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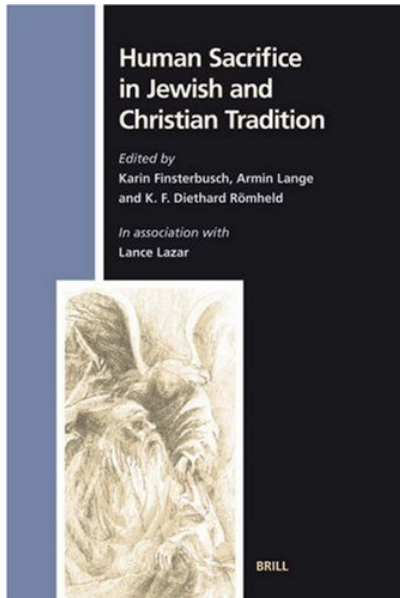

Finsterbusch, Karin, Armin Lange, and K. F. Diethard Römheld, eds.

Human Sacrifice in Jewish and Christian Tradition

Numen Book Series 112

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The impetus for the creation of *Human Sacrifice in Jewish and Christian Tradition* goes back to a 2002 conference held on the campus of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, entitled "'Human Sacrifice in Ancient Mediterranean Religion and Its Reflections in Modernity.'" Several of the contributors to the present volume were involved with the conference. In addition to the chapters written by these participants, (Armin Lange, Bennie Reynolds, Christopher Roberts, and Yaakov Ariel), eleven other essays were added to the lineup to produce what is an excellent and comprehensive volume covering ancient and modern perspectives on human immolation. Progressing systematically through the fifteen chapters, the following comments are provided with the intent of summarizing, evaluating, and complementing the diverse presentations.

Chapter 1, "Ritual Killing and Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East," by Beate Pongratz-Leisten, considers a cluster of ancient Near Eastern rituals and concepts that potentially formed the theological background that eventually gave rise to the notions of the Suffering Servant's atoning death (Isa 53:10) and subsequently to Jesus' expiatory immolation for humanity. The specific elements of the conceptual matrix embodied by the sacrifice of the Christian savior, each of which has a corresponding ancient Near Eastern or wider Mediterranean, though not necessarily sacrificial, precedent, are

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"restoration of order, expiation, atonement, and redemption, as well as the vicarious nature of the sacrificial act" (4). Two things are particularly important to note: (1) several of the concepts discussed throughout the well-researched presentation are found elsewhere in the volume (e.g., scapegoating, self-sacrifice, martyrdom, the rabbinic view of the Aqedah, and the Pauline perspective on the sacrifice of Christ); and (2) the author presents one of the most extensive, though still relatively brief, treatments of sacrificial theory contained in the volume. In light of these issues, it is fitting that Pongratz-Leisten begins the collection of essays.

While I have very distinct views on the essence of ancient Near Eastern human sacrifice, particularly because I do not limit human immolation to the concept of requiring a divine recipient (see my "How in Ancient Times They Sacrificed People: Human Immolation in the Eastern Mediterranean Basin with Special Emphasis on Ancient Israel and the Near East" [Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2006]), only a few limited comments are in order here. First, a treatment of Neo-Assyrian contracts referencing the burning of children would have enhanced the discussion of substitution in legal contexts (28–30), for one comes face to face with the notion that a breach of conduct necessitates the slaying (i.e., sacrifice) of children, specifically by means of burning them to deities (Tatlock, 89–93). The involvement of deities as recipients in these passages corresponds to Pongratz-Leisten's restricted definition of human sacrifice (10). Second, adding to the discussion of Ashurbanipal's killing of Teumman and the offering of his head (20–21), the Rassam Cylinder should be consulted, since it describes the execution of rebels by Ashurbanipal as a *kispu*-offering (Tatlock, 96–97). Thus, there are parallel references to human sacrifice from the time of Ashurbanipal. Third, Pongratz-Leisten opines that "in Mesopotamia there is no direct connection between sacrifice and purification rites" (32). One may note that there is at least one connection between the two in the Hittite sphere of influence, that is, the sacrifice of a human and animals for the purification of the army (*KUB* 17.28; cf. the discussion in Tatlock, 107–8, 111). Fourth, the statement that "the phantasies of cannibalism" is the only form of cannibalism "attested in the ancient Near East" (11) should be qualified in light of the current perspective on the remains excavated at Domuztepe, presently considered indicative of cannibalism.[1]

