

And the presentation? Making the usual allowances for the mawkish religiousness of Dickens, we may quote with some sympathy his description of a nineteenth-century English Sunday. Arthur Clennam ruminates :

There was the interminable Sunday of his nonage ; when his mother, stern of face and unrelenting of heart, would sit all day behind a Bible—bound, like her own construction of it, in the hardest, barest, and straitest boards, with one dinted ornament on the cover like the drag of a chain, and a wrathful sprinkling of red upon the edges of the leaves—as if it, of all books ! were a fortification against sweetness of temper, natural affection, and gentle intercourse.

What a difference here !

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### RECENT DISCUSSION OF THE TITLE 'LAMB OF GOD'

In this paper I wish to present a synthesis of the latest discussion<sup>1</sup> concerning the origin and meaning of the expression *ho amnos tou Theou* : the lamb of God, in the Fourth Gospel. This expression is found twice in St John, once in a simple form : 'Behold the lamb of God' (1:36), and once with the addition 'who takes away the sin of the world' (1:29).

With few exceptions the exegetes who have considered this question during the last few years (1950-60) distinguish two stages in the interpretation of this passage of the Gospel : they distinguish the time when the words 'Behold the lamb of God' were written, namely at the end of the first century A.D., from the time when these words were actually spoken, or were supposed to have been spoken by John the

<sup>1</sup> The most important contributions have been made by the following : C. D. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge 1953, pp. 230-8 ; J. Jermias, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* v (1954), p. 700 ; V. Taylor, *Jesus and his Sacrifice*, London 1955, pp. 224-5 ; C. K. Barrett, 'The Lamb of God' in *New Testament Studies* 1 (1955), pp. 210-18 ; O. Cullmann, *Les sacrements dans l'évangile johannique* Paris 1955, pp. 70-2 ; A. George, 'De l'agneau pascal à l'agneau de Dieu' in *Bible et Vie chrétienne* ix (1955), pp. 85-90 ; M.-E. Boismard, *Du baptême à Cana*, Paris 1956, pp. 42-3 ; id., 'Le Christ-Agneau-Rédempteur des hommes' in *Lumière et Vie* xxxvi (1958), pp. 97-104 ; B. Prete, 'Gesù Agnello di Dio, Valore ed origine dell' imagine' in *Sacra Dottrina* 1 (1956), pp. 13-31 ; I. de la Potterie, 'Ecco l'Agnello di Dio' in *Bibbia e Oriente* 1 (1959), pp. 161-9 ; R. E. Brown, 'Three Quotations from John the Baptist in the Gospel of John' in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* xxii (1960), pp. 292-8.

Baptist, namely at the beginning of Jesus' public life. In other words they consider the meaning of the title, on the one hand according to its *Sitz im Evangelium* or its *tempus scriptiois*, and on the other, according to its *Sitz im Leben Christi* or its *tempus dictionis*.

#### I *Its significance in the mind of the fourth evangelist*

With regard to the meaning of the title 'Lamb of God' in the mind and intention of the fourth evangelist, there are two major explanations among recent exegetes. The first one is presented with great emphasis by Dodd. He thinks that the expression 'Lamb of God' in the first intention of the evangelist is a messianic title identified with 'king of Israel.' The lamb represents the eschatological young ram which is shepherd and leader of the sheep, and which makes an end of sin by overcoming the powers of evil, quite apart from any thought of a redemptive death. The arguments supporting this explanation are taken from the Apocalypse and the Jewish apocryphal and eschatological writings. In the Apocalypse, which comes from the same environment as the Fourth Gospel, we find the figure of the *arnion*: the horned lamb, leader or shepherd of the people of God: 'For the lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and will guide them to the fountains of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes' (Apoc. 7:17). The *arnion* stands on Mount Zion surrounded by myriads of saints (14:1-5), and the kings and great ones of the earth hide themselves from his wrath (6:16). It is true that the Apocalypse uses the word *arnion* and not *amnos* as in the Gospel, but in the Jewish apocalypses many synonymous terms are employed for the bell-wether of the flock. In the Apocalypse the lamb is also presented as sacrificed for the redemption of man (5:6, 12; 7:14), but this is not, according to Dodd, the primary sense of the figure. It was only later that the militant and conquering Messiah was fused with the lamb of sacrifice.

