

Mary had a little lamb
Response to Dr. Alex Deasley's paper, "Holy Sacrifice"
by Carol Rotz

It seems to me that the timing of this conference during Advent is particularly appropriate as we consider who we North American¹ Nazarenes are and what we believe. I appreciate Dr. Hahn's repeated statement in his printed welcome that "the purpose of this conference is to do theology with the church and for the church". We who are in this room have a great privilege and an even greater responsibility to the church we represent. With that in mind, as I considered a response to Dr. Deasley's paper, I entered into dialogue with several on the topic of holy sacrifice. The most carefully considered response came from my pastor, Dr. Mark Harmon.²

His opening paragraph challenges us to do theology in and for the church: "Deasley does a masterful job of bringing to the forefront a theological controversy in the Church of the Nazarene, without once mentioning the controversy. Whether the scholars of our church realize it or not, the 'grassroots' of our Zion are aware of the trend toward what some are calling "The New Theology" in the Church of the Nazarene. "The New Theology" purports to be rescuing the denomination from the creeping Fundamentalism they see entering the church through the back doors of Calvinistic-oriented media and publishing pursuits, thus undermining our Arminian-Wesleyan faith. In Reality, "The New Theology" is destroying the very faith once given to the saints by throwing the bathtub out with the bathwater and leaving the baby (the postmodern generation) high and dry not knowing what to believe." God help us!

We are here to do theology with and for the church during Advent. Our focus during Advent is, of course, the celebration of the birth of Jesus and the anticipation of his return. We rejoice in the revelation of God in Jesus, the Christ, through whom all of creation is being reconciled to God by the Holy Spirit. It is a process in which we

¹As someone living outside North America from 1982-2001, I read with great interest the summary of Dr. Quanstrom's *A Century of Holiness Theology*. (I plan to read it from cover to cover when I get "the real thing".) During the last four years I have struggled to understand the issues of the North American church, and this summary has put many things into perspective. Dr. Benefiel's work has also been helpful.

² With his permission, his full response is attached to these notes as an appendix.

participate, and the consummation of which we anticipate.³ The question remains: Why did God become human?

Several of my friends collect nativity sets—into the hundreds. It's a beautiful addiction, and I enjoy it vicariously as they tell me the history and special significance of each one. A couple of weeks ago, a friend described a set she wanted to add to her collection. It's a bear nativity set. That is, the main characters are bears, and I was struck with the irony that the Incarnation, God becoming *human* would be depicted in such a way. Because I was also thinking about the topic of holy sacrifice, I thought how appropriate it would be for a nativity set to have Jesus as a lamb.⁴

In his masterful biblical exposition of holy sacrifice, Dr. Deasley twice referred to 1 Peter 1:18 and “the precious blood of Christ like that of a *lamb* without defect or blemish” (p.8 & 9).

Thank you, Dr. Deasley, for modeling for us the need to hold the biblical images of sacrifice in tension. To the categories of substitution, reconciliation, redemption, and necessity that Dr. Deasley reviewed he added several others, all worthy of our time. I am drawn to the concept of revelation, specifically as portrayed in John's gospel. There, the Word who was in the bosom of the Father, the one facing and moving toward the Father, became flesh and explained the Father (Jn 1:14,18) to us. Obviously this category is too vast for a short response. That brings us back to the nativity sets, back to Jesus as the lamb, back to Dr. Deasley's statement that “...the fundamental category in which Christ's death is interpreted in the New Testament is that of sacrifice” (p 4).

In John's gospel, the Baptist identifies Jesus as “the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29,36).⁵ Of course, the Lamb is an old symbol used

³ That is the premise of this conference: Holy God and Holy People. See especially Dr. Noble's paper, “Holy Persons” (11 ftnt 20).

⁴ What an unlikely image. “A lamb is destined to disappear—either to become a sheep, or to become lamb chops” (Achtmeier:285).

⁵ John the Baptist's identification of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel includes the Preexistent one (v30; cf. vv. 1, 15); The one upon whom the Spirit descended (v.32) in fulfillment of a divine promise (v.33a); The one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit (v. 33a); The Son of God (v. 34) (Moloney 53). There are, of course, other important Christological titles in John 1:19-51. They include); Son of God (34); Lamb of God (36), “Rabbi” (38 & 49) which means teacher; Messiah which means Anointed; Him about whom Moses in the

in a new way. It presupposes the entire Old Testament pattern of sacrifice⁶ that Dr. Deasley set out so well in his paper. Through the metaphor of the Lamb John has constructed a new picture of the significance of Jesus out of various Jewish traditions.⁷ Aaron's instructions were to offer a yearling lamb every morning and evening (Exod. 29:38). This daily worship was a sign of covenant and continual communion between God and the people of Israel. There is provision for an atoning lamb. A lamb could be brought "for a sin offering". The sinner was to "lay his hand on its head and slaughter it for a sin offering" (Lev.4:32-34).