1. The osteological analysis of the prehistoric material from Domuztepe, Turkey, was recently discussed at the 2007 ASOR conference in San Diego. One of the presenters and the principal investigator of the skeletal remains, Suellen Gauld, suggested in an earlier fellowship application (http://www.smc.edu/Projects/37/Sabbaticals_and_Fellowships_Committee/Professor_Gaulds_Application.doc): "To date [2004], my examination of the more than three thousand bone fragments comprising the sample shows that all individuals interred in the pit suffered considerable peri- and post mortem trauma. The presence of impact fractures, cutmarks, chopmarks, and thermal exposure on all parts of the skeleton bear witness to these traumas. While the exact

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Gabriele Weiler's "Human Sacrifice in Greek Culture" is, despite its relatively short length for such an expansive subject, a comprehensive and commendable survey of the occurrences of human sacrifice in Greek literature and to a lesser extent an overview of its appearance in material culture. As with any survey, Weiler is unable to cover the subject matter in great detail, and there are several lengthier works to which readers can turn, such as the now dated but thorough monograph cited by Weiler: Hughes's *Human Sacrifice in Ancient Greece* (London: Routledge, 1991). Concerning the content of the survey, one would have expected an explanation of Greek *pharmakos*, if nothing else but to apprise the reader of the perspective that there is no conclusive evidence to suggest that the Greeks performed the procedure by sacrificing a human scapegoat, that is, with the exception of a late tradition regarding the rite at Massilia (see Hughes, 158–65; M. Green, *Dying for the Gods* [Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2001], 45). Nevertheless, the *pharmakos* rite has been important to the discussion of Greek human sacrifice and therefore merits elaboration. In general, Weiler's chapter is praiseworthy in light of the fact that it distills a significant amount of data into a succinct and persuasive narrative. The categorization of Greek human sacrifice into nine models is particularly insightful and represents a useful contribution to the field.

Chapter 3, "The Theological Implications of Child Sacrifice," by Michaela Bauks, focuses on two prominent passages that refer to the burnt sacrifice (or near sacrifice) of a son and daughter at the hands of their fathers, Abraham and Jephthah. Not only does Bauks juxtapose Gen 22 and Judg 11 in examining the theological underpinnings of the narratives, but she briefly explores several, though not all, passages in the Hebrew corpus relevant to child immolation (see, e.g., 1 Kgs 16:34 regarding the probable sacrifice of Hiel's firstborn and youngest sons). Bauks concludes that the stories of Abraham and Jephthah reflect the fundamental message that humans, as created beings, are utterly dependent upon their creator, who has an "infinite" capacity to demand of his creatures whatever he deems necessary, in these cases, beloved children.

I agree with much of what Bauks states concerning child immolation in the Hebrew Bible, such as the deduction that Jephthah's sacrificial vow receives divine approval and is not an aberration (74). Indeed, had Yahweh disapproved, Jephthah would not have been victorious on the battlefield, which was the condition precipitating the sacrifice. There are, however, some points of disagreement, both interpretively and methodologically.

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sequence of their injuries has yet to be reconstructed, my working hypothesis is that each individual was killed by a severe blunt force trauma to the side of the head, after which, the bodies were systematically disarticulated. It then appears the body parts were cooked to remove flesh and the bones were broken apart to expose their internal marrow cavaties. In blunt terms, the skeletal evidence all boils down to a case of ancient human cannibalism."

