

Title page

Article title:

Ancient art, rhetoric and the Lamb of God metaphor in John 1:29 and 36

Significance of work:

1. Although the image of the *amnos* in John 1:29 & 36 is not the most important metaphor in the Fourth Gospel, it has become one of the most discussed not only in this Gospel but of the entire New Testament. There is still no consensus among scholars about the symbolic meaning and background of this metaphor.
2. The aim of this paper is to indicate that the metaphor of the Lamb of God, like the metaphor of the son, is to be viewed in terms of the relationship between God and Jesus as the son.
3. Ancient art is one of the most significant explanations of early Christian interpretation of New Testament texts. Therefore, the subject and themes of the early Christian iconography give us information about the way early Christian understood the lamb proclaimed by John the Baptist. I could not find any other research that applied the information or knowledge attained from early Christian art to explain the Lamb of God in John 1:29 & 34.

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1 **Ancient art, rhetoric and the Lamb of God metaphor in John 1:29**
2 **and 36**

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5 **Abstract**

6 *Biblical scholars have given diverse explanations for the Lamb of God metaphor in John*
7 *1:29 and 36. Most scholars are of the opinion that ‘amnos’ refers to the Passover lamb.*
8 *This explanation is not obvious from the context of the Fourth Gospel. To understand the*
9 *metaphor lamb or ‘amnos’ of God, one should understand the transferable meaning of the*
10 *figure or image. In this comparison only the vehicle, namely lamb, is given. What and*
11 *who the lamb is stay open. It can be anything within the limits of the other story elements*
12 *that have the same qualities of a lamb. To uncover the communicative dynamics of the*
13 *metaphor, the exegete must have insight into the meaning and function of the original*
14 *metaphor. Rhetoric provides a clue for the interpretation of the metaphor, namely that it*
15 *is a Lamb of God. Within the perikope other rhetorical clues like antithesis and varietas*
16 *are also provided. These clues are important but do not explain the image of the lamb. In*
17 *this study these problems will be considered via another medium, namely Hellenistic art*
18 *and images and their penetration into Judaism and Christianity during the first centuries*
19 *CE. Hellenistic and biblical images will be used to give an alternative interpretation of*
20 *the metaphor of the Lamb of God.*

21 **1. Introduction**

22 The aim of this paper is to indicate that the metaphor of the Lamb of God, like
23 the metaphor of the son, is to be viewed in terms of the relationship between God
24 and Jesus.

25 The image of the *amnos* in John 1:29 and 36 is not the most important metaphor in
 26 the Fourth Gospel. Although it has become one of the most discussed metaphors
 27 not only in this Gospel but of the entire New Testament, there is still no
 28 consensus among scholars about the symbolic meaning and background of this
 29 metaphor.

30 Christopher Skinner (2004:89–104) summarises the nine most common views on
 31 the subject. He divides these views into two groups: those who interpret the
 32 metaphor in terms of the theology of atonement and those who do not. Below
 33 follows a brief summary of the different views. Skinner has discussed the
 34 advantages and disadvantages of the different views and therefore I will not
 35 repeat this in detail.

36 **2. The most common views on the background of the lamb**

37 The lamb of the daily sacrifices (*tamid*): This daily sacrificial offering of two
 38 lambs (morning and evening) in the tabernacle and later in the temple was part
 39 of the communal life and worship of the Israelites (Ex 29:38–42). The lambs were
 40 to be physically unblemished. This was to reflect the otherness and holiness of
 41 YHWH. According to Skinner (2004:90) this ‘view is attractive because it offers a
 42 theologically sophisticated referent behind the “Lamb”’. This referent is the
 43 absolute perfection of Jesus, and the cross of Christ (his death) is presented as
 44 both a sacrifice for sin and as a vicarious experience providing access to God.
 45 Other Old Testament offerings that fall into the same category and can also be
 46 implicated are the *kebasim* (Num 29:1–4, 8–10); the burnt offerings (Lev 1:10); the
 47 peace offering (Lev 3:7–9); and the sin offering (Lev 4:32).

48 The scapegoat (Lev 16): According to Leviticus 16:6–10 part of the requirements
 49 for the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) is the offering of a scapegoat. Although

50 the scapegoat has a strong association with atonement, it can be explained only
51 in the light of the crucifixion of Jesus, although the scapegoat was not a lamb.
52 According to Skinner (2004:92–93), no modern scholar supports this view.

53 The gentle lamb of Jeremiah 11:19: The gentle lamb actually refers to the prophet
54 and refers to unsuspecting innocence and meekness in the face of suffering. This
55 could indicate the ‘Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world’ (Jn 1:29),
56 but it is unlikely that this was the ultimate idea of John the Baptist’s Lamb of
57 God. In addition it can be said that the LXX translates the gentle lamb as *arnion*
58 (ram), a metaphor used in Revelations and not in the Fourth Gospel (Skinner
59 2004:93).

