

The Son-Giving Formula in the Epistle to Diognetus: Tracing Its Origin to the Akedah Tradition¹

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Abstract

While recent scholarship on the Epistle to Diognetus has focused on its rhetoric, little attention has been given to its reliance on the Akedah tradition (Genesis 22). This study investigates how the epistle appropriates the "Son-giving formula"—a Christological motif cluster rooted in Romans 8:32 and John 3:16–17—as a governing theological script. Employing an intertextual framework based on Richard Hays's concept of metalepsis, the paper argues that the epistle does not merely repeat New Testament language but creatively redeploys its underlying Jewish sacrificial logic.

A close analysis of Diognetus 7–10 reveals a dynamic theological progression mirroring the Akedah's themes of divine initiative and beloved sonship. First, Diognetus 7:4–5 reframes the "sending" of the Son not as coercion (*bia*) but as persuasion (*peitho*). Second, Diognetus 9:2 intensifies the substitutionary logic of the Akedah into the "Sweet Exchange," presenting the Son as a ransom. Finally, Diognetus 10:2 transforms this soteriology into an ethical imperative, calling believers to imitate God's self-giving nature. Consequently, this study demonstrates that the Akedah served as a living paradigm for the early church, bridging the gap between apostolic confession and second-century apologetics. The Epistle to Diognetus thus stands as a testament to a "creative fidelity," retaining the soteriological logic of the New Testament while expressing it through a refined idiom of love and ransom.

Keywords: the Akedah tradition, the Epistle to Diognetus, the Son-giving formula, Epistle to the Romans, the Gospel of John

¹This article is conceptually framed around the idea of the Son-giving formula, as discussed in the Korean article by Kim KyuSeop, "Sending His Own Son in Romans 8:32[in Korean]", in Kim, SangHoon– Kim, JuHan– Lee, JongMan (eds.), *The Way on the Way* [in Korean] (Seoul: Sollowon [in Korean], 2021). The utilization of the concept of the Son-giving formula in this article is derived from the original author, Kim Kyuseop's work. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Prof. Kim, Kyuseop, who has provided excellent precedent research for this study.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, significant scholarly works have examined the Christology of the *Epistle of Diognetus*. However, little attention has been given to the potential incorporation of the Akedah tradition, especially in relation to allusions found in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. While scholars agree that the author of this epistle draws upon Pauline² and Johannine texts³, few have explored how these authors share a common theological foundation in the Hebrew Bible, particularly the Akedah tradition (the binding of Isaac in Gen 22). Through a close examination of the Sonship designation and the Son-giving formula in the *Epistle of Diognetus*, this study proposes that the giving of the Son, rooted in a Hebrew biblical framework, likely served as a common

² To confirm Paul's formative intellectual influence in the Epistle to Diognetus, see Einar Molland, "Die literatur- und dogmengeschichtliche Stellung des Diognetbriefes," ZNW 33 (1934) 289-312, esp. 308-10; Rudolf Brändle, *Die Ethik der "Schrift an Diognet": Eine Wiederaufnahme paulinischer und johanneischer Theologie am Ausgang des zweiten Jahrhunderts*, ATANT 64 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1975), 202-16; Andreas Lindemann, "Paulinische Theologie im Brief an Diognet", in A.M. Ritter(ed.), *Kerygma und Logos: Beiträge zu den geistesgeschichtlichen Beziehungen zwischen Antike und Christentum* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 337-50 esp. 343-50; K. Wengst, "'Paulinismus' und 'Gnosis' in der Schrift an Diognet", ZKG 90 (1979) 41-62; D. K. Rensberger, *As the Apostle Teaches* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 286-93; Michael F. Bird, "The Reception of Paul in the Epistle to Diognetus", in Michael F. Bird and Joseph R. Dodson (ed.), *Paul and the Second Century*. LNTS 412 (London: T&T Clark, 2011); Ernst Dassman, *Der Stachel im Fleisch: Paulus in der frühchristlichen Literatur bis Irenäus* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1979), 254-59; Rolf Noormann, "Himmelsburger auf Erden: Anmerkungen zum Weltverhältnis und zum 'Paulinismus' des Auctor ad Diognetum", in B. Aland-C. Schaublin-D. Wyrwa-U. Wickert (eds.), *Die Weltlichkeit des Glaubens in der Alten Kirche*, BZNW 85 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 199-229; Matthew Thomas, *Paul's "Works of the Law" in the Perspective of Second Century Reception*, WUNT 2 468 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 119-21.

³ To explore the relationship between Akedah and John 3,16, refer to Edward Kessler, *Bound by the Bible: Jews, Christians, and the sacrifice of Isaac* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 122, n. 20. Kessler points out that the best understanding of giving up the most precious son is within the framework of the Akedah allusion; R. J. Daly, "The Soteriological Significance of the Sacrifice of Isaac", CBQ 39 (1977) 45-75; Vermès, "Redemption", 225; F. M. Braun, *Jean le Théologien et son évangile dans l'église ancienne* (Paris: Gabalda, 1959), 157. Braun draws a correlation between Gen. 22:1-12 and John 3:16 through three points: 1) the only son being put to death by his father, 2) this son being the one on whom the promise of the covenant rested (cf. Gen. 17:19), and 3) the extension of this covenant to all the nations of the earth arising from the sacrifice of that one man.

conceptual tool in early Christian thought.

This paper will scrutinize the meaning of the Son-giving confession and explore its significance in the Epistle of Diognetus. A detailed analysis of specific passages (7:4–5; 9:2; and 10:2) will reveal the recurring presence of the Son-giving formula. Based on earlier investigations, this study argues that the Epistle of Diognetus does not represent a distinct religious tradition but reflects the continuity between the theology in the writings of the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers. This continuity is evident in the epistle's appropriation of the Son-giving formula, rooted in the Akedah tradition.