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Regarding the former, the notion that the divine recipient of the burnt sacrifice is undeclared in each of the central narratives is misleading (75), especially in reference to Judg 11, where Yahweh's connection to the immolation is unambiguously expressed (11:31). As for the latter, there exists a significant chronological disparity between the burnt sacrifice of 2 Kgs 3 and the literature to which the passage is compared as a means of explaining the narrative: references to Phoenician/Punic child sacrifice in the works of Eusebius, who cites Philo, and Diodorus of Sicily (80–82). This is particularly problematic in light of the current paucity of evidence for child sacrifice from Phoenicia proper (see below). What is more, the frequent use of the term "pagan" (75, 81, and 84) to identify non-Yahwistic cultic practices is inappropriate due its pejorative connotations and should be abandoned for more neutral terminology. In fact, the use of "pagan" to describe Greco-Roman religious customs is not without its difficulties (see A. D. Lee, *Pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity: A Sourcebook* [London: Routledge, 2000], 10–11), but it is at least preferable to anachronistically applying the term to non-Yahwistic religions of the Iron Age.

Chapter 4, "The First-Born between Sacrifice and Redemption in the Hebrew Bible," by Karin Finsterbusch sets out to explore four essential issues concerning Yahweh's claim on the firstborn children of Israel: (1) the extent to which sacrifice is commanded; (2) the semantics of firstborn terminology; (3) the gender of the firstborn to be sacrificed or redeemed; and (4) the function of firstborn immolation in the Israelite cult. The exploration is primarily centered on passages from the Torah, the biblical section that deals most frequently with firstborn immolations of this type (Exod 13; 22; 34; Deut 15; Num 18), although limited space is provided for an examination of additional occurrences of firstborn sacrificial language (Ezek 20; Neh 10; 2 Kgs 3; Mic 6). Perhaps the most insightful aspects of the analysis relate to the attempt to decipher the specific gender of the child and parent addressed in the various legal texts (e.g., Hebrew *bekor* need not refer only to male firstborns; cf. Num 18:15) and the effort to situate firstborn immolation into a wider theoretical framework concerning its sacrificial function within Yahwism. Finsterbusch concludes that it functions fundamentally as an offering given in response to Yahweh's lawful ownership of firstborn animals and children. This latter trajectory of the chapter embodies a difficult task, given the inconsistent representation of the function of firstborn sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible, and one would be justified in examining Gen 22 and Judg 11 in conjunction with the legal descriptions of firstborn sacrifice, as Bauks has done in the preceding chapter. It is interesting to note that, unlike the legislative texts, the narrative accounts of firstborn sacrifice portray the immolations primarily as burnt sacrifices that function differently in each passage. Perhaps the ambiguity of the role of firstborn sacrifice reflects the notion that one could fulfill Yahweh's demand for firstborn

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sacrifice in a variety of ways, such as Micah's query as to the viability of immolating his firstborn to atone for his iniquity.

Chapter 5, " 'They Burn Their Sons and Daughters—That Was No Command of Mine' (Jer 7:31)," by Armin Lange, engages the Deuteronomistic polemic against child sacrifice that surfaced in ancient Israelite traditions following the destruction of the temple in 586 B.C.E., concluding that such rhetoric, as specifically seen in the Deuteronomistic redaction of Jeremiah (7:31; 19:5; 32:35), attempted to discourage the rebuilding of the temple in the late sixth century by arguing, in part, that what was once thought to be appropriately practiced (child sacrifice to Yahweh) was in fact performed unto Baal. Hence, the *molk*-sacrifices of Jerusalem were once Yahwistic but were later attributed to Baal in an attempt to dissuade their continuation and to counter the perspective that Israel's salvation rests upon the temple cult of Zion. I agree wholeheartedly with the basic deduction that immolating children *lammolek* was an acceptable form of preexilic Yahwistic worship that was subsequently denounced as iniquitous and distorted in the guise of Baal veneration as well as Molek (not *molk*-sacrifice) worship.[2] It should be noted, however, that such a conclusion was reached independently by means of a divergent path, particularly by examining Yahweh's association with the Jerusalem Tophet.