60 The guilt offerings are mentioned in Leviticus 14:12–13 and Numbers 6:11–12
61 and indicate the removal of guilt of the priest who has to perform a purification
62 ritual and are therefore associated with the removal of sin. The problem with the
63 guilt offerings was that the sacrifice was not always a lamb but more often a bull
64 or a goat (Skinner 2004:94).

65 The *Aqedah* of Genesis 22:8 refers to the sacrificial animal God provided as a
66 substitute for the offering of Isaac. This image corresponds with a few aspects of
67 the crucifixion of Jesus: for example he carried the wooden cross like Isaac
68 carried the wood for the sacrifice; he laid down his life to receive it back again,
69 like Isaac did symbolically; and then the animal as a substitute offering.
70 However, in Isaac’s case it was a ram and not a lamb. The *Aqedah* also does not
71 refer to the removal of sin (Skinner 2004:95).

72 The lamb led to be slaughtered in Isaiah 53:7: This is one of the most significant
73 images to regard as background for the Lamb of God. Especially Isaiah has been
74 referred to by the New Testament writers as a useful prophecy to indicate Jesus’
75 substitutionary death. In Acts 8:35 when the Ethiopian eunuch asks Philip to

76 explain Isaiah 53:7 he applied this prophecy to Jesus. Although this image occurs
77 in one of the Servant Songs in Isaiah, and the suffering servant of the Lord is one
78 of the images applied to Jesus' substitutionary life and death, scholars like
79 Skinner are of the opinion that 'there was no concept in Hebraic thought of a
80 suffering Messiah' (Skinner 2004:96); and Brent Sandy also denies that an atoning
81 meaning is attached to *amnos* (Sandy 1991:447).

82 The lamb as paschal imagery: This view gets the most support from scholars
83 such as Raymond Brown (1982:58–62) and Margaret Davies (1992:234, 305).
84 Dorothy Lee (2011:13–28) has discussed this view in a recent article by arguing
85 convincingly in favour of the Passover as an important motive for the narrative
86 and theological structure of the Fourth Gospel. She also argues for the
87 incorporation of other Old Testament concepts associated with the temple and
88 the cult into the Passover imagery. As the narrative develops, she argues that the
89 Passover develops into its own metaphorical field to become a major symbol in
90 the Fourth Gospel. A major problem with this view is that the Passover animal
91 was not always a lamb, but could also be a sheep or goat (cf. Ex 12:5) and that the
92 term *pasga* is used nine times in this Gospel but only once in John 18:28 in
93 connection with the sacrifice itself (Skinner 2004:98). A further important
94 problem is the association of the lamb with the substitutionary death of Jesus and
95 the taken away of sin. Although the Passover animal was associated with
96 liberation and suffering, it was not seen as a substitutionary offering.

97 The apocalyptic lamb (*arnion*) in Revelations 7:17 and 17:14: Charles H. Dodd
98 (1980:230–238) as the main exponent of this view sees the Lamb of God as
99 equivalent to 'King of Israel'. He wants to indicate with this construction that John
100 the Baptist wanted to present Jesus as the Messiah and therefore identifies the
101 *amnos* with the triumphant, conquering and horned lamb in Revelations, namely

102 the *arnion*. In Revelations 5:6–14 the slain lamb (*arnion*) has returned from death
103 and is receiving worship; he also exercises wrath and power (6:15–17); is the
104 shepherd of God’s people (7:17); stands triumphant on Mount Zion (14:1);
105 overcomes opposition (17:14); and eventually establishes his reign on earth as
106 representative of God (22:1). The first objection to this interpretation is that the
107 word for the apocalyptic lamb is *arnion* and not *amnos*, as the announcement of
108 John the Baptist indicated. In the Fourth Gospel several words are used for lamb,
109 namely *amnos*, *arnion*, *pasga* and *probation*, and we must therefore conclude that the
110 evangelist used *amnos* to indicate something other than *arnion*. Second, Revelations
111 was probably written much later than the Gospel, and therefore Skinner thinks it
112 would be anachronistic to use the image of the *arnion* in Revelations to explain the
113 *amnos* in the Fourth Gospel. Dodd, however, reasons that the evangelist could have
114 taken the idea of the apocalyptic lamb from the Intertestamental apocalyptic
115 literature and associates the Lamb of God with the same images. Skinner (2004:101–
116 102) thinks this is unlikely because of the ‘consistent focus of the Evangelist on the
117 redemption provided in Christ’.

