1 The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world: personal sin, structures of sin and demonic influence in the Johannine perspective

1.1 Introduction

The image "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (J 1,29) functions in Johannine theology as a point of departure for understanding Jesus' mission as an action that has both a personal and a structural dimension. John's programmatic text reveals a tension between the universal scope of salvation and the concrete mechanisms by which evil operates in history: individual sin, entrenched social structures, and the reality of spiritual opposition to God. An initial recognition of this tension requires a simultaneous reading of the semantics of the Greek text, the situating of the lamb-image within several biblical traditions (Passover, the Servant texts, temple cult, and the apocalyptic tradition), and the linking of these spheres to the Johannine analysis of the "sin of the world" as a condition of rejection of the light, unbelief, and bondage. The aim of this section is a detailed discussion of J 1,29, an identification of the range of meanings of the verb *airō*, a demonstration of the theological significance of the singular in *hamartia*, and then an exposition of the multilayered background of the Lamb-image without reduction to a single source. The concluding fragment will be devoted to how John understands sin as rejection of the light, unbelief and slavery, invoking J 3,19; J 8,34.36; J 16,9 in their mutual interrelations.

1.2 The programmatic text J 1,29 and the language of the Lamb

The Greek variant of John the Baptist's utterance reads: Ἴδε ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου. The three components of the sentence — *amnos* as title, the participle from *airō*, and the syntagma τὴν *hamartian* τοῦ *kosmou* — form a dense web of meanings, none of which should be elided. The first exegetical difficulty concerns the title "Lamb of God" (*amnos tou theou*). In John the term occurs only in J 1,29 and J 1,36, and its sense is multilayered: it may indicate belonging to God, divine choice, a gift from God, or God's participation in the saving action represented by the lamb. It is therefore not merely an image of gentleness, but above all a soteriological category — Jesus as the one through whom God removes the state of separation from himself. One should also preserve the distinction between John's *amnos* and Revelation's *arnion*: although both traditions use the lamb-image, the apocalyptic *arnion* develops the motif of the victorious lamb standing among thrones; John, by contrast, emphasizes the lamb revealed within the history of salvation, linking this with the immediate summons to recognize the Son as giver of life and as one who leads out of darkness[1][2].

The second element, the participle ὁ *aírōn* derived from *airō*, carries semantic tension. The Greek verb can mean "to lift up, to take away, to remove, to assume, to bear." Traditional Polish translations ("gładzi") aptly render the result of the action — the effective removal of guilt — but may obscure the dimension of solidarity and assumption of burden, if one does not account for the sense "to take upon oneself" or "to bear." From a Johannine perspective the fullest reading is a combination of both fields: Christ as the One who takes upon himself the consequence of sin (in the sense of entering into its consequences) in order

[1] References to the Gospel of John, in particular J 1 (cf. Ἴδε ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου) and to the intermediate chapters J 13–17, which shape the model of a community of service and mission.

[2] L. Nortjé-Meyer, "Ancient art, rhetoric and the Lamb of God metaphor in John 1:29–36", *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 2015 — a study on the image of *amnos* in J 1,29 and possible interpretive fields (Passover, Isa 53, cult, apocalypse).

finally to remove it. The present-participial form (ὁ *aírōn*) emphasizes that this action is constitutive of Jesus' identity — it is not confined to a single act but encompasses the whole work from the revelation of the Son, through signs and word, to death, resurrection and the gift of the Spirit.

The third significant component is the use of the singular in the expression τὴν *hamartían* τοῦ *kósmou*. John does not speak of the "sins of the world," but of the "sin of the world," which signals a theological focus on the structure and state from which particular misdeeds arise. *Hamartia tou kosmou* indicates a deeper reality: a state of estrangement from God, a system of values opposed to revelation, a mechanism that generates manifold manifestations of evil. This does not eliminate the multiplicity of individual culpabilities; rather it shows that individual transgressions are fruits of a common root. In this way John preserves both the concreteness of sin (personal actions and decisions) and captures it within a broader "cosmic" dimension (*kosmos*), where evil operates as a systemic and spiritual power.

It is also worth recognizing how J 1,29 declares the character of Christ's work: it is distinct from the violence of the world, because it removes sin in a representative and reconciliatory manner — through the taking upon itself of its consequences, without entering into the logic of revenge. This combination of "taking" and "removing" is crucial for understanding the Johannine type of sacrifice: it is not a ritual offering intended to appease the anger of a deity, nor a political operation of purging a community at the expense of an individual, but the Son's entry into the mortal consequences of sin in order to nullify them and to restore human communion with the Father.

1.3 The multilayered background of the Lamb-image

The Lamb-image in J 1,29 does not arise in a vacuum and cannot safely be attributed to a single source. The Johannine text consciously combines at least four interpretative fields: the Passover (Wj 12), the Servant-of-the-Lord text (Iz 53), the milieu of temple cult, and apocalyptic symbolism. One must, however, avoid reductionism: each of these fields contributes distinct emphases that in John's ordering remain in dialogue.