Jesus, the Lamb of God, is different from the daily or occasional sacrificial lambs. "After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven" (Heb. 1:3). And it is not just any lamb that qualifies for sacrifice. It must be without defect. This is perfectly fulfilled by the Lamb *of God* and his holy sacrifice. Only God takes away sin.

There are, of course, other possible allusions with which to compare Jesus as a lamb. None is a perfect fit. There is the *aqedah*, but Isaac is set free; the Passover, but the Paschal lamb is not a sacrifice for atonement. Isaiah's suffering servant⁸ is a compelling parallel, but it is linguistically strange to equate the servant with the lamb. The apocalyptic lamb is the resurrected Christ, but a different word for lamb (*arnion*) is used, and the victory over death results in the destruction of evil rather than the removal of sin (Smalley 325-326).

So, can you picture Mary's little lamb in the nativity set? Why *did* God become human?

The powerful and formative story of Abraham and Isaac's journey to Moriah gives us a glimpse. In this Old Testament type there are two people. The son, knowingly or unknowingly, is the sacrifice, but in the end is not sacrificed. A ram takes his place. In a conflation of images in John, Jesus is both the Son and the Sacrifice. And, the Lamb

law and also the prophets wrote (45); Son of Joseph from Nazareth (45), Son of God (49); King of Israel (49); Son of Man (51).

⁶ For Smalley, the emphasis is especially on the vicarious offering for sin (326).

⁷ Skinner identifies nine "commonly posed views" (89).

⁸ This Isaianic image, of course deserves a paper of its own, but it is beyond the parameters of this short response. See, for example, Keener.

and the One he called Father are not entirely separate. Jesus said, “I and the Father are one” (Jn 10:30). Holy sacrifice, then, is an event in the life of God for the sake of the world.⁹ Placing atonement in the life of God implies a rejection of the idea that God’s anger must be placated before God can love a sinner. It also dispels the notion that an innocent third person can be legitimately punished by God for the guilty sinner.¹⁰ Understanding that the atonement is an event in the life of God emphasizes that nothing can undo it and its repetition is unthinkable.¹¹

A more obvious Old Testament reference in John is that Jesus is the Passover lamb.¹² Of course, the Jew’s annual killing of the Paschal lambs was not considered an expiatory sacrifice. It commemorated the deliverance of God’s people from Egypt (5:6,9; 7:1-8, 17).¹³ It may well be, though, that early Judaism attached nuances of

⁹ Paul expressed it this way: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor 5:19).

¹⁰ The musing of a modern, non-religious Jew ends, “Can the crucifixion of one man, even a ‘god,’ be ever ethically considered as expiation for the misdeeds of others? And these are dangerous beliefs, for reliance on the efficacy of sacrifice can engender the infliction of suffering, torture, blood libels, pogroms and mass murder of innocents (Wilbush 13).

¹¹ See Volf’s excellent article.

¹² There may be more interconnectedness. “One may read Gen 22:9-13 as a type of the Passover, the redemption of the first-born; note that the ram functions as a ‘lamb’ (22:7-8)...Some see Isaac typology in John 1:29... (Braun, Swetnam, Bruce in Keener 454 fnt 245).

¹³ Brown rightly insists that “the difference between the lambs’ blood smeared on the doorpost as a sign of deliverance and the lambs’ blood offered in sacrifice for deliverance is not very great” (1982:62). And certainly there is an element of the vicarious shedding of blood for the life of the firstborn.

Sanborn (21) spiritualizes the exodus, pointing out that the new exodus in Christ surpasses the old exodus in 3 distinct ways:

- brings eternal blessings of the kingdom of God. God blesses us forever because his Son has been raised as king forever.
- made us eternal priests who worship Christ forever. We are eternal worshippers because we have been freed from bondage forever by Christ’s blood.
- will destroy all of God’s enemies forever. Christ’s second coming will be universal and final. In it the Lamb will deliver you from suffering, persecution, and death because he will destroy all your enemies forever.