118 The servant from Isaiah 53 (Acts 8:32): The *amnos* as the servant of YHWH was first
119 argued for by CJ Ball in 1909 (1909:92–93). Since then this view has been supported
120 by a few prominent Johannine scholars, for example Walter Zimmerli and Joachim
121 Jeremias (1957:82). According to this interpretation an Aramaic expression ‘servant
122 of the Lord’ underlies the genitive combination of the Greek *ho amnos tou theou* and
123 was mistranslated over time as ‘Lamb of God’. This view indicates that the Aramaic
124 term *talya* is understood in the sense of the Hebrew *talya*, which can mean lamb,
125 boy or servant (Koehler & Baumgartner 1953:352). This view further postulated that
126 *talya* was mistranslated as *amnos* (lamb) instead of *pais* (servant), resulted in an
127 incorrect Greek rendering (Skinner 2004:99–100). The main concerns are that the

128 LXX never translates *talya* into *amnos*, and no examples of *talya* as a rendering of
 129 *ebed* (servant) are presented (Brown 1982:61). In conclusion, lamb seems not to be a
 130 mistranslation of servant. However, only the possibility of the Old Testament
 131 background of servant of the Lord or *ebed YHWH* is taken into consideration, and
 132 no other influences from the surrounding cultures that could instigate a cross-
 133 translation of servant or son with lamb are provided. This point of view is
 134 strengthened in the discussion to follow.

135 Other theories in connection with the 'servant' explanation are the ambivalent
 136 usage of words, for example the Aramaic word *immera* (lamb) pronounced also *imra*
 137 (word) and in Hebrew *imerah* (word) also pronounced *imra* are both presented by
 138 *amnos* (Negoitsa & Daniel 1971:24–37). Unfortunately, nothing in the Gospel points
 139 to an understanding of the servant of the Lord as the Lamb (*amnos*) of God (Skinner
 140 2004:100).

141 I have indicated in a previous publication that the context of John 1:29–34 does not
 142 exclusively support a paschal lamb interpretation of *amnos*. Therefore, a different
 143 route is taken, namely a discussion of the father-son and shepherd-lamb imagery as
 144 motivation for the *amnos* metaphor (Nortjé 1996:141–150).

145 **3. The macro-metaphor in the Fourth Gospel**

146 I will not discuss the metaphor as literary phenomenon as such. This has been
 147 done by many scholars, for example Jan van der Watt (1999) and Gerhard van
 148 den Heever (1992:89–100). Van den Heever has also discussed other Hellenistic
 149 metaphors used by the evangelist. Instead I follow Norman Peterson by taking
 150 the following working definition of metaphor: 'Metaphor is that figure of speech
 151 whereby we speak about one thing in terms of which are seen to be suggestive of

152 another' (1993:10).¹ Utterances have their meaning in a communicative context: in
 153 what is expressed by the author or speaker and what is understood by the reader
 154 or hearer. Their meanings are not determined by an external standard, but by the
 155 understanding of the hearer or interpreter. The following discussion is an
 156 interpretation of the Lamb of God in terms of other suggestive imagery in the
 157 Fourth Gospel.

158 Several elements in the pericope of John 1:29–34 indicate the background against
 159 which this pericope as a whole and more specifically the metaphor of the lamb
 160 should be interpreted. The pericope forms an integral part of the rest of the
 161 Gospel and the metaphor on the micro and meso level should also be applicable
 162 on the macro level.

163 Various scholars see different images as the most essential image in the Gospel
 164 against which the other images should be interpreted. Van den Heever (1992:97–
 165 99) identifies the concept of life as central in the Gospel and Van der Watt
 166 (1999:308) sees the family imagery as the most essential and pervasive imagery.
 167 According to him, there are two groups of metaphors, namely birth-life and
 168 father-son, which form the basis for the development of the family imagery.

169 Both these groups of metaphors are important in the first chapter of the Gospel.
 170 God is portrayed as the Creator-King, but also as the Father. He is the Father of
 171 Jesus, but also the Father of the believers. The close relationship and unity
 172 between Father and son is strongly emphasised in the Gospel: the son is in the
 173 bosom of the Father; he knows the Father and had seen the unseen God; they are
 174 one in thought and action, and have the same Spirit; the son communicates freely
 175 with the Father and the Father knows what the son wants, the son obeys the
 176 Father and can do nothing of his own accord. The Father stays with and in the

¹ See Soskice (1984:87–129) for a more technical discussion of metaphor and religious language.

177 son; and the son is never alone even when he lays down his life (Culpepper
178 1983:107).

179 The Father sends his son on a mission to the world. This includes that he must
180 lay down his life for the believers so that they can become children of God and
181 part of the family of the Father.

182 The family is the rich family of the Creator-King. This King owns a house and
183 property, and there are sheep, fish, wine and lands ready for harvest. Because it
184 is the family of the Creator-King, forensic activities can be expected: the King
185 judges according to belief or unbelief in the son of the Father (Jn 3:17–21) (Van
186 der Watt 1999:315–316).

187 This imagery serves as background for the appearance of the One coming from
188 above, which is mentioned by name only in John 1:17.