A. The Paschal background evokes in John both the practical and symbolic motifs of exodus from slavery and protection by blood. The gospel narrative highlights analogies: the hour of Jesus' passion is associated with Passover, the indications connected with hyssop in J 19,29 and the fact that his bones were not broken (por. Wj 12,46; J 19,36) — these elements steer the reader toward reading Jesus' death as a new Passover. Yet the Passover lamb in Exodus occurs in the context of a collective ritual and a sign of protection; John reworks this motif, endowing it with a representative soteriological meaning: the lamb-Jesus is not so much a simple replica of the paschal lamb as its fuller realization, extending liberation not only over the body but over the human relationship with God.

B. Isaiah 53:7 contributes the image of the Servant led "like a lamb to the slaughter" and the notion of passive acceptance of suffering as a means of justification for many. In the context of *airō* it is precisely the Servant tradition that allows the participle to be read not only as "removing" but also as "taking upon oneself" — the Servant does not remove sin from the outside but assumes its consequences and thereby brings redemption. In this way we gain a theological bridge between the solidarity of the victim and the efficacy of cleansing.

C. The temple cult environment and sacrificial practices provide the language of purification, reconciliation and vicarious sacrifice. John employs this language, but cautiously: John's lamb is not identical with the scapegoat of the Day of Atonement nor with any form of ritual substitution. Rather he utilizes the sacrificial schema to show a deeper, personal and at the same time cosmic dynamic of reconciliation — cleansing

from sin is real and effective, but its manner of accomplishment (love, obedience, acceptance of death) differs from instrumental or magical ritual enactments.

D. Apocalyptic semantic fields are most visible in the image of the lamb as victor, developed in Revelation (where *arnion* appears). John, although he uses a different term (*amnos*), stands within the same symbolic tradition that links sacrifice with royal victory: the lamb is both slain and triumphant. The terminological difference between John's *amnos* and Revelation's *arnion* should be underscored — they are not meaningless synonyms but kin images that together display both the universal dimension of the sacrifice and its eschatological consummation[3].

Consequently, John's lamb is a figure of synthesis: paschal blood effects exodus from slavery, the Servant passively takes upon himself consequences for many, temple cult offers a vocabulary of purification, and apocalypse completes the horizon with victory. Reducing the image to a single background — e.g., exclusively paschal or exclusively Isaianic — impoverishes the message. The evangelist appears to aim at an integrated vision: the lamb is the one who enters into the center of the mechanisms of sin, takes on their effects and thereby removes them, while simultaneously opening a new community.

1.4 The sin of the world: light, unbelief and bondage

In Johannine anthropology and soteriology sin is not primarily a legal or psychological category, but above all a relational and cognitive one: it is the rejection of the light of revelation, an act of unbelief and a process of bondage. Three texts — J 3,19; J 16,9; J 8,34.36 — direct us toward this threefold recognition.

J 3,19 states that "the judgment is this: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil." Here John defines sin as the free rejection of the light; the world is not an absence of knowledge but a choice. This choice has an ontological character: a state of separation (i.e., *hamartia* understood in the sense of unity) is consolidated by preferring darkness. Thus the sin of the world is not merely the sum of bad deeds but a manner of constituting human life that turns away from the revelation of the Son and prefers to hide evil deeds rather than acknowledge and repair them.

J 16,9 — "Of sin — because they do not believe in Me" — extends this conclusion: the fundamental kind of sin is unbelief in the Son as the revelation of the Father. Johannine unbelief is not a purely intellectual lack of evidence; it is a rejection of the truth revealed in Jesus, a refusal to enter into the relation of sonship and to remain in the word. Unbelief, therefore, is the ethical root: it severs a person from the source of truth and love and thus opens the way to further transgressions.

J 8,34.36 links sin to slavery: "Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin… If the Son sets you free, then you will be truly free." The dynamic is clear: sin begins with an act of free choice, but through repetition and consolidation it becomes a state of bondage. This internal dynamic leads us toward an understanding of structural sin: repeated individual decisions form habits that enter institutions and procedures, which in turn begin to operate as carriers of pressure, facilitating evil and making resistance to good difficult. In this way John recognizes both the moral dimension of personal responsibility and the social dimension of the consequences of one's deed.

From this perspective the understanding of the "sin of the world" requires the simultaneous maintenance of two principles: first, structures do not possess personal freedom and conscience — only persons sin;

[3]Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1869 — the catechetical account of responsibility and the description of structures of sin.

second, structures are the consequence and carriers of the pressure of human decisions. The category "structural sin" thus functions analogically here: it describes real mechanisms of social reinforcement of evil, but it does not absolve concrete persons of moral responsibility. This balance is emphasized in the pastoral reflection of the contemporary Church and in documents indicating that structures of guilt require a simultaneous spiritual and social response — conversion of heart and concrete reforms[43].

John's passion narrative shows how personal sin, institutional fear, and political calculation combine into a structure leading to the killing of the innocent. J 11,48–50 and the scenes connected with Jesus' handing over illustrate the mechanism: decisions of individuals (Judas, the religious leaders, Pilate) intertwine in a process in which no one feels full responsibility for the whole, yet everyone contributes to the outcome. The cross thus becomes on the one hand the summit of the action of the sin of the world — a revelation of its mechanisms — and on the other hand the place where the Lamb enters into the very center of that structure in order to ultimately expose its true nature.