To avoid the pitfall of relying on superficial lexical coincidences, this study employs an intertextual framework, drawing specifically on Richard Hays's concept of *metalepsis*.⁴ This approach posits that the "Son-giving" language in the Epistle to Diognetus functions not as an isolated citation but as a motif cluster—a constellation of theological terms that, when used together, evokes the Akedah's scriptural scene and narrative logic (Gen 22).⁵ Such a proposal is assessed not by a single lexical trigger but by clustered correspondence, recurrence across multiple loci, and thematic coherence within the receiving context. By analyzing these echoes, this paper argues that the formula serves as a deliberate theological script governing the author's Christology.⁶

2. The Son-giving formula in the New Testament: As an extension of the understanding of Isaac

2. 1. Romans 8:32 and the Akedah (Gen 22, LXX)

To begin our inquiry, we must examine the identity of the "Son" as depicted

⁴ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 20; cf. John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 115.

⁵ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 29–32; "On the Rebound: A Response to Critiques of Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul," in *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel*, JSNTSup 83, Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders (eds.), (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 70–96, esp. 79–81.

⁶ Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2005), 1–24.

in key New Testament texts, especially Jn. 3:16–17 and Rom. 8:32. Is “Son” merely a messianic designation, or does it convey a thicker relational claim between God and Jesus? This study aims to explore the connection between the Akedah and the “Son-giving formula,” a concept that has not received sufficient scholarly attention.⁷ Scholars generally agree that Paul, writing as a Second Temple Jew, reflects the Akedah tradition in Rom. 8:32, highlighting the parallel between God’s offering of Jesus and Abraham’s near-sacrifice of Isaac. The connection becomes plausible at the level of verbal and thematic correspondence, especially where multiple signals converge rather than relying on a single lexical trigger. The linguistic parallel may be illustrated as follows.⁸

Rom. 8:32	Gen. 22 (LXX)
οὐκ ἐφείσατο	οὐκ ἐφείσω (v. 12, 16)
τοῦ ἰδίου υἱοῦ	τοῦ υἱοῦ σου τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ (v. 2, 12, 15, 16)

This cluster—“not sparing,” coupled with intensified son-language (“his own Son” / “your beloved son”)—contributes to the passage’s rhetorical force: Paul grounds assurance of divine love precisely in God’s refusal to withhold the Son, culminating in God’s handing him over “for us.” On this reading, Rom. 8:32 does not merely state that Christ died; it narrates salvation as divine bestowal.

⁷ Kim, Kyuseop emphasizes the significance of such differentiation initially. Kim, “Sending His Own Son in Romans 8:32,” 373. For affirmation of the scholarly opinion regarding the Son of God as a messianic title, refer to the following works, as quoted from Kim, “Sending His Own Son in Romans 8:32,” 373, fn. 4; John J. Collin, *The Scepter and The Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010). For checking the contrary opinion to this, See Sigmund Mowinckel, *He that cometh: The Messiah concept in the Old Testament & Later Judaism*, trans., G. W. Anderson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 293–4; Gustaf Dalman, *The Words of Jesus Considered in the Light of Post-Biblical Jewish Writings and Aramaic Language*, trans., D. M. Kay, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1909), 271–2.

⁸ The following table is presented originally in Kim, Kyu Seop, *The Firstborn Son in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity: A study of Primogeniture and Christology* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 135.

2.2. A Response to Fitzmyer's Objection (Volume, Thematic Coherence, and Metalepsis Applied)

As outlined in Section 1, this study tests proposed echoes by Hays's criteria—especially “volume” and “thematic coherence”—and by the metaleptic logic whereby a later text can evoke a wider scriptural scene without explicit citation. This protocol directly addresses the objection (associated with Fitzmyer) that οὐκ ἐφείσατο is not exclusive to Genesis 22 and appears elsewhere in the LXX (e.g., 2 Sam 18:5).⁹ To address this objection, I grant the point that the verb cannot function as a decisive trigger on its own; the argument instead turns on the cumulative “volume” and “thematic coherence” of a motif cluster. The relevant cluster includes (i) intensified son-language (“his own Son”), (ii) the “not sparing/withholding” motif, (iii) the act of “handing over,” and (iv) the beneficiary framing “for us.” Read together, these features do not reproduce every narrative detail of Gen 22, yet they operate metaleptically: they activate the Akedah's narrative logic—God does not withhold the beloved son—as a theological script for interpreting the God–Son relation and the meaning of salvation. In other words, the Akedah proposal is supported not by a superficial lexical coincidence, but by the cumulative resonance of a coherent motif cluster that better explains Paul's rhetoric than rival accounts that treat the language as merely generic sacrificial idiom.¹⁰

⁹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, Anchor Bible, Vol. 33 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 531–32.

¹⁰ Robin M. Jensen points out that early Christian interpretation often viewed Isaac as a prefiguration of Christ, with Isaac's near-sacrifice serving as a typological foreshadowing of Jesus' crucifixion. Jensen highlights several parallels between Isaac and Jesus, including their miraculous conceptions, Isaac's role as the beloved son who carries the wood for his sacrifice (Genesis 22:6), which mirrors Jesus carrying His cross, and the three-day journey to Moriah, corresponding to Jesus' three days in the tomb. Additionally, Jensen cites early second-century Christian exegetes, such as those in *the Epistle of Barnabas*, who explicitly made these connections, portraying Isaac's near-sacrifice as a foreshadowing of Christ's atoning death, where Christ takes Isaac's place in the sacrificial narrative, linking the Akedah to the crucifixion. See Robin M. Jensen, "The Binding or Sacrifice of Isaac: How Jews and Christians See Differently," *Biblical Archaeology Review* (1993), <https://library.biblicalarchaeology.org/article/the-binding-or-sacrifice-of-isaac/>