189 3.1 Introducing the One from above (Jn 1:1–18)

190 The overall strategy of the implied author is to construct the prologue in such a
191 way that it serves as a comprehensive introduction to the basic ideological
192 perspective presented in the Gospel. The most important perspective is the
193 identity of Jesus: who he is, what he says and how other people react towards
194 him. Dialogue about this question is repeated by John the Baptist, the followers
195 of Jesus and his opponents. The prologue also serves to introduce other
196 'secondary' aspects, for example the characterisation of God (Tolmie 1998:57–75)
197 and specifically the relationship between Jesus and God (Culpepper 1983:107).

198 The prologue is a careful but somewhat indirect introduction of Jesus. He is
199 spoken of as the logos, light and life. He is mentioned by name only in John 1:17.
200 At the end of the prologue the implied reader knows his origin, his status and the
201 main significance of his life. The implied reader also knows what his relationship

202 with God is. Like his identity question, the question of his relationship with God
203 occurs throughout the Gospel in discussion with John the Baptist, his opponents,
204 his disciples and other characters.

205 When the implied author refers in John 1:18 to God as the Father and to Jesus as
206 the son, it prepares the implied reader for the kind of relationship between the
207 logos and God. This father-son image forms the basis for the development of the
208 father-son imagery in the rest of the Gospel and the orientation according to
209 which the family image is developed.

210 3.2. John the Baptist is not the One (Jn 1:19–28)

211 The introduction continues with the witness of John the Baptist on two
212 consecutive days. The implied author uses John as first witness because he was
213 not a follower of Jesus ('I also didn't know him' Jn 1:31, 33) and because the Jews
214 have considered him as a prophet (5:35) (Neyrey 1988:12). The implied author
215 uses also forensic elements to prove the identity of John and Jesus. After the first
216 introduction the implied reader is convinced that John is an independent and
217 trustworthy witness and that he is not the One who is coming from God to make
218 God known (cf. Jn 3:28–30; 9:22).

219 3.3 The One is the Lamb (*amnos*) of God (Jn 1:29 and 34)

220 The second introduction is presented as the first appearance of the One in public.
221 This is where the story of the appearance of the One below started and is the
222 beginning of the exploration of his identity.

223 This is the first time that 'the One' appears in public and can be seen. 'Seeing' (Jn
224 1:29, 32, 33, 34) and 'did not know him' (1:31, 33) are topics that move the
225 narrative forward from seeing Jesus merely coming towards him 'as an ordinary
226 man' to seeing what is happening to him and seeing him as the son of God. This

227 establishes the relation between seeing, truth and belief that is explored in the
228 rest of the narrative (cf. 20:29 'Because you have seen me, you have believed;
229 blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed'). However, John the
230 Baptist's faith is not further developed in the Gospel (Davies 1992:38).

231 John the Baptist starts his witness by identifying the One as the Lamb of God. His
232 essence is indicated as pre-existent (Jn 1:30), and his function is to baptise in or
233 with the Holy Spirit because he has received the Spirit of God (1:33). The witness,
234 knowledge and insight of John come to a climax when he identifies the One as
235 the Son of God. Therefore the family image is expressed by the son-God image.
236 God is the son's Father (1:18) and God has given him his Spirit (1:32). Therefore,
237 he and the Father have the same Spirit (Van der Watt 1999:332). It is not only
238 about the identity of the One, but also about his relationship with God, as Father.

239 Most scholars see the metaphorical use of 'lamb' in this context attributes
240 qualities associated with only the word 'lamb' to refer to Jesus and not the
241 qualities associated with the lamb 'of God' (Lee 2011:14). The genitive expresses
242 possession and may either mean something for God or something belonging to
243 God. In the light of the above conclusion the lamb belongs to God in the same
244 way as the son belongs to God and not as something that is given to Him.
245 Francois Tolmie (1998:68) also suggests that the basic message of Jesus as the
246 Lamb of God in terms of the characterisation of God is to be viewed in terms of
247 the relationship between God and Jesus. I would therefore rather seek the
248 background information of the lamb metaphor against the same background as
249 the son metaphor. The 'vehicle' lamb and the 'vehicle' son have the same tenor,
250 namely God. 'Son' is a relational term and implies the father-son imagery. If the
251 same relational principle (which is already indicated in the pericope), is applied
252 to the lamb, the lamb metaphor instead implies the shepherd-lamb imagery. In

253 John 10 we already have the image of the son as the good shepherd who is caring
 254 and protecting the sheep and willing to lay down his life for them. I would
 255 therefore rather look for the background information of the lamb and son
 256 metaphors in John 1:29 and 34 in the shepherd image, namely God as the
 257 Shepherd and the son as the lamb. In this case the qualities of the *relationship*
 258 between the lamb and God, say as the shepherd, are transferred to Jesus and not
 259 only the qualities of a (paschal or sacrificial etc.) lamb.

