



Vicarious Satisfaction in Liturgy: Agnus Dei (Lamb of God)

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Therefore a Christian must cling simply to this verse and let no one rob him of it. For there is no other comfort either in heaven or on earth to fortify us against all attacks and temptations, especially in the agony of death. (Martin Luther, Sermon on John 1:29)

Introduction

Lutheran Orthodoxy teaches that an indispensable part of the mighty work that God has done in Christ is atonement by vicarious satisfaction. Adversaries of Lutheran Orthodoxy deny vicarious satisfaction. They teach that God just “up and forgave” before and without the blood of Christ. They teach that Christ did not accomplish atonement on the cross and that atonement only happens when someone believes a bloodless word of absolution.

In a series of studies, the author examines how those claims stand up against established witnesses to the teaching of the Lutheran church. Prior writings in the series brought forth the orthodox Lutheran teaching of vicarious satisfaction in the Lutheran confessions of the *Book of Concord*, in explanations of the *Small Catechism*, and in Lutheran hymns.

Next, we observe the witness of the liturgy to the Lutheran confession of vicarious satisfaction. The first essay about the liturgy laid a foundation of vicarious satisfaction in the Lutheran understanding of worship in general. Based on that foundation, succeeding essays move onward to look at the parts of the Divine Service.

The Divine Service joins three services:

1. Confession and Absolution
2. Service of the Word
3. Service of the Sacrament

In this essay we look at Agnus Dei in the Service of the Sacrament. Agnus Dei comes from John 1:29 where John the Baptist says, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

[The use of the Agnus Dei] extends far back into Christian antiquity; and in the Eastern Church it was primarily a morning chant. Then in the sixth century, Gregory the Great brought it by way of translation into the Latin Church. However, it received its inclusion in the Mass and its placement between the Consecration and Distribution from Pope Sergius I (in 687), with the specification that it should be “chanted by the priesthood and the people.”¹

The text of Agnus Dei in the Common Service is:

O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world,
have mercy upon us.

O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world,
have mercy upon us.

O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world,
grant us Thy peace.

Amen.²

In broad outline:

- First, we will see an overview of how themes of the liturgy that began in the Invocation climax in Agnus Dei.³
- Second, we will dwell on one of those themes, the presence of God, through comments of various authors on Agnus Dei and Real Presence in the Sacrament.
- Third, we will consider John the Baptist’s statement in John 1:29 biographically, devotionally, dogmatically, homiletically, and exegetically.

We will conclude with a liturgical summary in comments by Paul E. Kretzmann, Luther D. Reed, Arthur A. Just, Jr., and Paul J. Grime.

Climax of Cross, Baptism, and Name in Real Presence

The Agnus Dei brings to climax themes that began the service in the Invocation. Recall from the prior essay, “Vicarious Satisfaction in Liturgy: Invocation,” that the Invocation involves vicarious satisfaction through its connection with the sign of the cross, Baptism, the Name of God, and the presence of God.

In the liturgy, Agnus Dei follows the Verba, Christ’s Words of Institution of the Lord’s Supper when Jesus said, “This cup is the New Testament in my blood shed for you and for many for the remission of sins.” The Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world by shedding his blood on the cross. Here the theme of the cross begun in the Invocation is climaxing.

John was able to recognize Jesus as the Lamb of God because God had revealed to him that the Lamb would be the one on whom he would see the Spirit descend. John saw the Spirit descend on Jesus in the form of a dove when John baptized Jesus. The Lamb and Baptism are tied together.

¹ Friedrich Lochner, *The Chief Divine Service of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church*, trans Matthew Carver, eds. Jon D. Vieker, Kevin J. Hildebrand, and Nathaniel S. Jensen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2020), 276.

² *Common Service Book of the Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: The Board of Publications of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1917), 25–26, citing Braunschweig, 1528.

³ The Divine Service has a rhythm leading multiple times to climaxes. Saying that a climax is reached in Agnus Dei by no means excludes another climax at the Communion rail when the true body and blood of Christ are given with bread and wine.

We remember when Jesus asked James and John whether they were able to drink the cup that Jesus was about to drink and be baptized with the baptism that Jesus is baptized with. He was pointing to the cross. Christ's Baptism and cross are tied together.

When John recognized Jesus as the Lamb in Jesus' Baptism, he the said, "this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." (John 1:33b) Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Spirit by water and the Word through the hand and voice of our pastors. The Lamb and our Baptisms are tied together.

