*, 162. Part of that lack of attention may arise from an assumption that the action is a later addition to the text.

<sup>51</sup> See 1 Samuel 15:25 and Micah 7:18. See Lyonnet and Sabourin, *Sin*, 23. Keener, *John*, 456.

depiction of the world's failure to know the Word and its rejection of the Word, provides the starting point for the portrayal of sin throughout John's Gospel. As Keener suggests:

“Although the Greek term for sin had undergone changes to include more moral connotations (while sometimes retaining some of the term's original amoral sense), John assumes the concept's historical Jewish sense of transgression against God's law (cf. 4:15; 8:34; 9:2-3, 31) which in the Fourth Gospel especially involves unbelief against Jesus (8:21, 24, 46; 9:41; 15:24; 16:9).”<sup>52</sup>

As we have already seen, the linkage of the Lamb of 1:29 to some of the Old Testament imagery incorporating the removal of sin or guilt seems improbable as a setting, yet Barrett argues that the imagery of removal of guilt can, nonetheless, be connected with 1:29, commenting that ‘no longer are the sins of ignorance of the Jewish people removed by sacrifice, but the sin of the world.’<sup>53</sup> While acknowledging that the words used are different, he draws a parallel between this passage and a number of Old Testament texts, suggesting that *hamartia* is also used in the sense of ‘guilt’ within the gospel: 9:41; 15:22, 24; 19:11 and 20:23.<sup>54</sup> However, a suggestion made by Lincoln is perhaps more useful. He argues that the use of Scripture and its imagery in the gospel is made up of a number of different sources which make it difficult to ‘pin down.’<sup>55</sup> Focusing on the fact that the Passover Lamb was not a sin offering, he looks to the influence of Isaiah 53 and Exodus 12, suggesting that the sin involved in the text is the refusal to acknowledge the Logos, which in turn is a rejection of the Creator. It is such sin that needs to be dealt with in order for the purpose for which Jesus came into the world to be fulfilled.

Within the gospel as a whole, the use of the noun *kosmos* is found with positive, neutral and negative connotations.<sup>56</sup> Positive images of the world include Jesus' statements that he is the Saviour of the world (3:16; 4:42; 12:47) and the light of the world (8:12; 9:5; 11:9 and 12:46).<sup>57</sup> The world is also pictured as having the potential to believe. This is demonstrated in the response to Jesus outlined in 1:12 and in Jesus' prayer for the world in 17:21. In 1:10 the noun is used in a neutral sense to refer to the created world, the physical reality of the earth.<sup>58</sup> However, in the second half of the verse, the portrayal becomes negative when the narrator comments that, ‘the world did not know him.’ This lack of knowledge leads to ‘the world’ being depicted as the place of human or natural existence that contrasts negatively with the realm of the divine.<sup>59</sup> Such negative imagery results in earth and heaven being set against each other in a dualistic pairing.<sup>60</sup> Within the narrative this opposition is highlighted, both in

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<sup>52</sup> See Keener, *John*, 456.

<sup>53</sup> Barrett, *John*, 177.

<sup>54</sup> Barrett, *John*, 176-7. Barrett cites Exodus 28:38; 34:7; Numbers 14:18; 1 Samuel 15:25; Psalm 32:5; 85:3; Micah 7:18.

<sup>55</sup> Lincoln, *John*, 113. See also Carey, “The Lamb of God,” 109. Carey suggests that the use of the Old Testament in the gospel should not be looked at simply in terms of direct quotation. Rather, it is more likely that a specific text or theme is used because “it is already in the mind through familiarity with the passage as a whole.”

<sup>56</sup> See the comprehensive discussion in Lars Kierspel, *The Jews and the World in the Fourth Gospel: Parallelism, Function, and Context*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 155-213. Kierspel suggests that there is a more positive picture in the first half of the gospel where it is God's attitude to the world that is evident. In the second half of the gospel, a negative picture emerges where the response of the world to God is seen. See also Köstenberger, *Missions*, 140.

<sup>57</sup> See also Jesus' depiction of himself as giving life to the world: 6:33, 51.

<sup>58</sup> See also 7:4; 11:9; 12:19; 13:1; 16:21, 28; 17:5, 13; 18:20, 36; 21:25. Stanley B. Marrow, “κόσμος in John,” *CBQ* 64 (2002): 90-102, 97, helpfully points out that the neutral sense is only found once in 1 John, in 1 John 4:1.