260 **4. Motivation**

261 The motivation for the shepherd-lamb (flock) and father-son (family) image as
 262 the background of the lamb metaphor is as follows:

263 4.1 The Fourth Gospel

264 The metaphors of the shepherd and the son are already part of the imagery in the
 265 Fourth Gospel. In John 10, Jesus is portrayed as the shepherd who looks after (Jn
 266 10:16, 28–29), provides and cares (10:10) and dies for the sheep (10:11, 17–18).
 267 Several other themes, for example Jesus will be left alone (to die), but the Father
 268 will be with him in power (16:31–32), correspond with the shepherd and the
 269 sheep imagery, although it is not explicitly stated (Van der Watt 1999:66–67).

270 It is also evident in the Gospel that the unity between the Father and the son
 271 indicated in the prologue is progressively defined through his mission. The
 272 highest claim that Jesus has for himself is that he and the Father are one and that
 273 the son is doing the works of the Father (Jn 5:19–26; 10:30, 36, 38; 14:9)
 274 (Culpepper 1983:108). This unity between Father and son is also reflected by the
 275 relationship between the son and the believers. As the Father educates (5:19ff;
 276 8:28), sends (3:34; 5:36; 17:4), loves (3:35; 5:20; 10:17 15:9), cares for and protects
 277 (8:29; 16:32) the son, in the same way the son educates (6:59; 7:14; 7:28; 8:2; 18:20),

278 sends (17:18; 20:21), loves (14:31; 15:9), cares for and protects (14:18; 10:28,29;
279 17:12) the children of the family of the Father. Tolmie (1998:66) indicates that in
280 John 10 God is almost continuously characterised as the Father of Jesus, and his
281 relationship with Jesus is dominant. In this light, it is possible that the implied
282 author used the lamb and son metaphors in John 1:29 and 34 as preparation and
283 indication for the Father and the shepherd metaphors in John 10 (cf. Jn 8:29;
284 16:32). The image of the shepherd and the lamb, implicitly expressed in the Lamb
285 of God metaphor, is narratologically extended to the sheep farming imagery (that
286 also occurs in Jn 21:15–17) and is transferred to Jesus as the good shepherd.

287 4.2 Old Testament

288 The Old Testament also provides a background for the father-son and shepherd-
289 lamb imagery. The absolute form 'the Son of God' as is expressed in the Fourth
290 Gospel is not an Old Testament concept. In Exodus 4:22 Israel is instead called
291 God's son or 'first born', and in Deuteronomy 32:6 YHWH is called their Father.
292 This theme is reiterated constantly in prophetic preaching (cf. Isa 63:16; 64:8; Mal
293 2:10) (Brown 1982:364). This reflects a special relationship between YHWH and
294 Israel. In the eastern family the son is the heir of the father, and is thus the object
295 of special love, attention, training and protection (cf. Hos 11:1–4). According to
296 Pryor (1992:129) it is essentially a *relational* term. From a Johannine perspective,
297 sonship is expressed by obedience and devotion, in contrast to a history of
298 disobedience by Israel (Davies 1992:129).

299 The image of God as a shepherd is also a well-known Old Testament image.
300 During the earlier period of Israel's semi-nomadic existence, God alone was
301 viewed as shepherd and protector (cf. Gn 48:15; 49:24; Deutr. 26:5–8; Jer. 13:17;
302 Mic 7:14). In Ezekiel 34:20 God acts as the shepherd who cares for and looks after
303 his people. He also provides a shepherd who will also care for them, namely

304 David (34:23–24) (Barrett 1972:310).² God also acts as a shepherd-judge: ‘I will
 305 shepherd the flock with justice’ (Ezek. 34:16) (Vancil 1992:1189). God is also
 306 portrayed as a shepherd who leads the people to safe pastures (Ex 15:13, 17), and
 307 holds to his bosom animals that cannot keep up (Isa 40:11; Ps 28:9). This reflects
 308 the attitude of ancient Israelites, namely that land and animals were treated in
 309 the same way they cared for themselves (Matthews & Benjamin 1993:58).

310 Psalm 23 is especially applicable in this context, because God is depicted as a
 311 shepherd who is loyal and devoted. It is easy to find similar themes from this
 312 Psalm in the Fourth Gospel and especially in connection with Jesus: the caring
 313 elements in Psalm 23 are present in the Father-son image in John; God as his
 314 Father loves and cares for him, even in the face of death (Ps 23:1–4; Jn 8:29, 16:32);
 315 Jesus dies at the hands of his enemies (Ps 23:5; Jn 11:53); he was anointed by the
 316 Holy Spirit (Ps 23:5; Jh 1:32); and he is going to the house of his Father to prepare
 317 a place for his followers (disciples and believers) (Ps 23:6b; Jn 14:2). This makes
 318 the shepherd imagery more obvious as background for the interpretation of the
 319 lamb metaphor in John 1:29.