Moreover the context of the first chapter of the Gospel of John suggests that the evangelist understood 'the lamb of God' as a synonym for the eschatological Messiah. On hearing the Baptist say, 'Behold the lamb of God,' Andrew exclaimed to his brother Peter, 'We have found the Messiah.' This last word is to be considered as the explanation of the Baptist's exclamation.

The addition 'who takes away the sin of the world' is to be understood of the removing of sin. In 1 Jn. 3:5 the taking away of sin is paralleled with the destroying of sin. In the Jewish writings, such as the *Testament of Levi* (18:9), the *Psalms of Solomon* (17:29) and the *Apocalypse of Baruch* (73:1-4) we find the picture of the conquering lamb who destroys evil in the world.

Dodd admits the possibility that in speaking of the lamb and of the removing of sin, the evangelist could be thinking of the servant as a sin-offering, and of the lamb of sacrifice, because John the apostle certainly used *testimonia* from the prophecy of the Suffering Servant in Is. 52:13-53, 12. But if the evangelist did so, it was in a 'highly sublimated sense.' The true meaning of 'Lamb of God' is just a traditional messianic title without any reference to the expiatory death of Christ.

Dodd's explanation has not been accepted by many modern scholars. Barrett criticises it strongly. He points out that Dodd's interpretation does not do justice to the explanatory clause 'Who takes away the sin of the world,' which according to the Hebrew background often signifies the removal not of evil simply, but of guilt (cf. 2 Sam. 15:25; 25:28). Barrett also thinks that the paschal allusions of the Fourth Gospel are undervalued by Dodd.

The second and more common interpretation today of the expression 'Lamb of God' in the mind of the fourth evangelist, is that this phrase is connected with and signifies the redemptive activity of Christ. In the second half of the first century A.D. the title 'Lamb of God' was attributed to Jesus in relation to his salvific death. Christ is called *amnos* in Ac. 8:32, where there is a quotation from Is. 53:7, namely from the fourth song of the Suffering Servant. Jesus is also compared with the *amnos* of Is. 53 in 1 Pet. 1:19, in a context which stresses the value of his redemptive act: 'You know that you were redeemed not with perishable things, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.' A characteristic feature of the *amion* of the Apocalypse is to be a lamb slain in sacrifice (5:6, 12; 7:14, etc.), who redeems mankind (5:9). This New Testament background suggests that John summarises in the title 'Lamb of God' the Christian tradition concerning the salvific death of the Messiah. This idea is clearly found in 1 Jn. 2:3; 3:5: 'Jesus is a propitiation for our sins, not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. . . . You know that he appeared to take our sins away, and sin is not in him.'

The origin of this title is to be found, according to the majority of the recent exegetes, in two Old Testament figures, namely that of the paschal lamb and that of the Suffering Servant. Jesus is the paschal lamb of the Christian Passover who by his death delivered the world from sin, as the original paschal lamb's blood had delivered the Israelites from the destroying angel. John shows special interest in the Passover, for in his Gospel he mentions three times the feast of Passover, and he alludes to it as a type of the death of Christ: 'For these

things came to pass that the Scripture might be fulfilled: Not a bone of him shall you break' (19:36). This passage is a quotation from Ex. 12:46 and Num. 9:12, dealing with the regulations concerning the paschal lamb. Dodd assigns the Old Testament reference of this passage to Ps. 34:21 which speaks of the afflictions of the righteous and their deliverance; but this is very improbable.

John represents Jesus as dying at the time when the paschal lambs were being sacrificed in the temple precincts. If the synoptic chronology which differs from John is correct, or if we accept the new chronology proposed by Mlle Jaubert,<sup>1</sup> the johannine chronology has an exclusively theological interest: Jesus himself was the true paschal lamb offered at the appointed hour on the afternoon of Nisan 14. If the chronology of John is right his dating significantly agrees with Paul's description of Christ as 'our passover' (1 Cor. 5:7). In John's description of the crucifixion we can find other paschal lamb features, such as the hyssop, and the body of Christ not being left on the cross until the next day. It seems certain that the Old Testament reference of the title 'Lamb of God' is the paschal lamb.