2. 3. John 3:16–17 as Son-giving confession

Although research on the relationship between Jn. 3:16–17 and the Akedah is less extensive than for Rom. 8:32, some scholars support this connection. Levenson (as cited by Esswein) argues that the use of ἔδωκεν in the Gospel of John reflects conventional language associated with child sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Exod. 22:28; Ezek. 20:31).¹¹ Esswein notes that comparable bestowal language appears in Rom. 8:32, suggesting a shared or converging tradition between Paul and John, both likely drawing from the Akedah narrative.¹² On this basis, Jn. 3:16–17 may be read as generalizing key Akedah features—(1) God’s provision/giving of the Son and (2) the Son’s unique, precious status—without naming Isaac. The result is metaleptic: a concise confession that can activate a wider scriptural logic of beloved sonship, love, and bestowal.¹³ Formally, Jn. 3:16–17 presents the same configuration: divine subject (God), bestowal verb (ἔδωκεν/ἀπέστειλεν), and the direct object (τὸν υἱὸν... τὸν μονογενῆ), framed by divine love and a salvific telos (“that... may have eternal life”). The claim of an Akedah-shaped script thus rests not on one shared word with Gen 22 but on a recognizable pattern of beloved sonship and divine bestowal

¹¹ J. D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the beloved son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1993), 31. Quoted from Michael A. Esswein, “Is He Going to Kill Himself?: The Willing Self-Sacrifice of Jesus and the Akedah in the Fourth Gospel”, *Sacra Scripta* 11 (2) (2013) 231–261, 256.

¹² Esswein, “Is He going to Kill Himself?”, 256, fn. 82. However, Esswein did not explicitly identify the characteristics of a “similar tradition”. Nevertheless, this article posits that the analogous elements found in both texts can be discerned as the Akedah tradition.

¹³ Please consider the following features, which correspond to the previously defined Son-giving formula. 1) ὁ θεὸς... ἔδωκεν (Jn. 3: 16), ἀπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς (Jn. 3:17); 2) τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ (Jn. 3:16), τὸν υἱὸν (Jn. 3:17) – both τὸν υἱὸν denoting the “only begotten Son” in v. 16. Some scholars dispute the Akedah allusion in John 3:16–17. Nonetheless, Craig Keener acknowledges that the phrase “unique Son” introduces pathos to the portrayal of sacrifice, which reminds Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac. C. S. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 566; cf. Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2019), 136–7. Keener elaborates on his explanation by expanding his remarks on Jn. 1:14, drawing on other existing literature that addresses the Logos as μονογενῆς. Keener, *John*, Vol. 1, 412–419.

2. 4. Son-death and Son-giving: definition and distinction

The New Testament contains what may be called a “Son-death” formula (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:3; Rom. 5:6–8; 14:9; Gal. 2:21; 1 Pet. 3:18), which emphasizes Christ’s death “for” others, as the following visualisation shows.¹⁴

The Son-death formula:

Subject, which identified as Christ, who died

+ Adverbial phrase for specifying the purpose of the death (for our sin)

Yet Rom. 8:32 and Jn. 3:16–17 do more than state that Christ died: they frame salvation as God’s act of bestowing the Son—God “did not spare” but “handed over” (Rom. 8:32), and God “so loved... that he gave” (Jn. 3:16–17). This shift foregrounds the relational and affective logic of divine love,

¹⁴ The derivation of the Son-death formula constitutes a contentious subject, exceeding the purview of this present article. The following works are selected from Kim, Kyuseop’s original citation in Kim, “Sending His Own Son in Romans 8,32”, 390–91, fn.32: Werner Kramer, *Christ, Lord, Son of God*, SBT 50 (London: SCM, 1996), 133–35, and Martin Karrer’s *Jesus Christus im Neuen Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 80–83. Steve Finlan provides illuminating perspectives on the early Christians’ confession of Christ’s sacrificial death, drawing connections to the assimilation of the concept of noble death in ancient Greek literature and the notion of death for atonement in Isa 53:6, 12. Steve Finlan, *The Background and Contents of Paul’s Cultic Atonement Metaphors*, 225–27. Some scholars posit that the origin of the Son-death formula lies in the Eucharistic sayings of Jesus (e.g., Martin Hengel, John Bowden, trans., *The Atonement: The Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 71–73; Joachim Jeremias, *Die Abendmahlsworte Jesu* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 97. However, this contention is contested by other scholars (e.g., Eduard Lohse, *Märtyrer und Gottesknecht: Untersuchungen zur urchristlichen Verkündigung vom Sühnetod Jesu Christi*, *Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments* 64 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963)), 135; H. J. de Jonge, “The original setting of the Christos apethanen Hyper formula” in Raymond F. Collins (ed.), *The Thessalonian Correspondence* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990), 232–4; K. Wengst, *Christologische Formeln und Lieder des Urchristentums* 2. Aufl. ed. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1973), 78–86). Other scholars contend that the death of Jesus should not be simplistically construed as a martyr’s death but rather as an integrated concept intertwined with diverse traditions and texts (e.g., J. W. van Henten, “Jewish Martyrdom and Jesus’s Death”, in Jörg Frey – Jens Schröter (eds.), *Deutungen des Todes Jesu im Neuen Testament*, WUNT I/181 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 146; W. H. Heard, “Maccabean Martyr Theology: Its Genesis, Antecedents and Significance for the Earliest Soteriological Interpretation of the Death of Jesus,” Ph.D. diss., University of Aberdeen, 1987, 394–465).

construing the meaning of the Son's death through the prior act of the Father. In this sense, the "Son-giving" formula may be defined as follows: the divine subject (God), the verb denoting bestowal, and the direct object of bestowal (the Son) as can be shown as illustrated below.¹⁵

The Son-giving formula:

the divine subject, denoting the cause of bestowal (God's love)

+ the verb denoting bestowal

+ the direct object of bestowal (the Son of God).