Before presenting my perspective on the nature of *lammolek*, which will be discussed below, it is important to emphasize that, despite Lange's careful use of extrabiblical data in reconstructing indigenous human sacrificial practices, it is advisable to exercise even further caution, especially in reference to three issues: (1) the supposed occurrence of child sacrifice in the text from Ugarit (122–23) is far from definitive, given that the word denoting the sacrificial victim in line 31' is damaged and can be read as indicating a male, [*d*]*kr*, or firstborn, [*b*]*kr*, human or animal (Tatlock, 145–49); (2) the supportive evidence from Crete that Lange, following Hennessy, cites in favor of interpreting the Amman Airport structure as a site of human sacrifice is highly suspect in terms of the concept of blood loss from a sacrificial slaying affecting bone discoloration when fired (see Hughes, 17; Tatlock, 49, 154–58); and (3) the reconstruction of an indigenous Phoenician practice of child sacrifice in Syro-Palestine has not been adequately substantiated to date. The

2. There are, conversely, some points of contrast between the two perspectives. For instance, Lange's description of Yahweh's apparent disapproval of Jephthah's sacrifice because of the lack of a verbal response to Jephthah's vow (119) is, in my estimation, erroneous, inasmuch as Yahweh's actions speak louder than words. As expressed above in reference to Bauk's presentation, by providing the victory, Yahweh fulfills his commitment to the arrangement, thereby affirming his acceptance of the intended sacrifice. One senses from Lange's presentation that he views the Deutoronomistic authors as antithetical to the notion of child sacrifice in general (see 110, 128), a view that does not adequately take into account several examples of child sacrifice within the Deuteronomistic corpus, such as *herem*-warfare (Tatlock, 235–38).

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perception that Punic sacrifice derived from the Phoenician homeland may or may not correspond to reality. Currently it is unclear, despite the overwhelming evidence of Punic child immolation (Tatlock, 72–74). Nevertheless, Lange is correct in noting that, "of what has been found so far, there seem to be no archaeological remains of the child sacrifices practiced in iron age Israel" (119); one might add that neither child nor adult sacrificial remains from that period have been clearly identified from ancient Israel. Thus, first millennium B.C.E. Phoenician and Israelite rites can be posited only from literary sources. However, earlier examples from the Chalcolithic to Middle Bronze eras have been discovered in the southern Levant, mainly in the form of built-in burials (Tatlock, 145–61).[3] It is important to recognize, *contra* Lange (119), that burning need not be evident in burial remains in order to interpret them as indicative of sacrifice. Rather than emphasize burning as the criterion upon which sacrificial interpretations are based,[4] one can speak with much more confidence about the sacrificial nature of human remains that have been incorporated into building projects. This is due to the likelihood of premeditated slaughter rather than coincidental death corresponding to the construction of building complexes.

Chapter 6, "Molek: Dead or Alive?" by Bennie Reynolds, is a philological analysis of the radicals *mlk* as they appear in Phoenician/Punic and biblical texts. It concludes that the consonants form a causative participle derivative of the root *hlk* in each context, thereby denoting a sacrificial term rather than a divine name. Hence, his study represents a return to Eissfeldt's thesis that Molek should be put to rest once and for all. What is more, Molek or *molk*-sacrifice, depending upon the interpretation, has come to dominate the examination of biblical human immolation, when, in actuality, references to *mlk* and child sacrifice are few and constitute only a small fraction of Israelite human sacrificial practices. Reynolds considers these biblical occurrences, building his case against Molek by arguing, for instance, that the *l*- preposition attached to *mlk* can be considered a *lamed revaluationis*, meaning "like" or "as." Therefore, a parent sacrifices a child "as" a *molk*-sacrifice, not "to" the god Molek. This is certainly a plausible interpretation when dealing with the form *lmlk*, which is the most frequently occurring construction of the word in Hebrew, but a discussion of the one reference to *mlk* without *l*- is conspicuously absent in Reynolds's examination, which states explicitly that *lmlk* is the only form in which *mlk* appears in the Bible (144). Leviticus 20:5, is significant, however, for, following Day, Heider, and Schmidt, the notion of "playing the harlot after the Molek" (Lev 20:5) is a Hebrew construction particularly indicative of idolatrous relationships with deities (cf.