<sup>59</sup> See also Jn 6 and Jn 12. Further negative imagery occurs in Jn 16 when Jesus says that the world will rejoice as the disciples mourn his death.

<sup>60</sup> See the picture that develops in Jn 8. See also Robert Kysar, *John, the Maverick Gospel*, (3<sup>rd</sup> edition) (Louisville; London; Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 73-78. Kysar argues that the human and cosmic dualism is

conversation between Jesus and his opponents, and between Jesus and his disciples. For example, in Jn 8 Jesus describes those who choose not to believe the testimony of the witness as those who are of this world and who will die in their sin (8:23-24). However, while at many points in the gospel unfavourable contrasts are drawn between this physical world and the world from which Jesus comes, 1:29 establishes that even though sin is identified with ‘the world,’ the world is also the object of Jesus’ mission.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, as Metzner suggests, it is “in Christ that God sets things in motion to save the world from its sin. His love for it is what inspires his action.”<sup>62</sup>

The way we interpret the use of the verb αἴρω is also significant for understanding the role of 1:29 within the story of sin, restoration and renewal. In the New Testament the verb is only found with the noun ‘sin’ in its singular form in 1:29 and the plural form in 1 John 3:5.<sup>63</sup> This combination of noun and verb could be interpreted in two different ways. In the first, the phrase might indicate the simple, straightforward act of the removal of sin. This interpretation is based upon the translation of the verb as ‘taking away’ or ‘removing.’<sup>64</sup> Forestell argues that this usage is found in the LXX, where the action expressed by the verb is akin to that associated with the verb ἀφαιρέναι, which simply means ‘to take away’ or ‘to remove’ rather than ‘bearing sins.’<sup>65</sup> Dodd argues along similar lines when he suggests that this notion of to ‘do away with’ or ‘make an end to’ sin was a function of the Jewish Messiah, “quite apart from any thought of a redemptive death.”<sup>66</sup> In this case, the action in 1:29 should simply be interpreted as the act of removing or the power to remove sin, rather than in the sense of vicarious bearing, expiation or atonement.<sup>67</sup> Forestell contends that this suggests an act of restoration: echoing the covenant sacrifice in that it has to do with the elimination of the sin that has broken the relationship and that 1:29 presents Jesus as the ‘the lamb provided by God for the removal of sin.’<sup>68</sup> Forestell argues that, while this cultic presentation is not replicated elsewhere in the gospel, it is in keeping with the gospel’s theology.<sup>69</sup> He contends that the concept of sin presented within the gospel is that of life lived in opposition to God that is overturned through the revelation of the Father and the gift of eternal life.<sup>70</sup>

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“meshed” and that the other dualistic symbols work along similar lines, i.e. a negative pole that “describes the state of misdirected and confused human life,” and a positive pole that is symbolised as “light, truth, spirit, life and eternal life, God’s rule, and the above.”

<sup>61</sup> See Kierspel, *The Jews and the World*, 159 and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel: With Implications for the Fourth Gospel's Purpose and the Mission of the Contemporary Church*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 165-6.

<sup>62</sup> Metzner, *Sünde*, 157.

<sup>63</sup> J. Terence. Forestell, *The Word of the Cross: Salvation as Revelation in the Fourth Gospel*, (Rome: Bib Inst Press, 1974), 160, notes that it is found in the passive in Ephesians 4:3.

<sup>64</sup> Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English lexicon*, revised and augmented Henry Stuart Jones and Robert MacKenzie, (Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1940); accessed via <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>, entry for αἴρειν. d.o.a. 18/2/13.

<sup>65</sup> While we have already noted that Hoskins, “Deliverance,” 288, argues that αἴρειν is only found twice in the LXX in the sense of forgiveness of sins (1 Sam 15:25 and 1 Sam 25:28), Forestell, *Cross*, 161, suggests that in the LXX the verbs αἴρειν, ἀφαιρέναι, ἐξαιρέειν, when used in respect of sin, are synonymous with ἀφαιρέναι, arguing that they are used to express forgiveness which is the work of God, or “a rite of God instituted for that purpose.”

<sup>66</sup> Dodd, *Interpretation*, 237.

<sup>67</sup> Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997), 71.