With regard to the demonic dimension, John recognizes the reality of the "ruler of this world" (*archōn tou kosmou toutou*) and points to the "power of the Evil One" operating in structures and in the lie that leads to death (J 8,44; 1 J 5,19). Prudence is, however, required: demonic influence does not annul human freedom nor does it reduce responsibility. The Evil One proposes false images, exploits desires and fears, finds cooperation in human choice, and thereby can make use of entrenched structures. In pastoral and social practice the consequence of this recognition is the necessity of a twofold response: prayer, spiritual discernment, and the sacraments regarding the spiritual dimension, and legal, protective, and institutional reform measures regarding the structural dimension. The aim is not mutual exclusion but the responsible cooperation of spiritual care with appropriate social and legal means.

Finally, it should be recalled that John preserves an eschatological tension: the work of the Lamb has already entered history — sin has been "atoned for," the ruler of the world has been judged — yet its full removal awaits final completion. This tension explains why the Gospel simultaneously calls for hope and for endurance in discernment: the saving mission of the Son gives genuine power of liberation, but human choices, structures, and the action of the Evil One still require a responsible spiritual and social struggle.

1.5 From personal sin to structures of sin

The category "structural sin" has its origin in twentieth-century moral theology, which attempted to name and understand experiences of evil when they cease to be exclusively the sum of individual acts and become a relatively durable social, economic, or cultural arrangement. A significant point of reference for this reflection is John Paul II's exhortation Reconciliatio et paenitentia, which emphasizes that structures of evil arise from personal sins and only in this sense can be spoken of as "sinful"; however, they are carriers of pressure that cause personal choices to more easily become repeated patterns and institutional solutions[4]. A similar formulation appears in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which reminds us that structures have no personal conscience but are the result and place of multiplication of human sin; for this reason this categorization is analogical and does not replace human responsibility[3].

The limits of this category require clear delineation. First, structures are not moral agents in an ontological sense: they do not possess a will understood as the will of a person and do not "sin" in the classical sense; persons sin — those who create, consolidate, and use them. Second, speaking of a structure of sin

[4]John Paul II, apostolic exhortation Reconciliatio et paenitentia, no. 16 — an analysis of the relation between personal sin and social structures; the requirement of personal responsibility in the description of structural sin.

is heuristic and descriptive — it points to mechanisms of social entrenchment of evil — not etiological in the sense that the structure itself is a source of moral being. Third, recognizing a structure of sin does not absolve individual responsibility nor the requirement of conversion; on the contrary, it helps direct conversion so that it includes both transformation of conscience and concrete repair and change of practices and regulations. These limits have pastoral significance: they avoid a dualism in which everything is reduced either to "bad people" or to a "bad system." In the Catholic understanding, a correct comprehension of structure is therefore analogical and causally linked to personal choices — hence the necessity of a parallel response: personal confession and social reform.

The Gospel of John supplies conceptual tools that help to recognize the formation of structures. In Johannine terminology central is the understanding of *hamartia* not only as an act but as a state: it is the "sin of the world" (*hamartia tou kosmou*), that is, the common dynamic of rejection of revelation, falsehood, and violence. In the field of the Johannine narrative we observe how single acts — the betrayal of a disciple, the fear of a leader, the political calculation of an official — interweave into a larger mechanism that has institutional effects. It is therefore appropriate that Catholic reflection formulates the category of structures of sin as an analytical tool: it indicates that repeated and mutually reinforcing decisions of people can become entrenched patterns of action, making the choice of good more difficult and requiring repair at the social level. Such a category preserves the primary emphasis: the responsible subject remains the person, and structure is the consequence and carrier of the pressure of human decisions.

In this context it is also necessary to underline the semantic tension of John's designation of the lamb: the title *amnos* (J 1,29) refers to the image of the lamb in many interpretive fields (Passover, Isa 53, cultic rites), and not to the later apocalyptic *arnion*, which in Revelation acquires the dimension of the triumphant victor. This tension helps to understand that Jesus' work touches both the dimension of personal forgiveness of sins and the exposure and breaking of structures that hide and reproduce evil. In theological practice this implies the necessity of simultaneous work on the transformation of consciences and on the transformation of social arrangements — not as two alternatives, but as dimensions of one salvific-moral process.

1.6 Mechanisms of structural evil in the Johannine passion narrative

The passion narrative in the Gospel of John permits one to discern various mechanisms by which personal sin is transformed into structural forms of sin. The passage J 11,48–52 is particularly telling here: the leaders' fear for "the holy place and the nation" and Caiaphas's proposal that "it is better for one man to die for the people" reveal how the logic of institutional preservation can justify the sacrifice of an innocent person. John presents this argument not as a neutral geopolitical diagnosis but as a morally distorted rationalization—a rhetoric that turns the protection of order into an instrument of sacrifice. The Evangelist himself reads Caiaphas's words as prophetic, yet at the same time exposes their cynicism: the text does not translate these utterances into an accusation against the entire Jewish people, but unmasks the logic that employs the language of the "common good" to conceal injustice. In this way John formulates a critique of a mechanism, not an ethnic or religious defamation of a group of people.