John went on to say of "the Lamb of God" that "this is the Son of God." (John 1:34) Jesus is the Son in "the Name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." The Name "Son" means nothing without a father. At his Baptism, the voice of the Father was heard from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." In the Lamb we see the cross, Baptism, and the Name of God the Son tied together.

Just before Agnus Dei we hear the Verba. We hear Christ says, "this is my body" and "this is my blood." With the Lutheran understanding of what Christ does in the Sacrament of the Altar, we recognize Christ has come in Real Presence by his true body and blood with the bread and wine. Therefore, we greet in direct address the sacramentally present Christ.

The Lutheran church added words to what John the Baptist said. Luther D. Reed says, "The word 'Christ' at the beginning of each of the three parts is a unique Lutheran interpolation, found nowhere else. Its first appearance in Lutheran use was in the Brunswick Order (1528)."⁴ Ulrich S. Leupold translates Luther's 1528 Agnus Dei, "Lamb of God, O Jesus, Who does bear the whole world's sins."⁵ Paul J. Grime says, "This addition ... has the ... benefit of strengthening the theological point that we are directly addressing Christ, who is now present in His body and blood."⁶

John said, "Behold the Lamb of God." We sing, "O Christ, Thou Lamb of God." John spoke to his hearers in the second person about Christ in the third person. But in Agnus Dei Lutherans sing not *about* Christ in the *third* person but *directly to* Christ in the *second* person because his sacramental presence is real. Whereas John said, "Behold, the Lamb," it is as if we now sing "Behold, Thou present Lamb."

Christ gives us this Sacrament and comes in his Real Presence to deliver to us the benefits of his sacrifice on the cross. In Word and Sacrament, He delivers to us what He won for us on the cross. He gives us his vicarious satisfaction, the remission of sins, and the imputation of his righteousness to us. When Jesus gives us his true blood to drink, He gives with his blood what He shed it for, the remission of sins. He does not give his blood and yet withhold what He shed it for. By his blood we have peace with God. We can stand in his presence in consolation and hope.

As with the Invocation, the themes of the cross, Baptism, the Name, and the presence of God all are united in Agnus Dei. In the true body and blood of Christ the same themes climax in the Real Presence on the ground of the vicarious satisfaction.

Real Presence

The connection between Agnus Dei and the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacrament is noted by many authors. Consider a few:

- The editors of the *Christian Cyclopedia*.

⁴ Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy, a Study of the Common Service of the Lutheran Church in America*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1947), 370.

⁵ Ulrich S. Leupold, "The Agnus Dei," *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 53:152

⁶ Paul J. Grime, "Service of the Sacrament," in Paul J. Grime, ed., *Lutheran Service Book: Companion to the Services* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2022), 615.

- Luther D. Reed in *The Lutheran Liturgy, a Study of the Common Service of the Lutheran Church in America*.
- Charles J. Evanson in *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*.
- Paul J. Grime in *Lutheran Service Book: Companion to the Services*.

Christian Cyclopedia

Since the 7th c. it has been sung after the consecration as a prayer to Christ present in His body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar. In line with their denial of the sacramental union the later Eng. reformers omitted the Agnus Dei from the Communion rite in the 1552 and later eds. of the Book of Common Prayer. It was restored in the 1929 Scottish Liturgy but not in the 1928 American Book.⁷

Luther D. Reed

In the Lutheran communion ... the thought [of Agnus Dei] is of confessing and adoring the Christ of the Gospels as truly present not only in the bread and the wine or in the moment of consecration, but in the entire service and worship and communion.⁸

The Agnus Dei is found in practically all the Lutheran church orders.⁹

The Anglican Prayer Book of 1549 followed the Lutheran precedent and appointed the Agnus Dei to be sung "in the communion time." The Second Book (1552) omitted it entirely. A proposal to restore it to the English Book in 1661 was not adopted, and a similar effort in 1928 was narrowly defeated.¹⁰

Charles J. Evanson

The Agnus Dei serves as a hymn of adoration to the Savior Christ who is present for us in his body and blood. It is for this reason that the hymn did not survive in the liturgies of Reformed churches, which refused to affirm the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the sacramental elements.¹¹

Paul J. Grime

The Lutheran confession concerning the true, physical presence of Jesus' body and blood in the bread and wine thus finds a natural expression in the Agnus Dei. As Luther comments in his treatise *The Private Mass and the Consecration of Priests*, the communicants' heart and faith recognize that "the Lamb of God who is present for us and among us . . . according to his ordinance nourishes us with his body and blood." That is not something that those of the Reformed confession could say, which explains why they removed the Agnus Dei in their liturgical revisions. For example, while the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* included the Agnus Dei, the 1552 edition omitted it.¹²