<sup>68</sup> Forestell, *Cross*, 161, contends that the concept of forgiveness is based on a juridical model of sin as debt, and as such, cannot be used to describe how sin is dealt with in John.

<sup>69</sup> Forestell, *Cross*, 165, views John 1:29 as a peculiarity in terms of the gospel, though accepts that the repetition in 1:36 demonstrates that 1:29 belongs to the present text: see 158.

<sup>70</sup> Forestell, *Cross*, 166.

However, 1:29 could also be viewed as theologically nuanced presentation of Jesus' action, and thus as a revelation of his identity. This argument rests both on the interpretation of the tense of the participle and the connection of the action to the description of Jesus as the Lamb of God. While the participle is found in the present active form, Brown argues that a sense of future force may be intended.<sup>71</sup> Whether a present or a future dimension to the verb is intended in 1:29, a connection can certainly be made between the imagery of taking away sin and Jesus' death. It is this association, as well as the passion references throughout the narrative and the crucifixion itself, which leads both Lincoln to consider Jesus' death as sacrifice and Metzner to conclude that sin should be viewed in terms of a theology of revelation which becomes visible at the Cross and is overcome by the Cross.<sup>72</sup> Metzner's contention is that as this sin is revealed, it is done away with, and thus is a phenomenon of the past. While this may be the case, the juxtaposition of the description and the action in the present active form provides an important indication to the implied reader of Jesus' identity and the action associated with that identity. Lincoln's suggestion that one of the ways Jesus is portrayed is as a sacrificial victim resonates with our theme. Jesus' death opens up the possibility for the world to receive God's gift of life.<sup>73</sup> The sin which has to be taken away, then, is the world's refusal to acknowledge the Word, as this is tantamount to rejection of its Creator.<sup>74</sup>

### **1:29 - A Title and an Action: Sin, Restoration, Renewal and Revival**

For the individual, and for the world, the imagery of 1:29 points to the actualisation of restoration and renewal offered by the incarnation itself. In John 8, a direct comparison is made between those who commit sin being slaves to sin, and those who are made free by the Son, being free indeed. If sin holds humanity in slavery, then the one who takes away that sin delivers humanity from sin's slavery. O'Day and Hylén suggest that the Passover feast in John's Gospel "occasions God's eschatological provision of 'the Lamb of God' (1:29) to liberate those enslaved to sin and death (8:34-35) that they might enjoy the freedom of sonship in God's household."<sup>75</sup> In similar fashion, when Koester associates deliverance with the title in 1:29, he argues that the imagery present within the narrative as a whole is that of the deliverance of a rejecting, hating world from sin and death, by Jesus the Passover Lamb of God.<sup>76</sup> He suggests that the 'sin' from which the Lamb of God delivers the world is alienation from and lack of relationship with God.<sup>77</sup>

A link can be seen, then, between the action of the Lamb in taking away the sin of the world (verse 29) and the consequences which flow from belief or faith in The Word as described in verse 12 of the Prologue, i.e. rebirth as children of God. Koester contends that the atoning sacrifice of the Lamb is not to be considered as a payment of a penalty for human sin. He argues that the theological framework in the gospel is concerned with sin itself, rather than the legal

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<sup>71</sup> Brown, *Gospel 29*, 55.

<sup>72</sup> Metzner, *Sünde*, 354.

<sup>73</sup> Lincoln, *John*, 113.

<sup>74</sup> Lincoln, *John*, 113.

<sup>75</sup> See Gail R. O'Day and Susan E. Hylén, *John*, (Westminster Bible Companion) (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), *John*, 30, who advocate the liberation dimension to the Passover lamb as the key background imagery.

<sup>76</sup> Koester, *Word of Life*, 113.

<sup>77</sup> Koester, *Word of Life*, 65-6; See also Forestell, *Cross*, 11, and Metzner, *Sünde*, 157-8, who argue among the same lines. See also Koester, *Word of Life*, 114-5. For Koester, this deliverance is brought about by the sacrifice of the Lamb as that Lamb takes away the rejection and hatred of unbelief, replacing it with faith.

penalty for it, in which case issues of justice, mercy, law and grace are secondary to the central focus of unbelief. Koester states:

*When the love of God, conveyed through the death of Jesus, overcomes the sin of unbelief by evoking faith, it delivers people from the judgement of God by bringing them into true relationship with God. This is atonement in the Johannine sense.*<sup>78</sup>