The formula appears paradigmatically in Jn. 3:16–17 and Rom. 8:32 (and may be compared, with due caution, to related configurations such as Gal. 2:20). A plausible account of its development is that early Christian reflection on the Son's death came to be articulated as a confession of the Father's giving/handing-over of the Son, with Isa 53 and the Akedah supplying complementary scriptural grammars for this construal; further details and additional New Testament examples are best treated as supporting evidence.¹⁶ The present discussion retains only what is required to define the formula and to motivating the transition to Section 3.¹⁷ On this basis, the "Son-giving" formula

¹⁵ The definition and clarification of the Son-giving formula are indebted to Kim's work. See Kim, "Sending His Own Son in Romans 8,32", 386. The structural visualization of the formula and its English translation are mine.

¹⁶ Kim argues that early Christian reflection on the Son's death was increasingly articulated as the Father's act of "giving/handing over" the Son, "Sending His Own Son in Romans 8:32," 393–94; cf. Werner Kramer, *Christos Kyrios Gottessohn: Untersuchungen zu Gebrauch und Bedeutung der christologischen Bezeichnungen bei Paulus und den vorpaulinischen Gemeinden* (Zürich & Stuttgart: Zwingli-Verlag, 1963), 114. For the claim that Isa 53 and the Akedah can function as intersecting scriptural grammars for this construal, see Paba Nidhani De Andrado, "The Akedah Servant Complex: Tracing the Linkage of Genesis 22 and Isaiah 53 in Ancient Jewish and Early Christian Texts" (PhD diss., Durham University, 2011); and Esswein, "Is He Going to Kill Himself?", 231–61, esp. 260–61. As supporting evidence for the wider NT semantic field of "handing over" language, see Wiard Popkes, *Christus traditus: Eine Untersuchung zum Begriff der Dahingabe im Neuen Testament* (Zürich & Stuttgart: Zwingli-Verlag, 1967), 196; cf. Leroy A. Huizenga, *The New Isaac: Tradition and Intertextuality in the Gospel of Matthew* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 185.

¹⁷ For Second Temple examples linking righteousness with eschatological inheritance, see 1 En. 58:2–5; Sib. Or. 3:45; and 4Q418 69 ii 13–14. These texts consistently affirm the inheritance of eternal life for the righteous. Furthermore, 4Q418 9–12 extends this concept to include the inheritance of glory and dominion over the land.

can be treated as a theological script: a motif cluster capable of being rehearsed without explicit citation.¹⁸

In addition, both Rom. 8:32 and Jn. 3:16–17 are framed by inheritance logic: God's bestowal of the Son is rhetorically linked with the granting of eschatological benefit (Rom. 8:32b; cf. Rom. 4:13; Jn. 3:16). Related configurations elsewhere in the New Testament reinforce the same semantic field, where love, beloved sonship, and relinquishment converge in sacrificial idiom. This wider pattern is plausibly intelligible within intersecting scriptural grammars—especially the Akedah and Isa 53—without requiring an explicit Isaac reference in every instance. Accordingly, these additional texts function as supporting evidence rather than primary proof, and the following section turns to a limited set of Second Temple Jewish witnesses to map the Akedah's reception and the semantic field presupposed by these confessions.

3. The Son-giving formula in Second Temple Jewish literature: A tracing of the reflection of the Akedah

There are various strands of texts alluding to the Akedah tradition, directly or implicitly, across a long scope of time. To focus on a more tangible comparison, this section analyzes Second Temple Jewish texts to present a recurring theological motif rather than a rigidly standardized formula. This motif reflects a continuity in early Christian thought, which sought to articulate Christ's unique role in salvation through the lens of Jewish scriptural traditions.¹⁹

¹⁸ Accordingly, Section 4 will read the Diognetan passages for the recurrence and strategic redeployment of this cluster—divine initiative, bestowal language, unique sonship, and salvific telos—thereby testing whether an Akedah-shaped script governs the author's Christological imagination.

¹⁹ Historical evidence suggests a closer connection between the concept of sacrifice and the Akedah tradition emerged after the destruction of the Second Temple. Robin M. Jensen points out that the Roman destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 C.E. likely prompted a significant reinterpretation of the Akedah in Jewish thought. With Temple sacrifices no longer possible, Isaac became the archetypal sacrifice, serving as a substitute for the defunct sacrificial system. Before the destruction, the episode was referred to as the "offering" of Isaac, but afterward, it was called the "binding" of Isaac, symbolizing the tying of a lamb's feet in Temple sacrifices. The term Akedah later implied that Isaac's offering or potential

3. 1. The Active and Willing Isaac: From Victim to Participant

A significant and consistent element in Second Temple literature is the transformation of Isaac from a passive subject into an active and willing participant. This portrayal provides a crucial link to the Christian understanding of Jesus' voluntary sacrifice. In 4Q225 (Pseudo-Jubilees), Isaac is depicted as a willing participant, a perspective that parallels Jesus becoming a sacrificial lamb in accordance with the Father's will.²⁰ Similarly, the *Book of Judith* (8:24–27) portrays the Akedah as a test of Isaac's own faith, highlighting his willingness to surrender his life—a theme that mirrors Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane (Matt 26:39).²¹

This trajectory of willingness is further elevated in the works of Philo and Josephus. Philo depicts Isaac's sacrifice as a voluntary action, describing him as a mature figure who perceives God as his Father.²² Pseudo-Philo (L.A.B.) reinforces this early theme of willingness despite its later composition.²³ Notably, 4 Maccabees reinterprets the tradition by casting Isaac as a courageous model of martyrdom (16:18–20), where he explicitly declares himself a burnt

death was viewed as a complete and vicarious atonement, with the Temple sacrifices serving only as memorials to this ultimate act. Jensen, "The Binding or Sacrifice of Isaac."