Similarly J 12,42–43 discloses the mechanism of social sanction: those who believe in Jesus are afraid to leave the synagogue and "have loved human glory more than the glory of God." This text points to another crucial component of the structure of sin: the pressure to conform and the loss of courage to bear witness.

This is not merely a problem of individuals of weak character; it is a mechanism in which the social reward for silence and conformity reinforces a culture of concealing the truth. John emphasizes that there are believers "in the heart" who nevertheless do not profess publicly—the dispersed obedience to communal norms consolidates a structure in which truth loses its effective power.

The Pilate narrative in John functions as a critique of political calculation that legitimates sacrificing the innocent to preserve order. Pilate's stance—declaring Jesus innocent, handing him over to the crowd, the gesture of washing his hands—reveals the political technique of "diffused responsibility": the final decision is reached in concert with other actors while preserving a narrative of limited options. John does not thereby dilute Pilate's responsibility; on the contrary, he stresses that Pilate had authority and could have acted otherwise, yet chose to preserve his own political position. The narrative shows how institutional and political mechanisms combine to transform an individual choice into a systemic outcome: this portrayal serves to critique practices of sacrificing the innocent in the name of "public peace."

Analysis of these scenes makes it possible to formulate a model of the operation of structures of sin that John, so to speak, plays out in the facts: 1) initiation by single choices that disregard truth; 2) rationalization through the language of the common good or political necessity; 3) institutionalization through procedures, habits, and sanctions; 4) reproduction by rewarding conformity and punishing resistance. This model does not reduce responsibility to an abstract "system": it presents a historical and psychosocial causal chain in which a concrete person—Caiaphas, Pilate, Judas, a member of the crowd—engages in the mechanism, after which the mechanism consolidates his choice and facilitates further similar decisions.

From this perspective the demonic dimension described in John (e.g., the role of *archōn tou kosmou toutou* as inspirer of falsehood and violence) does not function as a direct operator of structures but as an intelligence that suggests and amplifies mendacious justificatory narratives. The Devil in the Johannine narrative is "a liar and a murderer"—he inclines toward the construction of false reasons and the transformation of people into instruments. Yet John's text simultaneously does not remove human responsibility: demonic influence gains access through fear, desire, and prior decisions. Accordingly, the model of how structures operate includes cooperation: demonic suggestion inspires, human consent initiates, and the institution sanctions.

1.7 Personal responsibility under conditions of social pressure

The diffusion of responsibility and the limitation of freedom by a structure do not mean their abolition. The Johannine theology of the human person and of sin highlights the gradations of guilt and freedom. A distinguishing perspective is essential here: freedom can be constrained by fear, social pressure, material coercion, or misinformation, but constrained freedom does not entail the total removal of moral responsibility. Johannine texts show that the conditions under which evil is committed affect the degree of guilt—for example, some believe but hide their faith; others betray for material motives; still others commit betrayal after a long process of internal acquiescence. Moral analysis must take these differences into account: the Church calls for a just judgment that considers both the limitations and the remaining possibilities for choice.

From a practical point of view this means that accountability requires three dimensions of response. First, the dimension of truth: the victim must be heard, the lie must be named, and mechanisms of rationalization exposed. Only the disclosure of truth interrupts the reproduction of structures, because it removes

legitimizing narratives. Second, the dimension of personal responsibility: those who participated in moral or institutional wrongdoing should bear appropriate consequences, including legal and disciplinary measures, insofar as social and ecclesial order is concerned. Third, the reparative dimension (reparatio): the harm done requires concrete repair—protection of victims, redress, and procedural reform that will prevent repetition of the abuse.

John's passion scenes teach that the mechanism of defending an institution at the cost of a victim operates through the moral numbing of conscience and through the instrumentalization of religious or political language. Therefore effective accountability requires a culture that places truth above institutional reputation and that provides mechanisms of oversight and protection for whistleblowers. The Church, according to the Johannine logic of the Lamb, must stand on the side of the victim rather than on the side of institutional self-preservation; this stance implies processes of transparency, independent controls, and authentic contrition where necessary.

In the theological vision repair is linked to conversion: true structural reversal requires a transformation of hearts, which demands the courage of truth-telling, together with a parallel change in the rules governing social life. Without both elements reform remains superficial or short-lived. In this sense a pedagogy of mercy is also essential: purification must not lead to the humiliation of the person or to excluding them from the possibility of conversion; at the same time mercy cannot obscure the necessity of truth and repair. The Johannine Lamb does not remove the sin of the world by silencing guilt or by sanctioning concealment; on the contrary—through his sacrifice he reveals the truth and calls for conversion that is manifested in concrete responsibility.