The parallels between the Agnus Dei and the Gloria in Excelsis are the most obvious, with the verbatim repetition of John the Baptist's words, "who takes away the sin of the world." In the Gloria, the address is more general in nature, speaking of the Son's salvific work, whereas in

⁷ Erwin L. Lueker, Luther Poellot, and Paul Jackson, eds., *Christian Cyclopedia*, "Agnus Dei," (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), accessed in internet version, <http://cyclopedia.lcms.org/>

⁸ Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 371.

⁹ Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 369.

¹⁰ Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 369.

¹¹ Charles J. Evanson, "The Service of the Sacrament" in Fred L. Precht, ed., *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 430.

¹² Grime, "Service of the Sacrament," 616, citing *The Private Mass and the Consecration of Priests* (1533), AE 38:209.

the context of the Service of the Sacrament, our address is no longer merely to Christ but to “Christ here present” in His body and blood.¹³

The connections are multilayered. In addition to the similarities to the gloria noted above, the parallels to the Kyrie deserve further consideration. Like the Kyrie, the Agnus Dei stands apart as one of the few places in the Divine Service where the Son of God is addressed directly, rather than the typical approach *to* the Father *through* the Son. No doubt this thought occurred to Luther and led him to assign the same melodic formula to both the Kyrie and Agnus Dei in his *Deutsche Messe*.¹⁴

The text in Setting Three [of the *Lutheran Service Book*] translates the German [rather than the Latin] form in which the worshipper more explicitly addresses Jesus, using the vocative form of the name of Christ:

Christe, du Lamm Gottes . . .

O Christ, Thou Lamb of God . . .

This addition ... has the ... benefit of strengthening the theological point that we are directly addressing Christ, who is now present in His body and blood.¹⁵

Biographically

Under this heading we consider John the Baptist’s statement in John 1:29 biographically. We see how John’s statement occurs in the storyline of Jesus’ life. From the biographical perspective we derive significance from John’s words.

John says, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” We do not commonly call men lambs. John does not have one exact precedent for ascribing to Jesus the title “Lamb of God.” We never hear this until we hear it from John. Why did he say it? He explains in verse 33-34:

I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, “Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.

So, instead of an exact, direct reference to some prior text of Scripture, John has a word from God. Remember, he is a prophet. Jesus later said of him, “among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist.” (Luke 7:28) God can reveal such things to his prophets. “He would be a bold man who would set limits in advance to what God can reveal to His prophets.”¹⁶ He who sent John to baptize said something to him. He said, “Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” That word to John told him that he would see something, and John says in verse 34, “I have seen.” What did he see? According to the word given to him, he saw “the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him.” John saw two things:

- The Spirit descending on Jesus.
- The Spirit remaining on Jesus.

When and how did he see that?

John saw the Spirit descending on Jesus in the form of a dove at his Baptism. “And immediately, coming

¹³ Grime, “Service of the Sacrament,” 616.

¹⁴ Grime, “Service of the Sacrament,” 617.

¹⁵ Grime, “Service of the Sacrament,” 615.

¹⁶ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 149.

up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove.” (Mark 1:10. Also Matthew 3:16, Luke 3:22) At this same time, the voice of the Father from heaven revealed Jesus as his son (Matthew 3:17, Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22). So besides calling Jesus the Lamb of God, John also calls him the Son of God.

John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. Jesus had no sin of his own for which to repent. John, therefore, tried to prevent Jesus’ from being baptized. But Jesus told him to allow it “to fulfill all righteousness.” (Matthew 3:15). Jesus already was fully righteous, so for whom was He fulfilling all righteousness? He did this for us, to give us his righteousness.

Luther captured the primary meaning of his Baptism: “[Christ] accepted it from John for the reason that he was entering into our stead, indeed, our person, that is, becoming a sinner for us, taking upon himself the sins which he had not committed, and wiping them out and drowning them in his holy baptism (AE 51:315)¹⁷

There we see the active obedience of Christ in his fulfilling all righteousness and in “sins which he had not committed.” We see substitution in “into our stead, indeed, our person,” and in “for us.” We see satisfaction in “wiping them out and drowning them.”