²⁰ Huizenga, *The New Isaac*, 88–93. De Andrado proposes criteria similar to that of Huizenga, which she defines in her own terms as 'the Akedah Servant Complex': 1) The portrayal of a Righteous Figure who Suffers Unjustly; 2) The Suffering is Instigated by a Supernatural Being; 3/4 The Sufferer does not Protest but Cooperates/Gives a Voluntary Response; 5) Suffering is Framed as a Test or Demonstration of Obedience or Faithfulness; 6) The Sufferer Receives Reward and Exaltation; 7) The Recompense has Universal Consequences and Involves the Nations; 8) The Relationship between the Sufferer and Instigator/Permitter; 9) Association with Ideas of Atonement and Sacrifice. De Andrado, "The Akedah Servant Complex", 72–105. However, I prefer to follow Huizenga's criteria in this article because it is simpler and has a strong ability to explain the emergence of the Son-giving formula. In contrast, De Andrado's definition, which combines the Song of the Servant in Isa. 53 with the Akedah, seems relatively unconvincing and adds more complexity.

²¹ James L. Kugel, *The Bible As It Was* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997), 174–75. Quoted from Huizenga, *The New Isaac*, 94.

²² See Huizenga, *The New Isaac*, 104; cf. Philo, *Abr.* 181; *Mut.* 131; *Det.* 124; *Somn.* 1.173; *Leg.* 3.219.

²³ Huizenga, *The New Isaac*, 114–5.

offering.²⁴ Josephus completes this portrait in *Antiquities* by describing Isaac as receiving his fate "with joy" (*Ant.* 1.232), submitting joyfully to the divine will.²⁵

3. 2. Sacrificial Frameworks: Passover, Sonship, and Atonement

Beyond individual willingness, Second Temple texts integrate the Akedah into broader sacrificial and soteriological frameworks. *The Book of Jubilees* (18:17–19) deliberately aligns the timescale of the Akedah with the Passover (18:3), establishing Isaac as an analogical figure of Israel's firstborn and a sacrificial lamb. This connection underscores God's protective action for His chosen people through sacrifice.²⁶

Furthermore, the designation of "sonship" undergoes a significant development. Philo elevates Isaac's role by describing him as the "only begotten Son" of God, a concept central to the later Johannine theology (cf. Jn. 1:14; 3:16). While the Akedah's interpretation varies, the consistent portrayal of Isaac as Abraham's 'firstborn' or 'most precious possession' emphasizes his unique status.²⁷ Although explicit references to vicarious atonement remain ambiguous in some documents, the paradigmatic relationship between Isaac's obedience and the salvation of the people—particularly in 4 Maccabees—shaped the sacrificial interpretation of Jesus' death.²⁸

²⁴ Huizenga, *The New Isaac*, 122. See also Van Henten, *The Maccabean Martyrs as Saviours of Jewish people: A study of 2 and 4 Maccabees* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 152 n. 12; Desilva, *4 Maccabees: Introduction and Commentary on the Greek Text in Codex Sinaiticus* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 259. cf. Segal, "The Aqedah: Some Reconsiderations," in Hubert Cancik, Hermann Lichtenberger – Peter Schäfer (eds.), *Geschichte – Tradition – Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70 Geburtstag* (3 vols.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), Vol. 1., 108.

²⁵ Huizenga, *The New Isaac*, 125.

²⁶ Huizenga, *The New Isaac*, 85.

²⁷ Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 101.

²⁸ Huizenga, *The New Isaac*, 122; cf. Segal, "The Aqedah: Some Reconsiderations," 108.

3. 3. Conclusion: The Akedah as a Theological Script for the New Testament

In summary, by 20 C.E., all major aspects of the Akedah—particularly the active and willing Son—were present in Jewish thought.²⁹ While certain facets were selectively appropriated or omitted by New Testament authors, the core representation of Isaac underwent a transformation that informed the "Son-giving formula."

This framework of sacrificial language, especially Isaac's willing self-offering, provides the potential link to the New Testament's portrayal of Jesus. In Rom. 8:32, the reflection of the Akedah emphasizes Jesus' preciousness to God, analogous to Isaac's cherished status. Similarly, in John 3:16–17, the phrase "his only begotten son" (*ton huion ton monogenē*) reflects the same father-son dynamic and analogical principle. While Isaac's willingness is not always explicit in these specific verses, it is strengthened by the wider Gospel narrative of Jesus' determined sacrifice. Thus, the New Testament appropriates the Akedah's themes of the Father's active love and the Son's willing sacrifice, placing atoning substitution at the forefront of the early Christian confession.³⁰

Accordingly, the following section will examine the Epistle to Diognetus to demonstrate how this crystallized "Son-giving formula" and its underlying Akedah script govern the author's Christological imagination.

4. The Son-Giving Formula in Diognetus: The New Testament Christological Script Redeployed

Given the significant scholarly consensus regarding the later dating and distinct authorship of chapters 11–12, our analysis restricts itself to the earlier sections of the epistle.³¹ Specifically, we focus on three pivotal passages—

²⁹ Huizenga, *The New Isaac*, 127.

³⁰ De Andrado identifies similar allusions in Jn. 3:16, Rom. 8:32, and Heb. 9:28, linking filial sonship and atonement. Paba Nidhani De Andrado, *The Akedah Servant Complex: The Search for an Intertextual Link Between Genesis 22 and Isaiah 53* (London: Routledge, 2013), 156–59, 168–71. This point is discussed specifically under the criteria outlined in *The Akedah Servant Complex*, nos. 8 and 9.