3. This terminology is taken from Ellis's *Foundation Deposits in Ancient Mesopotamia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 35–38.
4. Scholarship from the turn of the twentieth century tended to focus on jar burials as a key component of their sacrificial typology (Tatlock, 150).

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Exod 34:15-16), not a phrase used to modify a type of sacrifice (Tatlock, 210–20).[5] Nevertheless, as already stated, I reject the reality of the god Molek in ancient Israel for an alternative reason: while Molek is portrayed as the god of the Jerusalem Tophet, this is a propagandistic device meant to mask the original rite of human sacrifice to Yahweh at the locale. Such an interpretation is founded upon Yahweh's association with the Tophet in Isa 30:33, which most likely refers to Yahweh as the *melek* (king), the title that was later distorted to form the word *molek* (on the distortion, see Day, following Geiger, 56–58, 84; *contra* Reynolds, 143).

As with preceding chapters, it is necessary to mention a few points of clarification. First, it must be reiterated that the interpretation of the cremated bones from the Amman Airport structure, which is based upon the skeletal remains from Crete, is debatable in terms of bone discoloration resulting from blood loss. In chapter 2 of this volume Wieler does not elaborate in great detail but nonetheless indicates the questionable nature of the conclusions derived from the excavations at Anemospilia, Crete (36). Reynolds extends the discussion of bone discoloration to address the Punic cremations of young children, positing the idea that Punic children were apparently slaughtered prior to cremation. The bone analyses of the Punic burials at Carthage and Sousse have not been successful, conversely, in ascertaining the moment of death in relation to the time of cremation, although the consistent burn patterns demonstrate that the children were typically immobilized when set on fire (Benichou-Safar, "Sur l'incinération des enfants aux Tophets de Carthage et de Sousse," *RHR* 205 [1988]: 57–68). Second, the Phoenician homeland's connection to *molk*-sacrifice, which Reynolds emphasizes (148), is currently tenuous at best, for the so-called Tophet at Tyre has, in contrast to initial reports, not shown clear signs of a well-established rite of infant sacrifice, or infant cremation, for that matter. With the exception of a fetus, the skeletal remains are from adults and juveniles (see Tatlock, 72–74). While the Nebi Yunis inscription (RES 367) almost certainly refers to some form of *molk*-sacrifice, as Reynolds discusses, it is an isolated find and its late date, approximately third to second centuries B.C.E., may reflect a Punic to Phoenician influence rather than the other way around. This is not to say that Phoenicia will never yield evidence of human immolation in the form of *molk*-sacrifice, but the current state of knowledge necessitates reserved judgment. As is apparent in these limited comments, I do not see any compelling reason to connect Punic *molk*-sacrifice to biblical *mlk*.

Chapter 7, "Jewish Views of Human Sacrifice in the Hellenistic and Roman Period," by Katell Berthelot, evaluates the significance of human immolation in the Jewish textual

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5. John Day, *Molech: A God of Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 82; George C. Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 233–45; Brian B. Schmidt, "Molech," *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*.

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traditions between 200 B.C.E. and 100 C.E.. Canaanite child immolation, the sacrifice of Jephthah's now named daughter, Seila, and the near immolation of Isaac factor most prominently in Berthelot's presentation. Based upon late Second Temple perspectives on these and other stories of sacrifice, the author detects three basic motifs in the Jewish literature of the period: (1) human sacrifice as an abominable act practiced by the enemies of the Jews was not a significant issue, as it had been in the minds of the writers of Deuteronomy; and (2) the role of demons as the recipients or instigators of human sacrifice becomes important, (3) as does the valorization of self-sacrifice. One of the most beneficial aspects of Berthelot's analysis is that the literary traditions are analyzed in terms of the sociopolitical milieu in which they arose. For example, the fact that non-Jews are not often denounced as practitioners of human immolation, despite the occurrence of accusations referring to other perceived acts of impropriety, such as infanticide, indicates that human sacrifice was not a significant practice in the Greco-Roman world at that time. Self-sacrifice, moreover, becomes significant in the Jewish community at a point in time when it was besieged by foreign oppression. In such a situation, the willingness of the sacrificial victim to submit valiantly to immolation might have engendered Jewish resistance against Roman occupation.