Finally, practical discernment requires caution regarding the demonization of opponents. John acknowledges the reality of the Evil One's action and uses concepts such as *archōn tou kosmou toutou*, yet qualitatively labeling people as "demonic" contradicts Christian ethics of dignity and tends to reproduce the very logic the evangelist criticizes. Spiritual discernment must be clearly distinguished from psychological, medical, and legal assessment: not every evil is supernatural in character, and where there are medical or criminal grounds, appropriate procedures must be applied. Pastorally, therefore, a distinction is necessary—prayer, spiritual discernment, and sacramental reconciliation cooperate with the requirements of the rule of law, the protection of victims, and institutional reform[3].

In summary: the Johannine passion narrative does not consolidate guilt into a homogeneous accusation against a particular group nor does it shift it onto an abstract system; rather it unmasks the mechanisms by which personal failings and the fears of social self-preservation become entrenched practices of sacrificing the innocent. The theological category of structures of sin, as presented in Church documents and the Catechism, helps to name these mechanisms and to indicate the path of response: truth, responsibility, and repair. Conversion here is both personal and social: human freedom can be limited but never entirely nullified; therefore the Church calls for the courage to acknowledge guilt in truth, to undertake concrete reparative steps, and to build relationships and institutions in accordance with the spirit of the Lamb—service, justice, and love.[1243]

1.8 The Lamb's Cross as revelation, judgment, and victory

At the center of the Johannine narrative the cross is not a random act of violence nor merely the tragic culmination of a conflict. It is an event with multiple theological functions: it reveals the truth about the nature of sin and violence, executes judgment on the "logic of the world," and at the same time actualizes

the victory of love, which takes upon itself the consequences of evil without adopting its logic. From this perspective one must read both the language about the "ruler of this world," i.e. *archōn tou kosmou toutou*, and the account of Judas's betrayal and the words about Jesus' voluntary giving up of his life. Translating these motifs into catechesis and pastoral practice requires a careful distinction between the reality of the Evil One's action and the creaturely and limited nature of his power, as well as the unchanged moral responsibility of persons and the functioning of structures.

1.8.1 "Ruler of this World": a reading of Johannine texts

The Gospel of John uses the expression *archōn tou kosmou toutou* in three key places (J 12,31; 14,30; 16,11), and the first-Johannine theological language frames this triplicity with the broad concept of *kosmos*. In J 12,31 Jesus says: "Now is the judgment of this world. Now *archōn tou kosmou toutou* will be cast out." The context is dramatic: the moment is approaching when the world, in its structural and spiritual opposition to revelation, will show its true face to the innocent Victim. In J 14,30 Jesus announces: "The *archōn tou kosmou toutou* is coming; he has nothing in me" — indicating a relational conflict, not ontological parity; and in J 16,11 he announces the judgment of the "prince of this world," who will be "judged" because of sin and falsehood. In these sayings John emphasizes the reality of the adversary, yet simultaneously his limitation: he is not the creator of the *kosmos*, he does not stand outside God's judgment, nor does he have ultimate power over human freedom. Thus the notion *archōn tou kosmou toutou* can be read as pointing to the personal dimension of resistance against God — the action of an intelligence that exploits human structures — rather than as a cosmological elevation of the adversary to the status of a coeternal deity.

1.8.2 Reality, creatureliness, and limitation of the Evil One

Johannine motifs speak clearly of the "power of the Evil One" and that "the whole *kosmos* lies in the power of the Evil One" (1 J 5,19). Such statements require theological precision: the reality of demonic action does not mean that the Evil One is the creator of the world nor that he possesses independent and absolute dominion over history. The Christian tradition understands demonic beings as created, and therefore limited and incomparable with God. The Evangelist portrays demonic action primarily as falsehood and murder (cf. J 8,44): it is a spiritual dynamic that distorts knowledge, supplies false ends, and legitimates violence. It is parasitic in character, for it exploits human desires, intellectual errors, and existing structures to expand its influence. John also stresses that suggestion, temptation, and accusation do not deprive a person of freedom nor negate his responsibility; the scope of guilt requires individual and prudent discernment. The dominion of the Evil One has been judged by the work of the Son. This truth gives hope and sets the Church's moral perspective: recognition of demonic inspiration can neither justify human sin nor lead to demonizing another person or institution.

1.8.3 J 8,44 and 1 J 5,19: falsehood, murder, "lying in the power of the Evil One"

In J 8,44 Jesus links falsehood with murder: the devil is the "father of lies" and "a murderer of human beings from the beginning." This connection indicates the genetic function of falsehood in the process of violence: first one must dehumanize the victim in thought, then justify their elimination in action. Conversely, 1 J 5,19 states a painful situation: "the whole *kosmos* lies in the power of the Evil One." John does not make of this a pessimistic explanation, but a realistic assertion intended to focus our response: recognition of the state of bondage is a condition for authentic liberation by the Lamb. These texts teach that demonic force manifests primarily where falsehood becomes the norm of social narrative and where systems organize

themselves around violence. John's task is therefore to expose falsehood and to reveal violence in its social and spiritual roots, without reducing it to anthropological determinism or falling into moral relativism.