O’Brien (173-179) rightly points out in Pauline terms that just as the blood of the paschal lamb signified the deliverance of the people of Israel from slavery and bondage in Egypt, so too the blood of the Lamb signifies the deliverance of God’s people from slavery to sin and death.

sacrifice to Passover, and the relation may have existed in the Hebrew Bible.

Regarding sacrifice, Dr. Deasley (p2) stated, “No doubt the meaning was clear to the worshippers in ancient Israel...” I somehow doubt that! It seems to me that they, like us, saw flashes of insight, experienced visceral responses to metaphorical expressions of the unthinkable, but they probably did not really understand.

And then there is the blindness of the religious. For example, the Johannine passion story is charged with irony. Those who were so careful to maintain ritual purity for the Passover meal that they would not enter Pilate’s headquarters (18:28), took Jesus to Pilate and demanded the death of the Lamb of God. In John’s chronology this would happen at noon, just as the lambs for Passover began to be slaughtered.¹⁴ Once “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (1:29), was put to death the Passover meal lost its significance. Ritual purity was meaningless. It was nothing in comparison to the Lamb’s holy sacrifice.

So, the Lamb of God took away the sin of the world. He was the sacrifice but not a victim. Jesus was firmly in control. This has important implications. Holy sacrifice can be a reality only when it is self-sacrifice, from an empowered position. Otherwise it is victimization.¹⁵

John records Jesus’ admission that his soul was troubled. But he also records Jesus’ refusal to turn from that which would glorify his Father. The unique Lamb of God laid down his own life in holy sacrifice. Jesus explained, “No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again” (Jn 10:18 NRSV).

It is this resurrected Christ that we see in Revelation—a Lamb standing as though slain, worthy to open the scroll. Now this is not the little lamb of the nativity set. This lamb has seven eyes and seven horns. Yet it is Mary’s little lamb. It is a contradiction within contradiction. Although John develops the picture of the Lamb in

¹⁴ Another detail in John 19:36 ties Jesus’ death to paschal observance. Exodus 12:10, 46 and Numbers 9:12 prohibits breaking the bones of the Passover lamb about to be eaten. Early Judaism carefully continued to observe prohibition (Jub 49:13); one who broke a Passover lamb’s bones could incur the public discipline of 40 lashes (Keener 1156).

¹⁵ Here Dr. Leclerc’s masterful work on the nature of sin and self must be considered.

battle imagery,¹⁶ the Lion of the Tribe of Judah turned out to be a Lamb. The heart of the power of God is the weakness of a crucified Lamb. But that contradiction of salvation through defeat, and of redemption through death, is itself part of a still deeper contradiction. Defeat and death have been contradicted by Jesus' resurrection, a contradiction finally to be consummated when God cleanses and renews his suffering creation. The world was reconciled to God by God through holy sacrifice, but it still needs to be reconciled. The accomplished reconciliation still awaits response and completion.

The Lamb is our paradigm and model, the source of our life and hope, whose worthiness to open the scroll came at a great price: holy sacrifice. I know the Lamb is only one image among many, but to me it is a powerful one, a necessary one. What should be our response this Advent as we gather here to consider who we are and what we believe? When I look at nativity sets, I'll see the Lamb. And when we try to understand what Advent is all about and articulate our faith, may we acknowledge that our best-reasoned theologizing affords only glimpses of the Holy.¹⁷ May we not even appear to be throwing the bathtub out with the bath water. What a privilege to *do* theology with and for the church here. What a responsibility to *do* theology with and for the church beyond the walls of this room and dare I say beyond the confines of this continent. This Advent let us respond to the nativity Lamb by recognizing his holy sacrifice for the church and participate in the reconciliation he provides. Let us glorify the Lamb.

¹⁶ "Revelation conveys a vivid interpretation of what God has achieved in Christ and its consequences for human living. John's book is an essential part of the Christian tradition, even though the history of its interpretation indicates all too clearly the dangers of giving any encouragement to those inclined to think that violence solves problems and, worse, that divine violence will solve all problems" (McDonald 46-47).

¹⁷ This, of course, is not a new insight. In his brief statement in the Articles of Faith series in *Holiness Today* Dr. Noble pointed out that none of the so-called theories explains the atonement (18).