³¹ I favour adhering to Bird's and Mackerras' proposal which suggests the initial segment of the letter (*Diog.* 1–10) displays resonance with Christian apologetic works of dating in the

Diognetus 7:4–5, 9:2, and 10:2—where the "Son-giving formula" appears not merely as a citation, but as the governing theological script. While explicit quotations are rare, the Christological logic of these passages closely mirrors the Akedah-shaped formula found in Romans 8:32 and John 3:16–17. However, the author of *The Epistle to Diognetus* does not simply repeat traditional language; he strategically redeploys the motifs of "sending," "ransom," and "imitation" to construct a narrative of divine non-coercion and substitutionary love. The following analysis traces how this received formula is transformed into a rigorous argument for the character of God.³²

4. 1. The Paradox of Divine Power: Sending as Saving (*Diog.* 7:4–5)

In *Diognetus* 7, the author employs the "Son-giving formula" to deconstruct worldly concepts of power. The text begins by identifying the one sent not as a subordinate servant, but as the "Artificer and Creator" (7:2)—a high Christology resonating with the Johannine Logos. However, the crux of the argument lies in the manner of this sending. The author draws an analogy to an earthly king sending his son (7:4), only to immediately subvert it. Unlike

second century (esp. Aristides, Justin Martyr, Theophilus of Antioch, and Clement of Alexandria), but the latter part of the letter (*Diog.* 11–12) exhibits similarities with second-century homiletical/catechetical writings such as 2 Clement, Melito of Sardis, and Hippolytus of Rome. Michael F. Bird and Kristen H. Mackerras, "The Epistle to Diognetus and the Fragment of Quadratus", in M. F. Bird – S. Harrower, (eds.), *The Cambridge companion to the Apostolic Fathers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 312. Consequently, the view that the first part of the letter was composed in the mid-second century and the latter part in the late second century appears plausible (cf. Clayton N. Jefford, (ed.), *The Epistle to Diognetus (with the Fragment of Quadratus): Introduction, Text, and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 28.

³² J. D. Meyer argues that the Akedah tradition serves as a common theological substratum for both Paul and John, suggesting that Romans 8:32 and John 3:16 are not isolated formulations but reflections of a shared Jewish exegetical tradition. See J. D. Meyer, "Atonement Anticipated: Paul's Use of Genesis 22 in Romans 8," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 32, no. 4 (2022): 359–78, esp. 372, 375. Meyer notes that the usage of the Akedah in John 1:29 and 3:16 parallels the logic found in Romans 8:32. This observation supports the premise of this study that the Epistle to Diognetus does not synthesize disparate texts but inherits a unified "Son-giving" tradition already established in apostolic Christianity.

earthly rulers who assert dominance, God sends His Son "in gentleness and meekness," explicitly rejecting coercion: "for force (bia) is no attribute of God" (7:4).

This theological axiom creates a profound link to the Akedah tradition. Just as the binding of Isaac was reinterpreted in Second Temple Judaism not as a violent imposition but as a willing cooperation (e.g., Josephus, *Ant.* 1.232), the "Son-giving" in *Diognetus* is framed as an act of persuasion (peitho) rather than force. The Son is sent "as loving, not judging" (7:5), transforming the sacrificial script from one of divine demand to one of divine self-giving.³³

Table 1.

The linguistic parallels	Diog. 7:4–5	John 3:16–17	Rom. 8:32
	4. ... ὡς βασιλεύς <u>πέμπων υἱόν</u> βασιλέα <u>ἔπεμψεν</u>, ... As a king <u>send- ing</u> a royal <u>son</u>, he <u>sent</u> him, ὡς θεὸν <u>ἔπεμψεν</u>, As God, he <u>sent</u> him, ὡς ἄνθρωπον προς ἄνθρώπους <u>ἔπεμψεν</u>, As a man, he <u>sent</u> him to humanity,	16 οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον, ὥστε <u>τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν</u>, For God so <u>loved</u> the world that he gave his <u>only be- gotten Son</u> ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀπόληται so that everyone who believes in him might not	ὅς γε τοῦ ἰδίου υἱοῦ οὐκ ἐφείσατο He who did not spare <u>his own Son</u> ἀλλ' ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν πάντων <u>παρέδωκεν αὐτόν</u>, but <u>delivered him up</u> for us all πῶς οὐχὶ καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ τὰ <u>πάντα ἡμῖν χαρίσεται</u>; how will he not also, along with him, graciously

³³ All the Greek texts from the Epistle to Diognetus referenced in the tables are cited from Bart D. Ehrman (trans.) *The Apostolic Fathers*, LCL, Vol. 1. (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2003). Additionally, all Greek texts presented in the tables are cited from the Nestle-Aland 28th edition.

	ὥς <u>σώζων</u> <u>ἔπεμψεν</u>, ... As <u>Savior</u>, he <u>sent</u> him... 5. <u>ἔπεμψεν</u> ὥς καλῶν, οὐ διώκων As one who calls, he <u>sent</u> him not one who perse- cutes, <u>ἔπεμψεν</u> ὥς <u>ἀγαπῶν</u>, οὐ <u>κρίνων</u>. As one who <u>loves</u>, not one who judges	perish ἀλλ' ἔχη <u>ζωὴν</u> αἰώνιον. but may have eter- nal <u>life</u>. 17 οὐ γὰρ <u>ἀπέστειλεν</u> ὁ θεὸς <u>τὸν υἱὸν</u> εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἵνα <u>κρίνη</u> For <u>God</u> did not <u>send</u> <u>the Son</u> into the world to <u>judge</u> τὸν κόσμον, ἀλλ' ἵνα <u>σωθῇ</u> ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ. the world, but so that the world might <u>be saved</u> through him.	<u>give us all things?</u>
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As demonstrated in Table 1, this logic closely parallels the Johannine and Pauline formulations. A clear Johannine echo appears in *Diog.* 7:5, where the phrase 'not... to judge' (*ou krinōn*) acts as a direct interpretive parallel to John 3:17 ('God did not send the Son... to judge'). Both texts emphasize that the motive for the Son's arrival is love (*hōs agapōn*), not condemnation. Regarding the Pauline resonance, although Diognetus employs the verb 'sending' (*pempein*) rather than Paul's 'giving up' (*paradidonai* in Rom. 8:32), the soteriological weight of both terms remains identical within the logic of divine sacrifice. In early Christian thought, the "sending" of the Son implies the "giving" of the Son to the world's condition. The description of the Son as the "King's Son" sent to save aligns with Paul's emphasis on the "own Son (*idiou huiou*)" whom God did not spare.