320 4.3 Gnostic background

321 Various scholars have argued for a Gnostic influence on the Fourth Gospel. The
 322 Father-son relationship and redemption are of special importance. It seems that
 323 the Father-son designation and relationship is not simply borrowed from the

² In non-Jewish circles gods and great men were also described as shepherds: Anubis, Attis, Yima, Zarathustra, Marduk, and the Phrygian gods. Babylonian kings and Greek heroes (Agamemnon) were spoken of as herdsmen of their people. Apollonius of Tyana spoke of his disciples as his flock.

324 Fourth Gospel, but the Gnostic idea of father-son image could also have
325 influenced the evangelist (Schnackenburg 1980:181–182).³

326 The most significant Gnostic influence on the New Testament is the *Corpus*
327 *Hermeticum*, emerging from the 2nd to the 4/5th century CE. Most of the seventeen
328 tractates are ascribed to Hermes Trismegistos (thrice-greatest), a Graeco-
329 Egyptian deity. It is a syncretism between Hermes the Greek messenger and
330 shepherd god and Thot his Egyptian counterpart, who contributed the epithet.⁴

331 Although each tractate has its own concerns, the main point of the Hermetic texts
332 is to provide a way for human salvation from the empirical world. In the
333 *Poimandres* (*Corp. Herm.* 1) the logos coming forth from the *nous* is called ‘son of
334 God’ (6); and God is called the father of all (21; 27); God and father (21); and
335 father God (30). In *CH* 8 (about rebirth) the Gnostic is to become, through the
336 revelation of Hermes, a son or child of God (Schnackenburg 1980:183). *CH* 4
337 refers to a dipping (baptism) into the ‘basin of mind’ sent down from heaven. *CH*
338 13 takes the reader through a complete regeneration and rebirth of the
339 individual, which are necessary for true understanding and salvation to take
340 place. The disclosure of knowledge about the nature of the universe and
341 salvation occurs in the form of a dialogue in most of the tractates. Hermes is
342 usually the hierophant (manifestation of God and Asclepius; *CH*

³ Schnackenburg argues that the *Ode 23 of Solomon* shows ‘knowledge of the Gnostic myth which, because of the peculiar imagery used, could not have been transmitted through the Fourth Gospel. It is also true of the *Gospel of Truth*, which is closely related in many aspects to the *Odes of Solomon*. Barrett (1972:31) also finds Gnostic systems (Christian and non-Christian sources) were influenced by religions of Salvation (with its many variations). See also C.H. Dodd (1954–1955):54–57). Turner (1991:50) is also of the opinion that ‘The myth of the pre-existent divine wisdom descending from the divine world in search of her own, underlies much, and perhaps most, of the Fourth Gospel, not only its prologue’. See also J.A. Brant (1998:199–211) for Greek novel influence.

⁴ The tractates reflect the adaptation of Greek philosophy to late Egyptian religious thought, and therefore reflect the influence of Egyptian gods and cults.

343 2,4,5,6,8,9,12,13,14) and Hermes' son Tat (Thot) or Asclepius serves as receiver of
344 the knowledge. In *CH* 9, God himself imparts knowledge to Hermes (Trumbower
345 1992:157).

346 It seems evident that the evangelist was working with similar presuppositions
347 and along similar lines to those of the Hermetic authors. In both the Fourth
348 Gospel and the Hermetica the following themes appear: speculative cosmologies,
349 various types of dualism, individual salvation, sacraments, knowledge of God
350 (Jn 17:3), God as life and light, divine begetting, rebirth, mediation between God
351 and humankind is through a logos or heavenly man (Barrett 1972:32) or the
352 revealer and redeemer as the 'son of God' (Schnackenburg 1980:183–184). Turner
353 (1991:51) also gives interesting similarities between Jesus as the shepherd in John
354 10 and Hermes, but indicating that Jesus was obviously more important than
355 Hermes.

356 There are no literary dependencies, but it seems that the Johannine text
357 (especially the prologue and the introduction of the One coming from above
358 1:29–34) and the Hermetic texts are representative of a common religious thought
359 and milieu.

360 4.4 Hellenistic and Christian art and sculpture:

361 Another argument is that it is evident that the early Christians had chosen
362 images and symbols that were common to the Old Testament and the pagan
363 environment they were living in. The subject and themes of the early Christian
364 iconography give us information about the new factor of universal significance
365 early Christian art represented (Huyghe 1968:23; Henderson 1985:3–12).⁵ This is
366 illustrated by the images of paintings found in Dura-Europus in Syria and the

367 catacomb paintings in Rome (dating 2–3rd century CE). Among frequently
368 recurring motifs in early Christian art which have been taken from the pagan
369 world are the peacock, the dove, the athlete's palm, the fish, the seasons, solar
370 pantheism, the vintage feast which was part of the Dionysiac funerary cult (Van
371 den Heever 1992:97–98) and the shepherd who carries a lamb across his
372 shoulders. Gough said that this image is so familiar in early Christian art that it is
373 easy to lose sight of its pagan origin.