So, John saw the Spirit descending on Jesus, but when did he see the Spirit remaining on Jesus? Notice what the Spirit does immediately after Jesus’ Baptism. Mark reports the voice of the Father from heaven in verse 11, and then in verses 12-13, “Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan.” (Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-2)

Jesus had just heard the Word of God in his Baptism, “You are my beloved Son.” Immediately in the temptation, Satan attacks the Word and faith. He had attacked the Word and faith with the first Adam. He challenged, “Has God indeed said?” Now with the Second Adam he says, “If you are the Son of God.” (Matthew 4:3, Luke 4:3) God: “You are my beloved Son.” Satan: “If you are the Son of God.”

Satan severely and sorely tempted Jesus. What would happen? Would the Spirit depart from him? Remember when “the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul.” (1 Samuel 16:14) With the Second Adam, Satan failed. “When the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.” (Luke 4:13) In this we see “the Spirit remaining on Jesus.”

Next the delegation of priests and Levites from Jerusalem comes to John asking who he is. In his answer John says, “I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know.” (John 1:26) “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) “This is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” (John 1:33) Jesus can baptize with the Holy Spirit because the Spirit remained on him.

The Spirit descended upon Jesus when Jesus “fulfilled all righteousness” for us in being baptized by John. The Spirit remained on Jesus through the wilderness temptations of Satan. There Jesus continued to fulfill all righteousness for us.

This is part of Christ’s work of vicarious satisfaction. In this biography we see Jesus rendering active obedience to God. We see his passive obedience of suffering temptation. As Luke says, Jesus suffered “every temptation.” (Luke 4:13) Jesus “was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:14) By this He remained without spot and was able to accomplish atonement for us. “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:14) “You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers,

¹⁷ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 1582 n. 3:15. The citation to AE is to Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works: American Edition* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing Houses; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press; and Philadelphia: Fortress Press).

but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” (1 Peter 1:18–19) In his obedience to God, Jesus is the only man who ever succeeded in remaining without blemish.

Lamb upon lamb in the Old Testament must be without blemish:

- For the Passover, God had commanded, “Your lamb shall be without blemish.” (Exodus 12:5)
- For the sin offering, “If he brings a lamb as his sin offering, he shall bring a female without blemish.” (Leviticus 4:32)
- For the burnt offering, “Take a kid of the goats as a sin offering, and a calf and a lamb, both of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering.” (Leviticus 9:3)
- For the cleansing of lepers, “He shall take two male lambs without blemish, one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish.” (Leviticus 14:10)
- For the Feast of First Fruits, “You shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish.” (Leviticus 23:12)
- For the Feast of Weeks, “You shall offer with the bread seven lambs of the first year, without blemish.” (Leviticus 23:18)
- For the Feast of Tabernacles, “You shall present a burnt offering ...: fourteen lambs in their first year. They shall be without blemish.” (Numbers 29:13)
- In the Law of the Nazarite, “He shall present his offering to the LORD: one male lamb in its first year without blemish as a burnt offering, one ewe lamb in its first year without blemish as a sin offering, one ram without blemish as a peace offering.” (Numbers 6:13–14)
- For the daily morning and evening offerings, “You shall offer to the LORD: two male lambs in their first year without blemish, day by day, as a regular burnt offering. The one lamb you shall offer in the morning, the other lamb you shall offer in the evening.” (Numbers 28:3–4)
- For the Sabbath Day offerings, “On the Sabbath day two lambs in their first year, without blemish.” (Numbers 28:9)
- For the monthly offerings, “At the beginnings of your months you shall present a burnt offering to the LORD: two young bulls, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year, without blemish.” (Numbers 28:11)

Let them—or we— forget, when reiterating about the Passover that He had instituted in Leviticus, God said in Numbers, “Be sure [the seven lambs] are without blemish.” (Numbers 28:19) “Be sure.” He keeps repeating that the lambs must be without blemish in Numbers 29:2, 8, 17, 20, 23, 26, 29, 32, 36.

Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He can take it away because, in his active and passive obedience to God for us, He is a lamb without blemish and without spot. In the biographical aspect of the Agnus Dei, we see the vicarious satisfaction. Based on that satisfaction, at this time in the liturgy following the Words of Institution, we can stand in the Real Presence of Christ who now is sacramentally present in the service.

Devotionally

Under this heading we consider John the Baptist’s statement in John 1:29 devotionally. We see how Christians have received his words into their devotional lives.