Chapter 8, "Gender Difference and the Rabbis," by Tal Ilan, explores rabbinic texts from roughly the second to ninth centuries C.E. as they interpret the story of Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter; other accounts of human immolation enter the rabbinic discussions as the judge's actions are analyzed in terms of their acceptability. The fundamental element of Ilan's thesis is that modern conceptualizations of the episode of daughterly sacrifice correspond very closely to the views of the rabbis (e.g., the rabbis in the Tanhuma give Jephthah's daughter the opportunity to speak in an attempt to save her own life when no one takes up her cause). Thus the authors use a technique analogous to an interpretive strategy found in contemporary gender studies: providing a voice to marginalized women. The modern view that Jephthah transgressed divine law by his illegal sacrifice is, moreover, paralleled in rabbinic discourse, but the rabbis not only implicate Jephthah; they also chasten the Israelite high priest, Phinehas for his failure in restraining the judge.

Peter Lampe's "Human Sacrifice and Pauline Christology" will be viewed by many as a controversial piece, for it argues against the perspectives that within the Pauline stratum of the New Testament the death of Jesus is portrayed as an atonement sacrifice and as a reinterpreted binding of Isaac, or Aqedah (Gen 22). This is not to state, conversely, that Lampe does not find in Paul any references to Christ as a sacrificial victim; indeed, he deduces that Paul uses other sacrificial imagery within the multifaceted portrayal of the crucifixion; however, the imagery resonates neither with the Aqedah nor with atonement. Paul, Lampe suggests, describes the sacrifice of Jesus in relation to the Passover lamb as well as in terms of the sacrificial animals of Exod 24, whose blood facilitated the

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inauguration of a new covenant and whose flesh and blood served as the objects of a communal meal. Therefore, Exod 24 was the background for early Christian perceptions of the fundamental communal meal instituted by Jesus before his death—the blood of Jesus in the Eucharist facilitates a new covenant. Eucharist, furthermore, is an important aspect of Lampe's analysis, for he concludes that Pauline literature does not represent the rite as a re-enactment of a sacrifice by which Christ is physically embodied in the sacramental elements. The latter is a post-Pauline development.

Chapter 10, "The Collective Suicides in the Persecutions of 1096 as Sacrificial Acts," by Rainer Walz, is the first of several contributions in the final section of the book, "Human Sacrifice in Medieval and Modern Judeo-Christian Traditions." Some readers might find the subject of Walz's essay surprising, since it investigates the theological underpinnings of Ashkenazic suicide and familial slaughter in the face of the Christian persecutions of the First Crusade. The sources analyzed by Walz (i.e., chronicles and poetry) explain how Jewish men and women literally sacrificed (as described, e.g., by the traditional Hebrew word for immolation, *zabaḥ*) their children and themselves in order to avoid, or even to expiate for, forced conversion to Christianity. This performance of human sacrifice by the practitioners of a religious tradition that had long since abandoned it around the sixth century B.C.E. might astonish the reader, principally because it is unexpected. Not only does Walz establish the theoretical framework for understanding these acts of sacrificial martyrdom, but the immolations are contextualized within the broader framework of what in Jewish tradition fostered the parents' actions as well as how these violent acts were subsequently interpreted. The collective suicide in the late first century C.E. at Masada will quickly come to mind as readers encounters this chapter, and it is precisely this event that served as a model for the sacrificial slayings of 1096. The story of Masada had already been circulating among the Jewish community by means of the Sefer Josippon. Therein, the Masada deaths are explained as immolations.