374 In Greece and even throughout the Graeco-Roman world, Hermes Criophorus
375 (the ram-carrier) was a favourite subject for sculpture, and his adaptation by
376 Christians would probably have passed unnoticed by the pagans.

377 Hermes is a perfect example of the pluralistic nature of the Greek divinities.⁶ He
378 was born on Mt. Cyllene in Arcadia as the son of Zeus and the nymph Maia
379 (daughter of the titan Atlas). He began his divine career as the power of spirit
380 residing in the roadside cairn, the stone heap or *herma*, which served as the
381 marker of boundaries, entrances and graves. He then rose from the rocks that
382 held him captive and came to surmount them in the form of a herm, a stone
383 (Martin 1992:155). On the day of his birth he killed a tortoise and made the
384 world's first lyre out of its shell. The day after his birth, he stole the oxen of
385 Admetus which Apollo, his half-brother, was guarding. Apollo discovered that

⁵ George Henderson has also utilised the art of the sculptured Ruthwell Cross to interpret biblical and ecclesiastical liturgy.

⁶ The sources for the Greek myths are a mixture of written texts, sculpture and decorated pottery. Information about stories that circulated orally has to be reconstructed indirectly by inference and guesswork. The Greek religion was polytheistic, and the culture within which it was practised was pluralistic. The stories about the origin and actions of divinities varied widely, and depend on the context in which they were told. The stories emerged in different types of narratives e.g. epic, tragedy, comedy. They portrayed widely different and even conflicting aspects of the Greek divine world. Moreover, there were geographical variations too. A god might have one set of characteristics in the city or region, and quite different characteristics elsewhere.

386 Hermes was the thief and Hermes gave him the lyre to win him over. Apollo
 387 accepted the gift and gave Hermes a shepherd's crook. This made him the
 388 protector of shepherds. When Hermes grew up, he became the official messenger
 389 and servant of the gods. Zeus often used him as a mediator in his various love
 390 affairs.

391 But Hermes was much more than that. He also had the role of escorting the dead
 392 to the underworld. He had the power to cross all kinds of boundaries. He was
 393 the patron of merchants, the protector of traders, herdsmen and seamen, of good
 394 luck and wealth, and of thieves and pickpockets, and he was also renowned for
 395 his mischief-making. He was also the god of roads and fertility, and the deity of
 396 athletes. He protected gymnasiums and stadiums and had magical powers over
 397 sleep and dreams (Clayton 1990:100).

398 He was also known as Hermes Criophorus,⁷ and this is of interest to us. This
 399 motif comes from the ancient *moscophore* prototypes of Hermes *criophore* (Duchet-
 400 Suchaux & Pastoureau 1994:164). Sculptures of Hermes Criophorus were
 401 popular and were found throughout the Graeco-Roman world: for example the
 402 Herodian harbour Caesarea in Israel (Finegan 1969:76);⁸ the Acropolis in Athens
 403 (4th cent.); and in Corinth (4th cent.). An important and interesting variation from
 404 Sparta of Hermes Criophorus is a depiction of him carrying the lamb on his arm

⁷ The Arcadia district in the central Peloponnese in Greece was the home of Hermes Criophorus. In later literature Arcadia became the setting for poetic evocations of pastoral life. While the actual terrain of Arcadia is harsh and mountainous, the idealised landscape is gentle and fertile, home to an uncorrupted community of shepherds and rustic deities, 'Arcadia (Mythology)', *Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2000*. © 1993–1999 Microsoft Corporation.

⁸ According to Finegan the Hermes figure in Caesarea can be dated to the 5th cent. CE. According to him, it came from buildings that were built between the 4–7th cent. CE. A few inscriptions were found on the pavement, including Romans 13:3. Josephus (1981:331–332), on the other hand, mentions that there were temples, a palace, statues of gods and goddesses, and an agora. He also notes that the streets were arranged according to the Hippodamian system, a typical Greek architectural style. An inscription about Pilate is also found. This dates the Hermes statue to the beginning of the Christian era.

405 and not on his shoulders (National Museum in Athens (460–450 BCE). This
406 probably symbolises a lamb, which can easily be carried on the arm, and not a
407 ram, which would have to be carried on the shoulders. The next important image
408 of Hermes is one of him carrying the new-born Dionysus, the god of wine, on his
409 arm. In the other hand he is probably holding a bunch of grapes, which the infant
410 god is trying to reach (Servi 1997:44).