1.8.4 Judas: J 13,2 and J 13,27 — the process of betrayal and free responsibility

John's portrayal of Judas is a valuable study of the cooperation of personal guilt with demonic influence. In J 13,2 the Evangelist states that "the devil had already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, the thought to betray him." The formula shows an external suggestion that demonic action can introduce. In J 13,27 we read further that after receiving the morsel of bread "then Satan entered into him." John thus presents a process: external promptings, individual decisions, and finally an intensification of demonic influence. However, the evangelic text simultaneously does not excuse Judas from responsibility. Even before the events of the Last Supper Judas participated in actions that indicated his faulty value system (e.g., his attitude toward the common purse). The devilish suggestion finds access to a soul that has partly already adopted the logic of the world — desire, greed, or lust for power. In the light of this process John reads the drama of a person who, receiving an impulse from outside, makes a free choice and turns it into a moral act. The text teaches a twofold truth: demonic influence exists and is real, but it never replaces the human decision that is morally accountable.

This must be developed by two practical remarks. First, the narrative does not allow an alibi: "I was possessed, therefore it was not me." Second, one must not make Judas into an impersonal archetype that "demonizes" the opponent; John rather wishes to show the personal drama and to indicate how betrayal is connected with social mechanisms that later lead to Jesus' death. In this sense Judas' story is a warning: demonic promptings can exploit existing weaknesses and prejudices, without however depriving a person of freedom or personal responsibility.

1.8.5 The cross as acceptance of the consequences of evil without accepting its logic

Understanding the cross in the Johannine perspective requires focus on three dimensions: the voluntariness of laying down life (J 10,18), the vicarious and representative sense of death (J 11,50–52), and its eschatological meaning as judgment upon the "ruler of the world" (J 12,31–32). In J 10,18 Jesus states: "No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again." These words emphasize that the cross is not the fatal result of overwhelming violence but the fruit of a free, intentional self-giving. Contained in this freedom is a paradox: Jesus accepts the consequences of the violence exercised by the world, yet he does not accept its principles — he does not respond with violence, nor does he justify the logic of offering and instrumentalizing a human being. The Caiaphas-like remark (J 11,50–52), although in the high priest's mouth sounds politically cynical, becomes for John a perverse prophetic confession: "It is better for one man to die for the people." The Evangelist adds that these words are not merely political calculation but the fulfillment of God's plan, which makes the death of Jesus a saving, representative act — "that the scattered children of God may be gathered together into one." In this sense the cross is a vicarious act, but this substitution does not consist in taking on guilt as one's own moral responsibility in the sense of confusing person and sin; rather Christ accepts the consequences of the tie of sin: rejection, loneliness, exclusion, and death — in order to transform them and thereby reveal their true face.

J 12,31–32 interprets Jesus' death as the moment of judgment against the "ruler of this world": although the world through its violence seeks to destroy the Son, by that very act it effects its own disclosure and

judgment. The cross therefore is not the triumph of violence but a judgment in which the world's violence is unmasked — its logic is exposed as self-destructive. John shows that this disclosure leads to victory: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." The notion of "lifting up" here links cross and attraction: the cross becomes a magnet of love that reverses the mechanism of sacrifice and summons to conversion.

1.8.6 1 J 1,7; 2,2; 3,5.8: purification, destruction of the devil's works, liberating power

The First Letter of John determines the theological function of blood and sacrifice: "The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 J 1,7), "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 J 2,2), and "The Son of God appeared to destroy sins" and "to destroy the works of the devil" (1 J 3,5.8). These parallel formulas integrate the personal, spiritual, and cosmic dimensions of salvation: the cross cleanses guilt, unmasks and destroys spiritual mechanisms (the works of the devil), and thereby restores people to life in truth and love. The Johannine letter also emphasizes that purification and victory are ontologically effective, yet require reception by faith and perseverance in the word: receiving the gift demands a response.

1.8.7 The Cross as revelation of the truth about violence and the victory of love

From a Johannine perspective the cross is the fullest disclosure of the "logic of the world": it shows that systems of defending one's position, instrumentalizing human beings, and justifying violence ultimately reveal their meaninglessness in the face of love that gives life away. Practically, this is the revelation of two truths simultaneously: the truth about the harm the world is prepared to inflict in order to survive, and the truth about God who identifies with the victim and through that transforms the world. Victory does not consist in the triumph of force but in the transformation of relationships: Jesus' death ceases to be the end of the story; it becomes the beginning of a new logic — a logic of service, love, and truth. This victory has an eschatological dimension: in it the "ruler of this world" has been judged and deprived of final domination, although his influence in history remains felt until the full parousial revelation.

1.8.8 Pastoral and ethical implications: discernment without demagogy

Johannine theology of the cross imposes concrete pastoral demands. First, one must recognize the reality of the Evil One's activity and structures of sin — whether in the form of deceitful narratives or institutional mechanisms — but always without losing sight of the fundamental truth about the createdness and limitation of demonic power. Second, recognition of demonic influence does not absolve moral responsibility: every act remains judged according to human decision. Third, one must not use language of demonization as an ideological weapon against political, religious, or social opponents — demonic characterization as an assessment should refer to actual forms of falsehood and violence, not to people in a depersonalizing manner. Finally, catechesis about the cross must combine spiritual struggle with concrete actions for justice: prayer and spiritual discernment go hand in hand with changing procedures, protecting victims, and repairing structures that facilitate violence.