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Appendix
SOME JUMBLED THOUGHTS
 By Dr. Mark Harmon

Deasley does a masterful job of bringing to the forefront a theological controversy in the Church of the Nazarene, without once mentioning the controversy. Whether the scholars of our church realize it or not, the “grassroots” of our Zion are aware of the trend toward what some are calling “The New Theology.” in the Church of the Nazarene. “The New Theology” purports to be rescuing the denomination from the creeping Fundamentalism they see entering the church through the backdoors of Calvinistic-oriented media and publishing pursuits, thus undermining our Arminian-Wesleyan faith. In reality, “The New Theology” is destroying the very faith once given to the saints by throwing the bathtub out with the bathwater and leaving the baby (the postmodern generation) high and dry not knowing what to believe.

In a paper presented to the Thirty-Sixth Annual Meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society, Jirair Tashjian, claims that “ the passion narratives of the four Gospels and the sermons in Acts leave no doubt that the death of Jesus was brought about by human beings, whether Jewish or Roman authorities, and therefore historically contingent.”

Tashjian defines “historical contingency” as any event for which human beings, rather than God, are responsible. He writes: “ I began this essay with the question as to whether the death of Jesus was historically contingent or divinely foreordained. It seems to me that the answer is that the death of Jesus was brought about through human decisions and therefore it is historically contingent. Survey of material from and about the historical Jesus indicates that social, political and religious forces were at work to bring Jesus to his violent death. At the same time, however, Jesus was not simply the victim of circumstances. At some point in his life he began to see that his message and what he represented would *probably* (emphasis mine) result in a violent death and that this was part of the coming of the kingdom of God. His words at the Last Supper indicate that he understood his own death in the Passover imagery of liberation for captives from the old order.”¹

Tashjian believes “Christian theology over the centuries has grappled with the dilemma of reconciling the historical contingency of Jesus’ death with its divinely ordained purpose. The atonement theories that have emerged are various attempts to come to terms with this theological dilemma. That is, in view of the fact that it was human beings who killed Jesus, how can the death of Jesus be, if at all, a divinely foreordained event? Are we to conclude that it was God who orchestrated and manipulated human decisions in order to bring about Jesus’ death?”² He specifically believes the **penal satisfaction** theory of atonement emerged to come to terms with the dilemma. In arguing *against* penal satisfaction or substitution as “the least viable

¹ **The Death of Jesus Historically Contingent or Divinely Ordained?** Jirair Tashjian
<http://www.cresourcei.org/jesusdeath.html>

² **The Death of Jesus Historically Contingent or Divinely Ordained?** Jirair Tashjian
<http://www.cresourcei.org/jesusdeath.html>

formulation of the atonement” he argues *for* historical contingency and that “Jesus didn’t have to die.” That is, the death of Jesus was not divinely foreordained as penal satisfaction but the result of God’s coming into human history vulnerably through the incarnation. He writes “The satisfaction theories of the atonement are inadequate to express the richness of divine love that suffers because they arise out of the faulty assumption that God’s primary attribute is justice and that God must vindicate himself and his moral government and demand payment for a moral debt. On the other hand, understanding the death of Christ as an expression of God’s endeavor to reconcile the world to himself, along the lines of the moral influence theory, is not only consistent with biblical theology but is also most congenial to Wesleyan thought.”³

The “grassroots” of the Church of the Nazarene (non-theologically trained laypersons and thinking pastors) take issue with Tashjian at this point. While willing to surrender any fundamentalistic interpretations of penal satisfaction they are not willing to surrender the *necessity* of Jesus’ death. The lamb was slain from the foundation of the world.

Deasley’s consideration of “the main categories or images used in the New Testament to convey the meaning of the death of Christ” specifically enumerates “The Category of Necessity.” Deasley strongly states “the death of Jesus. . .stands under the rubric of necessity (and is) a feature of the presentation of that subject throughout the New Testament.” He notes that both the ministry and passion of Jesus are punctuated with references to necessity and a fulfillment of Scripture.

Deasley also, in exegeting Romans 3:21-26 adequately refutes Tashjian’s critique of satisfaction theories as operating under the “faulty assumption that God’s primary attribute is justice and that God must vindicate himself and his moral government and demand payment for a moral debt.” Deasley notes that Paul understood that God needed to prove himself righteous—that forgiveness is a moral problem to God, “Sin forgiven cheaply cheapens the sin.” In Christ God’s way of righting wrong has been disclosed—the paradoxical act of God’s holy love providing what God’s justice demands. The *necessity* of the cross was not the necessity to resolve the dilemma caused by the history of sin but the necessity of a God of holy love to love rightly. (see Deasley quoting Oden)

OTHER JUMBLED THOUGHTS

In a sermon⁴ preached by Dr. Wesley D. Tracy, entitled “Cross Ways” which is now being used as discussion starter in a Course of Study modules Tracy, too, attempts to destroy the student’s

³ Ibid

⁴ . . . This sermon was preached by Wesley Tracy, guest preacher, at the First Church of the Nazarene, Kansas City, MO, September 9, 2001.

fundamentalistic thinking about the cross (and blaming errant preachers and songwriters) , without giving an adequate biblical theology of the atonement.