The second clause of the title 'who takes away the sin of the world' refers to Is. 53, which is concerned with the Servant of the Lord. Jesus is presented by John as the Servant of the Lord who is being led without complaint like a lamb before the shearers, and as a man of sorrows, who bore the sins of many and made intercession for the transgressors. In Is. 53:7, 12 are combined the two ideas of lamb and of bearing sin. There is a difference between taking away sin and bearing sin, but John is supposed to have selected the Greek words which are suited to what Jesus actually did. The reference to the suffering Servant is by way of allusion, but Is. 53 also explains the genitive 'of God' in the expression 'Lamb of God,' since the latter seems to correspond to the title *'ebed yahweh*: servant of Yahweh. The explanation of the genitive given by Bultmann<sup>2</sup> and Barrett in the sense that the lamb is supplied by God is very unlikely.

The allusions to the paschal lamb and the Servant of the Lord are combined in such a way that neither figure alone can explain adequately the johannine title. The paschal lamb is not presented in the Old Testament as taking away sin, while the Servant of the Lord is only considered as the bearer of sin. Only the general context of Is. 53 suggests that the Servant justifies the multitude by taking away sin. Moreover the paschal lamb in the Old Testament is called not *amnos* but *probaton*. It is possible that other sacrificial figures influenced the

<sup>1</sup> A. Jaubert, 'La date de la dernière Cène' in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* CXLVI (1954), pp. 140-73. cf. L. Johnston, 'The Date of the Last Supper' in *Scripture* 1957, pp. 108-15

<sup>2</sup> *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, p. 67

johannine title, e.g. the scapegoat of the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev. 6:22) or the daily sacrifice offered in the temple of Jerusalem which was called *tamid*.

Barrett thinks that the combination of the ideas of Christ as pasover lamb and as Servant of the Lord who expiated sin by his death, was realised through the paschal interpretation of the Last Supper and of the Eucharist.

Cullmann, Mollat,<sup>1</sup> Brown, George and de la Potterie admit the double or plural reference to the Old Testament figures mentioned above. Barrett stresses the primary connection with the paschal lamb. Taylor and Boismard point out the prevalent conception of the Servant of Yahweh. According to the latter Jesus takes away the sin of the world by communicating to men the Spirit he received at his Baptism, for the Spirit is a power preventing men from committing sin (cf. Jn. 8:31-47; 1 Jn. 3:4-9). According to Brown, Dodd's apocalyptic significance could also be included in the interpretation of the title.

In general, therefore, we may conclude that the title 'Lamb of God' in the Fourth Gospel is one of the major johannine themes, containing the notion of redemption through death. This profound meaning is to be fully understood in the light of the actual death and resurrection of Christ.

## 2 *Its significance on the lips of John the Baptist*

According to the Fourth Gospel, this title of 'Lamb of God' is given to Jesus by John the Baptist during his ministry. But it is difficult to admit that the Baptist understood the profound meaning which the expression had after the death and resurrection of Christ. In general the whole christology of the Precursor in the Fourth Gospel raises a problem for the exegetes. The christological doctrine of the Baptist in John's Gospel explicitly includes the pre-existence of Christ (1:15, 27), his divinity (1:34) and his redemptive mission (this title, as explained above). But if we compare this doctrine with the Baptist's preaching in the synoptic Gospels we notice a great difference. The content of his message here is mostly eschatological, and passages like Mt. 11:1-6, describing the deputation he sent to Christ, imply that the Precursor did not understand the essential nature of Christ's ministry as Messiah.

Because of this divergence between the synoptics and John with regard to the Baptist's christology, a few authors deny that the latter in actual fact ever gave the title 'Lamb of God' to our Lord. The evangelist invented the incident, some few suggest, in order to stress

<sup>1</sup> *L'évangile de St Jean in Bible de Jérusalem*

the superiority of Jesus over the Baptist, and thereby assist the polemic against the Baptist's disciples. But these opinions are extremist and they are not accepted by the majority of exegetes. On the contrary the scholars maintain that the statement was actually made by the Baptist, but in a sense which was different from that which the evangelist intended when he wrote of the incident. The latter reinterpreted and rearranged the Baptist's statement according to a deeper theological sense, in the light of the whole ministry of Jesus and under the special influence of the Holy Spirit.