Crucially, the terminology hints at the underlying Akedah typology. As Keener observes, the Johannine term *monogenēs* (John 3:16) often functions as a translation for *yāhîd* (Gen 22:2), overlapping with *agapētos* (beloved).³⁴ Although *Diognetus* 7 does not explicitly use *monogenēs*, the portrayal of the Son as the King's most precious possession sent for salvation reflects this "beloved son" motif. By framing the incarnation as the sending of the "Beloved" to save by love rather than force, *Diognetus* 7:4–5 effectively redeploys the Akedah's theological script: salvation is achieved not through the violence of a sovereign, but through the sacrificial presence of the Son.

4. 2. The Sweet Exchange: The Akedah as Substitutionary Ransom (*Diog.* 9:2)

If *Diog.* 7 establishes the non-coercive nature of God's sending, *Diog.* 9 reveals the mechanism of that salvation: a substitutionary exchange. Here, the Son-giving formula reaches its theological zenith. The author describes God's act with precise sacrificial terminology: "He Himself gave up His own Son as a ransom for us" (*Diog.* 9:2). This phrasing is not merely a collection of New Testament allusions; it is a redeployment of the Akedah's logic of substitution—where the beloved son is offered, and a ransom is provided—applied now to the relationship between God and humanity.

Table 2.

The linguistic parallels	<i>Diog.</i> 9:2	John 3:16–17	Rom. 8:32
	2. ...αὐτὸς τὸν ἴδιον υἱὸν ἀπέδοτο ... He himself gave up his own Son λύτρον ὑπὲρ	16 οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον, ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀπόληται ἀλλ' ἔχῃ	ὃς γε τοῦ ἰδίου υἱοῦ οὐκ ἐφείσατο ἀλλ' ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν πάντων παρέδωκεν αὐτόν, πῶς οὐχὶ καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα ἡμῖν χαρίσεται;

³⁴ Keener, *John*, Vol. 1, 566–67; cf) Esswein, "Is He going to Kill Himself?", 257.

	ἡμῶν, ... as a <u>ransom</u> for us....	ζωὴν αἰώνιον. 17 οὐ γὰρ ἀπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἵνα κρίνη τὸν κόσμον, ἀλλ' ἵνα <u>σωθῇ</u> ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ. ...³⁵	...
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As illustrated in Table 2, the text synthesizes the "Son-giving" language of Paul and John to articulate this exchange. First, the designation "His own Son" (*ton idion huion*) in *Diog.* 9:2 is a direct appropriation of Romans 8:32. By using *idios* (one's own), the author underscores the preciousness of the offering. Just as the Akedah narrative pivots on Abraham not withholding his "only/beloved" son, the Diognetan formula emphasizes that God surrendered what was most dear to Him. This aligns with T. J. Lang's observation that *Diognetus* 9 operates in a "quintessentially Pauline register," echoing the logic of Romans 5 where the righteousness of the One covers the many.³⁶

Second, the term "ransom" (*lytron*) transforms the "giving" into a "trading." As J. T. Lienhard observes, the connection between the verb "gave up" and the noun "ransom," with the Son as the direct object, carries distinct soteriological significance in this passage.³⁷ While John 3:16 emphasizes the motive of love, *Diognetus* 9:2 focuses on the transaction of atonement. This resonates with the Johannine proclamation of the "Lamb of God" (Jn. 1:29), but with a heightened emphasis on the exchange: the Holy One for the lawless, the Innocent for the wicked, the Immortal for the mortal. In the Akedah (Gen. 22), a

³⁵ See Table 1 for full English translation of John 3:16–17 and Romans 8:32

³⁶ T. J. Lang, *Mystery and the Making of a Christian Historical Consciousness* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 157. Lang notes that the remainder of this chapter (9.2–6) "eulogizes this event in which the righteousness of the one man makes the many lawless ones righteous as well."

³⁷ Joseph T. Lienhard, "The Christology of the Epistle to Diognetus," *Vigiliae Christianae* 24, no. 4 (1970): 281. Lienhard highlights that the specific combination of *apedoto* (gave up) and *lytron* (ransom) defines the unique soteriological contribution of this epistle.

ram was substituted for the son. In *the Epistle to Diognetus*, the logic is inverted and intensified: the Son Himself is the substitute. The author of *Diognetus* thus takes the "Son-giving formula" found in Romans 8:32 and John 3:16 and crystallizes it into the famous exclamation of the "Sweet Exchange" (*O glykeia antallagē*). This demonstrates that for the early church, the Akedah was not just a story of obedience, but the foundational script for understanding how God exchanges His Son's life for the life of the world.

4. 3. The Imitation of God: The Akedah as Ethical Imperative (*Diog.* 10:2)

Finally, in *Diognetus* 10:2, the "Son-giving formula" transcends soteriology and becomes the foundation for Christian ethics. Having established the "Sweet Exchange" in Chapter 9, the author now explains why God initiated this exchange. The motivation is explicitly identified as love, and the agent is the "only-begotten Son" (*ton huion autou ton monogenē*). This specific phrasing serves as the definitive link to the Akedah tradition via the Johannine lens. As noted in Dirk Schinkel's analysis, the terminology in *Diog.* 10:2 ("God loved... sent His only-begotten Son") mirrors John 3:16 so closely that it carries the same eschatological weight.³⁸ However, *Diognetus* takes a crucial step further. The mention of the *monogenēs*—the "beloved" of the Akedah typology—is not just to prove God's love, but to define the character that believers are called to imitate.