1.8.9 Conclusion: the Cross as judgment and enduring victory

In the Johannine account the Lamb's cross is simultaneously a disclosure of evil, a judgment upon its logic, and the beginning of its transformation. Jesus accepts the consequences of human sin and demonic

inspiration without accepting their principles. In this way he destroys the power of the "ruler of this world," cleanses the world from sin, and creates the conditions for a new community. This victory is already accomplished in Christ, but its full consummation is eschatological and is realized in the process of conversion of hearts and transformation of social structures. The Church, which lives from this victory, is called both to prayer and discernment and to courageous work removing mechanisms of violence, always in a spirit of mercy that does not degrade a person to a mere "enemy" but sees in them someone called to conversion and renewal.

1.9 The Community of the Lamb: truth, service, and reconciliation

The Gospel according to John in chapters J 13–17 shapes the image of a community meant to be the image and instrument of the work of *amnos* — the Lamb of God — in the world. The foot-washing scene (J 13,1–17) establishes not so much a new ritual practice as a relational constitution: authority understood as domination is to be transformed by service; closeness and touch are to replace exclusion. In the "priestly prayer" (J 17) Jesus asks the Father that the disciples — and through them the whole community — remain in the truth and be sent into the world, rather than remain its hostages. These two motifs — service and mission — define what the Johannine Church is to be: a community that is a sign of truth and a protector of the weak, and at the same time a place of abiding in unity with the Father through the Son.

Foot-washing: a model of service and cleansing. The Johannine description in J 13 emphasizes the paradoxical conditioning of Christ's authority: "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (J 13,1), he uses his authority to serve. The act of washing feet is a symbol of the Lord entering into situations of weakness and hardship of others — consonant with the previously described function of *airō*: Christ "takes upon himself" the burden of the human condition and "removes" its power over people (cf. J 1,29; see also the connection with Isa 53). The foot-washing thus establishes a community whose primary duty is the protection, reconciliation, and rehabilitation of the weak, not their instrumental exploitation for the preservation of the institution. In the light of this scene any communal practice that conceals harm, defends institutional reputation at the expense of victims, or turns "the common good" into a pretext for imposing impunity stands in open contradiction to the Johannine model of communal life.

Fidelity to the truth and the mission of sending (J 17,14–18). Jesus' high request that the disciples not be "of the world" yet be sent into the world formulates the necessary tension: the Church must preserve the truth about God, about itself, and about the neighbor, while at the same time serving and bearing witness in social realities that still bear the stamp of *hamartia* and the activity of the "ruler of this world" (*archōn tou kosmou toutou*). This duality determines that the Church cannot adopt strategies of hiding harm as a way of "protecting" the mission. Being in truth requires transparency, and being sent requires the courage to stand with victims and to undertake difficult structural changes where institutional mechanisms protect perpetrators.

The community as protector of the weak and as institutional self-critique. Johannine texts indicate that evil often operates subtly: through fear of losing one's place, through the logic of "better for the whole community," or through rituals that legitimize exclusion (J 11,48–50; J 12,42–43). In light of this awareness the Church has a duty of particular sensitivity: protecting the harmed requires not only declarations but concrete procedures — immediate protection, medical and psychological support, legal action, and guarantees that those reporting harm will not be subjected to reprisals. At the same time the Church ought to be capable of carrying out internal, rigorous self-criticism where cultural and institutional mechanisms

favor concealing evil. This is both an ethical and a pastoral requirement: without it it is impossible to build a community that authentically reflects the cross-shaped call to love and service.

Personal conversion and structural reform — mutually necessary. The previously outlined distinction between personal sin and structural sin remains theologically and practically significant: structures have no conscience but are the result of many human decisions. Therefore the Church's response must combine two dimensions. The first is the call to conversion of hearts: sincere acknowledgment of one's guilt, use of the sacrament of reconciliation, and authentic transformation of desires and attitudes. The second is concrete reform: transparent procedures for reports, internal and external mechanisms of oversight, protection for reporters, training, changes in disciplinary norms and organizational culture. Both dimensions are complementary: without the transformation of the heart reform may become mere "cosmetics"; without reform personal conversion can easily be suppressed by entrenched structures.

The role of prayer, discernment, and the sacraments. Johannine spirituality presents prayer and the sacraments as means of real transformation: prayer unites with the Father, opens to truth, and strengthens perseverance; the Eucharist nourishes the community so that it can live the logic of sacrifice rather than the logic of sacrificing others; the sacrament of reconciliation enables acknowledgment of guilt and healing. Spiritual discernment helps to distinguish interior temptations, manipulations, and possible spiritual influences. It must, however, be stated with complete clarity: prayer, spiritual discernment, and the sacraments do not replace and must not be used as substitutes for medical or psychological assistance, for protection against further violence, or for appropriate legal procedures. Effective care for the harmed requires a multidisciplinary approach — spiritual, therapeutic, legal, and material — in which the Church cooperates with the appropriate civil services and specialists.