Tracy writes: “Sometimes our preachers and songwriters, themselves, get a bit careless in slinging around “Cross talk.” The ideas we preach, teach and sing sometimes go down “crossways” to the person really seeking to know the God behind and the God on the Cross.”

In his sermon he asks the following questions:

1. When you look at the Cross with the eyes of your heart do you see primarily “punishment?”

To this question he notes: “Nazarene theologian, H. Ray Dunning says, the notion that “Jesus bears punishment for man's sin is totally foreign to the New Testament” (Grace, Faith, and Holiness, 372). J. Kenneth Grider, another Nazarene theologian who disagrees with Dunning every chance he gets, actually agrees with him on this point. The sacrificial death of Jesus was not an act of punishment—or if it was, the divinely inspired New Testament writers missed it. But evangelicals and Fundamentalists often use that imagery. And that's the problem with that kind of language, it impugns the good name of God the Father. It paints a picture of a dad enraged and outraged at life in general and at his kids in particular. He grabs one of his sons and flogs him, thrashes him to the door of death. His rage finally appeased he announces, “I forgive you.” What? If the son could speak he would say (and I quote theologian J. Kenneth Grider, a long-time member of this church), the son would say, “No, you did not forgive me—you punished me (A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology, 329). Grider, my teacher at seminary, goes on to say, “If the Father's justice must be . . .satisfied by punishment, then no forgiveness is possible. It is either punishment or forgiveness, surely, not punishment and forgiveness” (329).

Tracy’s objections may be well founded but (as noted above) by throwing the bathtub out with the bathwater he leaves the baby (the postmodern generation) high and dry not knowing what to believe.

Deasley’s Category of Substitution would give the student, pastor and laymen a reconstructed theology of a holy God of love providing the substitute for bearing sin (not guilt)

A second question Tracy asks is

2. When you look at the Cross do you see a debt paid off?

He writes:

“When you think of the Cross do you think of a debt being paid?” And he notes the important questions: “Think about this: Who paid what? To whom? And Why?”

I hate to blame the lawyers like everyone else does. But a lawyer got Protestants to think of the atonement as a legal transaction in which Jesus paid the debt for our sins. John Calvin was a great, great man, but he was a lawyer first and a theologian second. His “Cross-talk” was legalese from beginning to end. To Calvin, one of the greatest of the Protestant Reformers. God

was a stern Judge who is mad at us and must be appeased. Jesus stepped up and paid the debt and that made God stop being mad and start loving and forgiving us. In his Institutes brother Calvin makes it seem that “God wanted Jesus to die and predestined Pilate and Caiphas to make it happen. Surely not—Jesus is God's beloved Son. The Father and the Son are not divided or in opposition” (Pinnock, 102).

Nazarene theologian J. Kenneth Grider rejects the Cross as “debt-paying.” He says, “Even as one cannot punish and also forgive, one cannot accept payment for a debt and still forgive: (331). Grider points out that Scripture indeed says, “You are not your own; you were bought with a price” (1 Cor 6:19-20). This no doubt means that we are bought with the price of Christ's suffering, not the price of a debt being paid. The Bible does speak of one dimension of the atonement as a “ransom,” but even in those three cases no third party collecting “accounts payable” is noted. Grider goes on to say, “Neither a human being nor God, surely, can accept payment for a debt and still forgive the debt. And forgiveness, sheer forgiveness, is unique to Christianity, of all the religions, and must be protected” (331).

Again, Tracy's objections may be well founded but (as noted above) by throwing the bathtub out with the bathwater he leaves the baby (the postmodern generation) high and dry not knowing what to believe.

Deasley's Category of Redemption provides the student, pastor and laymen a reconstructed theology of a holy God of love providing us with the true meaning of the ransom, debt, payment, metaphors—“The import of the metaphor terminates with its immediate sense: the idea that the accomplishment did not come cheaply.”