Thus we come to the question: What was the meaning of the title 'Lamb of God' in the mind of the Precursor? There are two main answers to this problem. The first is sponsored by Jeremias, Cullmann, Boismard and de la Potterie. These authors suggest that the Baptist designates Jesus not as a lamb but as a servant, using the Aramaic word *talya*, which can signify 'servant' as well as 'lamb.' When the Aramaic expression was translated into Greek by John or some earlier writer, the term was mistranslated, or rather reinterpreted and made to signify 'lamb.' The 'servant' in the mind of the Baptist is not a redeemer who offers his death in expiation of sin, but a prophet and a teacher, who purifies men from sin through the knowledge of the law and through wisdom. The background for this is the first Servant song (Is. 42:1-4), some sapiential texts in Sir. 24:22; Ps. 119:11; Henoah 5:8, and the Qumran writings, e.g. IQS 4:20-3. These texts emphasise the idea that sins are purified by knowledge and wisdom. Moreover there is the general impact of Deutero-Isaiah on the description of John the Baptist. The Baptist identifies himself with the voice crying in the desert (cf. Is. 40:3). Jesus is called 'the chosen one of God' according to the variant in Jn. 1:34, and this is an allusion to Is. 42:1. Moreover the context of the Gospel supports this hypothesis, since Jesus presented himself at Nazareth as the preacher of the good tidings to the poor (Lk. 4:18). John the Baptist therefore announced Jesus as a teacher according to the prophecies of Isaiah. The expression 'Lamb of God' is due to the mistranslation of 'Servant of God.'

The second explanation of the sense of this title on the lips of the Baptist is based on the assumption that he spoke of the Messiah as the lamb of God in the light of the Jewish apocalyptic writings. The Baptist called Jesus the lamb of God in the sense of the conquering lamb to be raised up by God to destroy evil in the world. Thus this explanation is identical with the first interpretation Dodd gives of the meaning in the intention of the evangelist. He expresses this opinion only with probability on behalf of the Baptist. The advocates of this eschatological interpretation are Barrett and Brown. Concerning the

use of the word *ṭalya*' these authors claim that there is no evidence to suggest that the present passage was translated directly from an Aramaic document, and in any case the natural Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew *'ebed* (i.e. servant) is not *ṭalya*' but *'abda*'. Moreover the fourth evangelist's retention of the expression 'lamb' on the lips of the Baptist must count for something. In actual fact the picture of the apocalyptic lamb is entirely consistent with the original form of the Baptist's message. Brown adds the arguments Dodd presented. The idea of a conquering lamb is found in the Jewish apocalyptic writings and the Apocalypse. The *Testament of Joseph* (19:8) speaks of a lamb (*amnos*) who overcomes the evil beasts and crushes them underfoot. Although there are Christian interpolations in this section of the book, Charles<sup>1</sup> does not think that the major picture of the lamb is an interpolation. In *Henoch* 90:38 where we find the great animal allegory of history, there comes at the end a horned bull which turns into a lamb, and the Lord of the sheep rejoices over the lamb which is the leader of all the animals.

Fr Brown does not rule out the possibility that the Baptist meant the statement in the Suffering Servant sense, for this idea could lie within his range of thought. The Baptist knew Isaiah, and the synoptic description of the Baptism of Jesus at the Jordan is made in a Suffering Servant context. However, Brown thinks that the eschatological interpretation fits the text better in its historical meaning.

We have seen, therefore, that recent discussion of the title 'Lamb of God' makes a distinction between the significance it had for the author of the Fourth Gospel writing after the Resurrection and the significance it had for the Baptist and his hearers on the day he gave it to our Lord. Some consider the former significance to be eschatological, but the majority, redemptive. Some consider its significance in the Baptist's mind to have been prophetic, others eschatological. I myself sympathise with the redemptive sense in the first case and with the eschatological one in the second.

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<sup>1</sup> *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha* II, 353