Responsibility and justice — a twofold perspective. The Johannine testimony reminds us that persons are primarily responsible for sin, yet structures disperse blame and can protect perpetrators. Therefore the restoration of justice requires:

- holding individually accountable those who have done wrong;
- transparent disciplinary proceedings and cooperation with civil authorities where actions are punishable;
- making amends to victims, including compensation, rehabilitation, and accompaniment in the process of healing;
- precise prevention and oversight procedures that exclude the instrumentalization of institutions to protect perpetrators. Justice in the Johannine perspective is not merely retribution; it is a condition for the restoration of the right to dignity and a condition for the community to become an authentic sign of reconciliation, and thus an environment in which the work of *amnos* is continued by the disciples.

Discernment of demonic influence and practical action. The Gospel of John recognizes the demonic dimension as a reality operating through falsehood and the instigation of violence and murder (J 8,44; cf. *archōn tou kosmou toutou*). Theologically one must maintain a clear distinction: demonic influence may inspire evil, but it does not remove human responsibility; structures are not demons per se. In pastoral practice this means that spiritual discernment, prayer, and spiritual guidance have their place, but they can never be used to avoid the necessity of concrete actions — medical care, psychological support, protection, or legal procedures. In particular: when harm has occurred, the first priority is the safety and health of the victim; further spiritual actions should be undertaken with the victim's consent and must not delay or replace protective and legal procedures.

The “already and not yet” tension as a pastoral horizon. Johannine soteriology and the Johannine epistles contain clear statements that must be read together: “The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 J 1,7) and “The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, that he might destroy the works of the devil” (1 J 3,8) display the “already” dimension — the objective victory of Christ over the powers of death, cleansing through his sacrifice, and the gift of the Spirit. At the same time, however, “the whole world lies in the power of the Evil One” (1 J 5,19) points to the “not yet” dimension — the ongoing resistance of sin, the real presence of structures and practices contrary to the Gospel, and the necessity of continued communal effort. This tension formulates a practical principle: the Church must live with confidence in the victory of the Lamb (hope and assurance of salvation), while simultaneously working with determination and humility to remove the effects of sin here and now (perseverance, humility, and concrete reparative actions). This is not a contradiction but a dynamic tension that obliges simultaneous witness and work.

1.9.1 Practical pastoral and institutional conclusions

- Formation: ongoing formation of clergy and laity in protection, discernment, and pastoral ethics; introduction of mandatory training in procedures for handling reports of harm.
- Procedures: clear, accessible, and independent procedures for reporting and investigating cases; cooperation with state authorities; protection of whistleblowers; public communication of decisions and their justifications where this does not violate the dignity of victims.
- Protection of victims: immediate physical safeguarding; access to medical and psychological care; accompaniment in legal processes; financial and spiritual support over the longer term.
- Sacramental and spiritual support: access to the sacraments as an element of healing, forms of communal support; prayer for the perpetrator and for victims, but not at the expense of justice.
- Transparency and accountability: open reporting of preventive measures and case outcomes; clear disciplinary criteria; a culture that does not glorify “institutional protection” at the expense of persons. All these actions must be rooted in the spirit of *amnos*: Christ takes upon himself the burden of the world in order to free it; the Church must have the courage to imitate this mode of action, and not to protect its structures at the expense of the poor and the harmed.

1.9.2 Mature concluding synthesis

The Johannine visions of *amnos* and *arnion* display two related aspects of the same mysterious work: the Lamb accepts death and conquers by love, at the same time creating a community meant to be a living sign of that victory. The Church, as a community of disciples, is called to service, to life in truth, and to the protection of the weak. In practice this means the necessity of authentic conversion of heart and uncompromising reform of structures — in a spirit of forgiveness, but also of justice and accountability. Prayer, discernment, and the sacraments are necessary because they reinforce following the Lamb; however, they are not substitutes for professional medical care, psychological assistance, or legal procedures. When the Church combines love with truth and service with responsibility, it becomes a space in which the “sin of the world” loses its power, and people receive real opportunities for healing and full participation in communal life. Such a community is both a sign of the eschatological “already” (the victory of Christ) and an instrument for working on the “not yet” (the repair of history), until the day when victory becomes fully visible.

1.10 Notes and bibliography

1.10.1 Notes

1.10.2 Bibliography

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2 Glossary of key terms

airō – **airō**: to lift, take, or remove; the verb in John 1:29

amnos – **amnos**: “lamb”; the term used in John 1:29–36

archōn tou kosmou toutou – **archōn tou kosmou toutou**: “ruler of this world”; Johannine designation of the adversary

arnion – **arnion**: the “lamb” of Revelation, the image of the victorious Lamb

diabolos – **diabolos**: devil, accuser, and father of lies

hamartia – **hamartia**: sin, especially “the sin of the world” in John 1:29

kosmos – **kosmos**: the world as creation and as an order resisting the light