While the understanding of Jesus' activity in a corporate or global sense may be evidenced more readily in other texts, the language of the declaration does provide a sense of Jesus' activity being cosmological as well as individual. When Du Plessis argues against a sacrificial interpretation of Lamb of God, he contends that the main theme in John 1 is the glory of Jesus.<sup>79</sup> Even if we disagree with Du Plessis regarding the sacrificial interpretation, the sense that the purpose of Jesus' activity on earth should be viewed in terms of the revelation of God's glory is first found in the Prologue (1:14). While the suggestion that Jesus unveils the Father's glory is a recurrent theme in the gospel, it is also the case that Jesus' own glory is unveiled. His signs are described as revealing his glory and glory imagery also occurs in the way the narrative portrays the passion of Christ and the Cross.<sup>80</sup> However a particular connection should be made between this proclamation of Jesus' identity and the associated action in 1:29 and Jesus' words to the disciples in 20:19-23.

Within the context of a synchronic study, the argument that 20:19-23 is integral to the presentation of sin, forgiveness and restoration within the gospel rests on its connection to the narrative as a whole. A number of interpreters argue in favour of such continuity and make links between the pericope and other sections of the gospel.<sup>81</sup> Brown argues that the power represented by the verbs in verse 23 is related to the '*krisis*' or judgement which has to be made because of the coming of Jesus.<sup>82</sup> People are faced with a choice between light and darkness. Those who choose darkness are condemned, whereas those who choose light are not. Thus, he argues that although the interpretation of 20:19-23 has varied throughout its reception history, the force of these subsequent interpretations should not dominate. Rather, he contends that "our concern here is to understand this power in the light of the overall gospel context dealing with sin and judgement."<sup>83</sup> Metzner also argues that 20:23 "fits" conceptually with the entire body of the narrative up to this point.<sup>84</sup> He states that the preceding chapters have revealed Jesus' unique role in the judgement and salvation of the world and thus have provided evidence of Jesus' authority to make the declaration of 20:23. Metzner suggests that there is conceptual continuity between these verses and the rest of the gospel, in regard to the legal or trial motif. As Jesus' disciples become his representatives in the world, so the trial and judgement

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<sup>78</sup> Koester, *Word of Life*, 115, italics in original.

<sup>79</sup> Du Plessis, "The Lamb of God," 144, "All these sacrificial notions are alien to the structure, text and context of the words spoken by the Baptist."

<sup>80</sup> In John 2 the narrator states that the first sign of turning of water into wine revealed Jesus' glory and engendered belief among his disciples (2:11). In John 5, Jesus rebukes the Jews for their failure to see and to recognise the glory of God present in himself and contrasts this with their readiness to accept and give glory to others (5:43-44). In John 11, Jesus tells the disciples that Lazarus' illness is for God's glory and states that the Son of God will be glorified through it. Later in the story, at the point of the opening of Lazarus' tomb, Jesus reminds Mary that he told her that she would see the glory of God if she believed. See also Du Plessis, "The Lamb of God," 145.

<sup>81</sup> The existence of inner-textual links does not necessarily prove that the material is contemporaneous with the rest of the gospel, given that an editor could make sure that additional, later, material was in keeping with the previous material. However, despite the arguments regarding dissimilarity, such links provide some evidence of the continuity of a theme within the narrative.

<sup>82</sup> Raymond E. Brown, "The Resurrection in John 20 – A Series of Diverse Reactions." *Worship* 64, (1990): 194-206, 204.

<sup>83</sup> Brown, "Resurrection," 204, footnote 16.

<sup>84</sup> Metzner, *Sünde*, 281-2.

encounter between Jesus and the world is continued between his disciples and the world. For Metzner, there is an inextricable link between the concepts and themes of these verses and those of the preceding chapters. Hansen argues that “the text is all too often divorced from its context.”<sup>85</sup> This leads him to propose that when 20:23 is viewed within its context, it should be associated with unbelief, given that forgiveness in the gospel is “ultimately associated with belief.”<sup>86</sup> In a similar way to both Metzner and Hansen, Heil argues that 20:23 is entirely consonant with what has gone before in the gospel.<sup>87</sup> He suggests that the significance of the verse arises from the supposition that failure to believe is the “fundamental sin in John’s gospel.” In support of this argument, he cites 8:24; 16:9 and 19:11. Given this, he suggests that: ...the disciples’ “forgiveness” of sins includes their bringing others to believe by extending the revelatory mission on which Jesus is sending them (20:21, see 1:29; 8:46; 15:22-24). Their “retaining” of sins includes the failure of others to believe despite being given revelatory truth of Jesus by the disciples (9:39-41; 15:22-24; 16:8-9). But their divine power to forgive and retain sins also extends to the faults and failures that deprive those already living within the community of believers from remaining in Jesus and living eternal life.<sup>88</sup>