Chapter 11, "God's Sacrifice of Himself as a Man," by Jasper Hopkins, engages Anselm's *Cur dues homo*, or *Why God Became a [God]-Man* (as translated by Hopkins, 246–47), by considering eight central discourses between the monk Anselm and his less-astute fellow ascetic Boso. After elucidating Anselm's fundamental perspective on the necessity of Jesus being both human and divine in order for the sacrificial act to have been successful, Hopkins addresses six misconceptions of Anselm's treatise, such as the perspective of certain feminist scholars that Anselm portrays God as a sadistic ruler demanding the life of his son, which in no way could be construed as a loving act. Hopkins counters that Anselm strikes a fine balance in his work between God's need to implement justice and his merciful work of self-sacrifice. One of the important features of the chapter is that Hopkins situates *Cur dues homo* within its historical milieu, the late eleventh century C.E., suggesting that Anselm's view corresponds to a world in which the systems of feudalism

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and ecclesiastical penance existed. In other words, the one "promotes the idea that honor is due to an individual in proportion to his rank or social position or ontological degree of perfection," whereas the other "fosters the notion that penance must be done for each sin and that the penance must be proportional to the gravity of the sinful act" (256). In terms of the crucifixion, "only God *can* make such a payment; but only man *ought to* make the payment. Therefore, if payment is to be made, it will have to be made by a God-man" (242, emphasis original).

Chapter 12, "Kierkegaard's 'Fear and Trembling,' the Sacrifice of Isaac, and the Critique of Christendom," by Christopher Roberts, like the previous chapter, investigates the historical context in which one author's perception of sacrifice gained meaning, but to a much greater extent than that addressed above. Here Roberts places Kierkegaard's analysis of the Aqedah in its nineteenth-century Danish environment as he illuminates the author's critique of Christianity at that time, a critique that began in the wake of the establishment of a constitutionally recognized church, the *Folke Kirken*. Kierkegaard places great significance upon reading the Aqedah as it unfolds rather than reading the entire narrative in light of its resolution. By exploring four hypothetical Abrahamic figures (the philosophical, confessional, ascetic, and faithless Abrahams), all of whom fail to accomplish the prescribed task appropriately, Kierkegaard attempts to show that Christians of his era were much too greatly consumed with abiding by societal norms (*det Almene*), than with true faith, as Roberts explains: "[b]y delineating the felicity conditions of a proper sacrifice, Kierkegaard presents his case against Christendom, in particular the compromises between church and state that reduce religion to the generalized norms of *det Almene*" (272).

Chapter 13, "Viktor von Weizsäcker: 'Euthanasia' and Experiments on Human Beings' [Part I: 'Euthanasia'] (1947)," which is introduced by Udo Benzenhöfer and Wilhelm Rimpau, focuses on the ethics of euthanasia in the wake of Nazi practices in World War II. Despite the relevancy of Weizsäcker's treatment for the study of medical ethics, I am hard-pressed to ascertain the justification for including it in this volume. The editors note that it parallels the chapter on capital punishment by Styers and that Benzenhöfer and Rimpau situate the work "into the broader context of human sacrifice" (xii). The latter two scholars do not, however, substantially achieve this contextualization; instead, much of the discussion of human sacrifice in the introduction to the chapter is a verbatim reproduction of Weizsäcker's statements. As for Weizsäcker's presentation, little discussion is given to religious perspectives on immolation. Thus, the chapter significantly departs from the overall tenor of the volume, including the presentation provided by Styers. Nevertheless, some readers may find the discussion useful as a theoretical discussion of immolation.

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Chapter 14, "Still Ransoming the First-Born Sons?" by Yaakov Ariel, carries the subject matter addressed in Finsterbusch's chapter on the sacrifice and redemption of firstborn Israelites into the contemporary world, suggesting that the rite has reached unprecedented levels today. Ariel raises several intriguing points about the practice in contemporary Judaism, particularly that the redemption ceremony (*Pidyon Haben*), which takes place approximately one month after birth, is not only a rare continuation of the cultic practices derived from temple-based Judaism but is the one element in modern Jewish liturgy that requires a priestly officiant. According to Ariel, the persistence of the practice is a result of a fundamental fear that the firstborn son requires added protection from evil, as the blessing from the ritual quoted by Ariel illustrates: "May God bless you and protect you.… God is your protector, your right side shadow, God will protect you from all evil, and save your life" (314).