411 These images have found influence on the early Christian art in three ways. The
412 first of these is in the good shepherd watching over his sheep. He stands or sits in
413 the middle of the flock and is ready to protect them against any dangers (cf. 5th
414 century mosaic in the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna). This theme is
415 associated with Orpheus, a figure in the art of the *paleochristian* period as a
416 symbolic 'likeness' of Christ. This image of the shepherd watching over the flock
417 is a later image, from the 5th century (Finegan 1969:76).

418 The second depiction is as a shepherd with a ram or sheep on his shoulders. This
419 is illustrated by the paintings in Dura Europus c. 245, the catacombs of Priscilla,
420 Domitilla and Callista in Rome. It seems that this motif figured in the very early
421 Christian art (2–3rd cent.). It is easy to see the congruity between Hermes
422 Criophorus and this image of Jesus as the good shepherd with a sheep on his
423 shoulders. In Dura Europus symbols of deliverance are taken from the Old
424 Testament and the New Testament where Adam and Eve and the serpent were a
425 reminder of the fall of humanity and opposite them appeared the shepherd, the
426 image of redemption. In early paintings and on sarcophagi the shepherd is
427 portrayed against a background of trees and flowers, a pastoral setting which
428 symbolises the paradise of the elect. According to Gough it symbolises the
429 shepherd deliverance as prefigured also in Psalm 23 (Gough 1973:19–21).

430 The third image is of John the Baptist with the lamb on his arm. The oldest image
431 of John with the lamb is found in Ravenna, Italy, and dates to c.3–4th or 5–6th
432 century CE. I have indicated in a previous publication that John with the lamb
433 was already established very early (probably before the Constantine era) as a
434 ‘trademark’ for him, while Peter is portrayed with curled beard and hair and
435 Paul with pointed beard and bold head. It is noticeable that John is never
436 portrayed with the lamb on his shoulders. The congruity between John the
437 Baptist and Hermes as messengers with either the lamb or Dionysus on the arm
438 is also noticeable. This is so especially when the similarities between Hermes as
439 revealer and redeemer, also known as the son of god in the *Corpus Hermeticum*,
440 and the similarities between Dionysus’ wine feast and the Fourth Gospel are kept
441 in mind (Van den Heever 1992:99).

442 **5. Conclusion**

443 The important aim of this paper is to indicate that the metaphor of the Lamb of
444 God, like the metaphor of the son, is to be viewed in terms of the relationship
445 between God and Jesus. The background of the commonplace element shared by
446 the lamb and the son metaphors is God as Father and God as Shepherd. The
447 same characteristics of God (as Father and as Shepherd) are found in the father-
448 son relationship and the good shepherd metaphor in the Fourth Gospel. He who
449 is the ‘lamb’ in John 1 became the shepherd in John 10. This background is also
450 supported by the Old Testament images of God as Father and Shepherd of Israel
451 and Israel as sons and as the flock of YHWH. The other supportive background
452 and influence is the Hermetic literature, where Hermes the messenger and
453 shepherd god is also portrayed as the son of god. There is also the congruity in
454 early Christian art between John the Baptist with the lamb in his arms and the

455 Hermes Criophorus image with either the lamb or the new-born Dionysus on his
456 arm.

457 No literary dependencies or direct influence of these images on the Fourth
458 Gospel or on the image of the Lamb of God can be proven, but it is indicated by
459 many scholars that these images are representative of a common religious
460 thought and milieu. Although Dorothy Lee (2011:14) supports the Passover
461 background of the Lamb of God imagery, she acknowledges that

462 symbolism is not easily located in singular meaning but opens itself, by
463 definition, to a “surplus of meaning” that exceeds intentionality or design. In a
464 religious context, it brings meaning into being, becoming the bridge between
465 divine and human. In this sense, we might say that, while symbolism cannot
466 easily be grasped, it can be approached.

467 The early Christian literature, art and images borrowed from the existing images
468 from the Old Testament and the pagan world they were living in. It is arguable
469 that the early Christians laid one perception over another and that no single
470 inter-textual reading of the metaphor can be taken as the background to the lamb
471 metaphor; rather, they are likely to have combined images from the milieu in
472 which they were living. To me, it seems that this is exactly what the evangelist
473 did: he took images and material from the existing Christian traditions, the Old
474 Testament and the pagan world and created his own images and message about
475 Jesus.

476 I haven't addressed the qualification of the lamb, namely he 'who takes away the
477 sin of the world', but this attribution to the lamb emphasises the universalism
478 inherent in the Fourth Gospel's central testimony, namely that the lamb takes
479 away the sin of the *world* and not just that of Israel, inasmuch as the Father sent
480 the son into the world to save the world (Jn 3:16–17). Commentators interpreting

481 the lamb as the Passover lamb do not take the qualification 'the sin of the *world*'
482 into consideration. To me, God remains the initiator who saves the world
483 through his Son as the Lamb. This emphasises even more the idea that the author
484 took images from various traditions to create his message about Jesus, especially
485 if we take into consideration that the Gospel was probably written from Ephesus.

486

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