Crucially for our consideration of 1:29, in 20:19-23 the task of addressing the sin of others, which has been the mission of Jesus alone, specifically passes to the disciples as they receive the gift of the Paraclete. In the conclusion to the chapter, 20:31, the implied author makes it clear that it is belief in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, which will lead to life, and thus, by implication, the opposite response, i.e. refusal to believe, which will lead to death. Jesus’ words to his disciples, in verse 23, indicate that the potential for failure to recognise, i.e. the potential for sin, continues to exist in the world. It is not that the disciples are being given some kind of supernatural power to forgive sins. Rather, at this point they have the unique experience of having been in the presence of the risen Christ, and of receiving from him the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is this experience and empowering that enables them to bear witness to Jesus’ identity, and therefore enables them to bring others to belief in him.<sup>89</sup> Thompson contends that it is only after the death of Jesus and his return to the Father that the benefits of his death – principally release from sin and the possibility of new birth – can be made available to all. The disciples are the first people to whom this gift and privilege is granted, and they are the first people who will be ‘sent out’ to mediate the gift to the world. Thompson points out that it is only after this gift of forgiveness and re-birth has been offered and received that the disciples can authentically “embody God’s love and bear witness to the truth, thus mediating God’s forgiveness to those who come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (20:30-32).” The disciples’ mission is to re-present the risen Christ in a way that will bring others to belief. The fact that the disciples are being given the authority to act as agents of God’s forgiveness in the world, confirms that they now believe and thus are forgiven. With the commissioning of the disciples in 20:19-23, the opportunity declared in 1:29 remains a possibility for the world. As others come to believe, they will experience that forgiveness and restoration. Indeed, as in turn, Thomas believes, the climax of the telling of the gospel is reached. Within the story of

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<sup>85</sup> Steven E Hansen, “Forgiving and Retaining Sin: A Study of the Text and Context of John 20:23.” *Horizons in Biblical Theology*, 19.1 (1997): 24-32, 24.

<sup>86</sup> Hansen, “Forgiving and Retaining,” 30.

<sup>87</sup> John Paul Heil, *Blood and Water: The Death and Resurrection of Jesus in John 18-21*, (CBQMS 27. Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Assoc. of America, 1995), 138.

<sup>88</sup> Heil, *Blood and Water*, 138-9.

<sup>89</sup> See Marianne Meye Thompson, “The Breath of Life: John 20:23 Once More.” In *The Holy Spirit and Christian origins: essays in honor of James D G Dunn*, edited by Graham N. Stanton, Bruce W. Longenecker and Stephen C. Barton, 69-78. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), 78.



the gospel, the sin which will be retained is the sin of refusal to believe in the one sent to provide deliverance, restoration, and liberation.<sup>90</sup>

## Conclusion

On the occasion of his first physical appearance in the narrative and in the first witness statement regarding him, Jesus' mission is set out as one in which he takes away the sin of the world. By stating that Jesus is 'ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου' the Baptist brings together the identity and the mission of the Incarnate Word as declared in the Prologue. By linking the taking away of sin directly with the person of Jesus and by naming him as the Lamb of God, this episode evokes in the reader a potentially rich and diverse range of possible theological associations, from the Aqedah story of Genesis to the Passover event, and even apocalyptic deliverance imagery. However, the overall themes which emerge are those which express Jesus' role in terms of sacrifice, deliverance and even glory. The action associated with the Lamb of God reveals a present and potential future dimension to that action, i.e. it suggests, at the commencement of the Gospel that the taking away of sin is an action that Jesus is fulfilling and will achieve more fully at a future point. Thus, Jesus' identity is inextricably linked to his mission to re-establish the relationship between God and his people. In time his disciples will be charged to continue this mission as they bring others to a point where they come to believe in the one who is the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

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<sup>90</sup> See Heil, *Blood and Water*, 138.

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