Chapter 15, "Slaughter and Innocence: The Rhetoric of Sacrifice in Contemporary Arguments Supporting the Death Penalty," by Randall Styers, begins by expounding upon the centrality of blood atonement in Christian thought, especially within American evangelicalism; Styers later demonstrates that this concept serves to underpin the theological justification of the death penalty for some Christian proponents. This, however, is only one of the aspects of sacrificial logic that Styers identifies in his narrative. Indeed, following a treatment of the parallels noted by McBride and Smith between Girard's theory on sacrifice and the function of capital punishment in contemporary America, a significant portion of the chapter is devoted to emphasizing how secular and religiously based pro–death penalty arguments embody Girard's conceptualization of sacrifice. Girard specifically developed the notion, based upon Greek scapegoat rites, that human sacrifice functions as a channel for societal violence that, if left unmitigated by immolation, would manifest itself in some other fashion. Styers particularly focuses upon the sacrificial logic that advances the rhetoric that the death of the innocent (i.e., the scapegoat) is acceptable for the sake of a greater societal good. Hence, as some death-penalty supporters argue, some innocent people might fall victim to the justice system, but capital punishment ultimately benefits society.

This chapter is markedly distinct from Weizsäcker's presentation, inasmuch as Styers explicitly addresses contemporary Christian perceptions of, among other things, the expiatory nature of capital punishment and the significance of the immolation of Jesus for pro– and anti–death penalty advocates. Given these foci, it corresponds perfectly to the overall tone of the volume. As for the particular tenor of Styers's piece, it subtly advocates for the abolishment of the death penalty in the United States, especially because of the inaccuracy of a justice system that wrongly slays the innocent along with the guilty. Styers is particularly shocked by Christians, who, like Hertz, utilize the execution of Christ as an archetype for current capital punishment cases (348–49).

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While preparing review, my attention was drawn to a fascinating conceptualization of a state-sponsored execution as an instance of human immolation. The imagery is poignant and adequately complements the analysis provided by Styers. Thus, brief mention of the hanging of Saddam Hussein is in order. According to BBC broadcaster, William Crawley (http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/ni/2007/01/saddam_a_human_sacrifice.html), "On meeting a young Muslim in east Belfast today, I wished him 'Eid mubarak'. We talked about whether the execution of Saddam Hussein has dishonoured Eid. He assured me it had not. This, he said, was the perfect day for a 'human sacrifice', and Saddam an appropriate offering." Hussein himself perpetuated the concept of his immolation by describing his foreseeable death as such. In a written statement attributed to him by the BBC, the inmate said: "I sacrifice myself. If God wills it, he will place me among the true men and martyrs" (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/6212393.stm). Such words, coupled with the correspondence between the date of execution and the Sunni Eid al-Adha, when the near immolation of Abraham's scion is commemorated, fostered a sacrificial interpretation of his execution (http://www.salon.com/opinion/feature/2006/12/30/saddam/print.html). As this case illustrates and as Styers shows, sacrifice and execution are not mutually exclusive categories. The associations attached to a given slaying allow the ritual slaughter to move between both groupings. The example of the crucifixion of Jesus demonstrates further that the executioners need not view the slaying as an act of immolation in order for it to be considered a sacrifice. This is precisely what is fascinating about the Christian conceptualization of immolation—the Romans unwittingly participated in a sacrificial act.

In conclusion, I wish to express my admiration for this fine collection of essays. The work is unprecedented in regard to the comprehensive treatment it has provided on Jewish and Christian, as well as a few additional cultural, traditions on human immolation from antiquity to modernity. No single scholar could hope to embody the expertise brought together in this single volume. While I have noted some points of contention, I recommend it without reservation. It should serve as an essential read for future examinations of human immolation in the biblical and postbiblical traditions. It certainly complements another of Brill's recent additions to sacrificial studies, which, however, is more narrowly focused: Ed Noort and Eibert Tigchelaar, eds., *The Sacrifice of Isaac* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

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