³⁸ Dirk Schinkel, "'Unsere Bürgerschaft Befindet Sich Im Himmel' (Phil 3, 20): Ein Biblisches Motiv Und Seine Entwicklung Im Frühen Christentum," *Biblische Notizen* 133 (2007): 88. Schinkel argues that *Diognetus* 10:2, with its strong allusion to John 3:16, reveals an eschatological dimension often overlooked in scholarship.

Table 3.

The linguistic parallels	Diog. 10:2	John 3:16–17	Rom. 8:32
	2 ὁ γὰρ θεὸς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἠγάπησε, For God <u>loved</u> humanity ... <u>ἀπέστειλε</u> τὸν <u>υἱὸν</u> αὐτοῦ τὸν <u>μονογενῆ</u>, He <u>sent</u> his <u>only begotten Son</u>, ...	16 οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον, ὥστε τὸν <u>υἱὸν</u> τὸν <u>μονογενῆ</u> ἔδωκεν, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀπόληται ἀλλ' ἔχη ζωὴν αἰώνιον. 17 οὐ γὰρ <u>ἀπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν</u> εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἵνα κρίνῃ τὸν κόσμον, ἀλλ' ἵνα <u>σωθῇ</u> ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ. ...	32 ὅς γε τοῦ ἰδίου υἱοῦ <u>οὐκ ἐφείσατο</u> ἀλλ' ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν πάντων <u>παρέδωκεν αὐτόν</u>, πῶς οὐχὶ καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα ἡμῖν χαρίσεται; ...

As shown in Table 3, the parallel between 'sent' (*apesteilen* in *Diog.* 10:2) and 'gave up' (*paredōken* in *Rom.* 8:32) reveals how the author redeploys the formula. While Paul emphasizes the sacrificial cost ("did not spare"), Diognetus reorients the focus to the purpose of this sending: to establish a pattern of behaviour.

The logic of Chapter 10 moves from reception to mimesis. The text argues that because God "loved humanity" and sent His Only-Begotten (10:2), the believer who understands this will "love Him in return" (10:3) and become an "imitator of God" (*mimētēs theou*, 10:4). How does one imitate God? Not by seeking power, but by taking on the burdens of one's neighbor—just as God took on ours. Thus, the "Son-giving formula" in Diognetus 10:2 functions as the ultimate ethical imperative. The Akedah is no longer just a story of a past sacrifice; it is the living script for the Christian life. To be a Christian is to reenact the "giving of the son" by giving oneself for others.

4. 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the investigations in this subsection reveal that the *Epistle to Diognetus* does not merely echo the New Testament's "Son-giving formula"; it strategically redeploys it as a coherent theological script. From the non-coercive sending of the King's Son (7:4–5), to the substitutionary ransom of the Own Son (9:2), and finally to the ethical sending of the Only-Begotten (10:2), the author consistently reflects the Akedah-shaped Christology of Paul and John. As Lienhard highlights, this Christology centres on the Father's mission, portraying the Son as the ultimate saviour sent into a world of helplessness.³⁹ This suggests that for the author of *Diognetus*, the Akedah was not a latent memory but a living paradigm for defining God's character. Notably, the absence of this specific "Son-giving" motif in chapters 11–12 reinforces the distinction between the epistle's original body and its later appendices.⁴⁰ Ultimately, this reading contributes to a broader understanding of how early Christian theological language emerged not in isolation, but through the active re-interpretation of Jewish sacrificial paradigms within post-apostolic reflection.

5. Conclusion

The title "Son" in Romans 8:32 and John 3:16 carries a relational nature that reveals the special bond between God and Christ—a bond that reflects Jewish traditions of divine sonship. Beneath these texts lies the ideological framework of the Akedah tradition, in which God's willingness to give His Son mirrors Abraham's offering of Isaac. As this study has demonstrated, the "Son-giving formula" serves as the theological bridge connecting this narrative of

³⁹ Lienhard, "The Christology of the Epistle to Diognetus," 289.

⁴⁰ As previously stated, chapters 11–12 have long been considered later additions. It is noteworthy that while these chapters refer to the 'sending of the Word,' the thematic emphasis differs significantly. The focus in chapters 11–12 is epistemological and paraenetic, centering on knowledge and doctrine. The motifs of divine love, substitution, and sacrificial giving central to the "Son-giving formula" are notably absent. This absence supports the view that chapters 11–12 derive from a different theological layer than the earlier chapters (1–10), which clearly echo the New Testament formula.

Abraham's offering to the apostolic confession, and ultimately to its creative redeployment in the Epistle to Diognetus.

From the New Testament to second-century Christianity, early Christians did not merely repeat these traditions but actively shaped their confessions by drawing on the Akedah's themes of sacrifice and divine sonship. Our analysis of *Diognetus* 7–10 confirms this dynamic progression:

1. Divine Method: The author reframes the sending of the Son not as coercion (*bia*) but as persuasion (*peitho*), mirroring the voluntary spirit of the Akedah (*Diog.* 7).

2. Divine Transaction: The substitutionary logic—the ram for the son—is intensified into the "Sweet Exchange," where the Son serves as the ransom for the lawless (*Diog.* 9).

3. Divine Imitation: Finally, the "Son-giving" becomes the ethical imperative for the believer, moving from soteriology to mimesis (*Diog.* 10).

Consequently, the continuity between the New Testament and the Epistle to Diognetus should not be taken as mere repetition, but as an indicator of the formative role the Akedah tradition played in shaping the language of divine giving. Texts like *Diognetus* function as receptional continuities of New Testament theology—retaining the soteriological logic of divine self-giving, while expressing it through a refined idiom of ransom, love, and sacrifice. Ultimately, the epistle stands as a testament to early Christian theological memory—operating not through rote recitation, but through the vital and confessional reaffirmation of God's self-giving love.

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