Leon Morris says,

‘The Lamb of God’ is a way of referring to Jesus which has made a powerful appeal to Christian devotion through the centuries. The petition, “O Lamb of God, that takest away the

sins of the world, have mercy upon us', occurs in many liturgies, while those who prefer extempore prayer often find the words "Lamb of God" come easily to their lips. Christian art has found the symbolism congenial, and many are the pictures and the stained glass windows which show forth the Lamb. There is something about the expression which does not require explanation before it can appeal to the depths of the heart. In the words themselves lurks a numinous quality.¹⁸

Let us consider "the Lamb of God" in one outstanding example of Lutheran devotional writing, *The Christian Year of Grace* by Johann Spangenberg.¹⁹ This work was recruited by Luther. After Luther's *Postils* (sermons on the appointed Bible readings of the Church Year), it was the premier Lutheran devotional book of the Reformation era. His explanations of the appointed readings in question-and-answer format taught and fed countless Evangelical Lutheran people of all ages and vocations for centuries. Robert Kolb says,

His questions guided readers through the content of these Scripture passages with the concepts of the catechism in the background, so that they could learn how to move from the basic instruction of the catechism to the profitable hearing and reading of the Bible. Luther wrote the preface for the work . . . This work appeared fifty-six times in print in German . . . (plus fifty-two editions in Plattdeutsch, with seven Latin printings, seven Czech, three Dutch, and one Slovak). This volume of sales suggests that pastors found these questions and answers good guides for their own preaching and that parents found them helpful for devotions with children and servants.²⁰

Following are excerpts where Spangenberg reflects on John 1:29.

With His innocent blood, Christ made satisfaction for the sins of all the world (John 1 [:29]), paid for all our debts, and the Father has marked us "paid in full" and reconciled, so long as we trust in Christ and hold to His Word.²¹

That expresses vicarious satisfaction plainly and simply.

The chief priests and scribes, who were full of sin and condemnation, denied that they had any sin, and refused to be baptized. But Christ, who is without sin, who alone can claim that "no deceit was found in His mouth," He came and asked to be baptized by John. . . . But why? Not for Himself but for us. Christ here stood in our place, assumed the form of sinful flesh, and became the greatest sinner, who had and carried on Himself the sins of all the world. These He placed in Baptism and washed them from Himself, indeed, from us all, in whose place He stood there, so that they might be submerged and drowned in His Baptism. Hence John says, "Behold, the Lamb of God that bears the sin of the world" [John 1:29]. If Christ is the Lamb of God, He must of course be holy, pure, and innocent. If Christ bears the sin of the world. He must clearly be a great sinner. As Isaiah says, "The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Is. 53 [:6]). So whoever believes that his sins, and all the world's, are on Christ, and He was baptized and nailed to the cross and shed His blood for them, in order to cleanse, rectify, justify, and save them, has forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Christ's Baptism, cross, suffering, and death are his own.²²

"To put it briefly, our righteousness and blessedness rest only in the merits of Christ's Passion. As John

¹⁸ Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 129.

¹⁹ Johann Spangenberg, *The Christian Year of Grace: The Chief Parts of Scripture Explained in Questions and Answers*, trans. & ed. Matthew Carver (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014)

²⁰ Robert Kolb, "Introduction," in Spangenberg, *Christian Year of Grace*, xiii-xiv.

²¹ Spangenberg, *Christian Year of Grace*, 138.

²² Spangenberg, *Christian Year of Grace*, 391.

the Baptist says, 'Behold, this is the Lamb of God that bears the sin of the world' (John 1 [:29])."²³ "We should express our thanks to God the Father and our Savior Christ, the true Passover Lamb that bears the sin of the world (John 1 [:29])."²⁴

Dogmatically

Under this heading we observe how John 1:29 has been taught in the dogmatics of the Lutheran church. We marshal some passages from Johannes Quenstedt, Francis Pieper, and Johann Gerhard.

Johannes Quenstedt

Robert D. Preus distills Johannes Quenstedt's exegesis of John 1:29 as follows;

That Christ's vicarious work extends to all the world is brought out again by John 1:29, where the term "Lamb of God" may be understood analogically as pointing back to the Passover victim spoken of in Ex. 12:3ff. and elsewhere. The Paschal Lamb was a type of Christ who was to be the Sacrifice for us (1 Cor. 5:7). But the term must also be taken materially as the true Lamb which all the Old Testament offerings only prefigured. Therefore the emphatic ὁ ἀμνός, contrasting this Lamb with all the Levitical lambs as the One who the prophets had predicted would come and wash away sin. This is no ordinary lamb, but is the Lamb of God, the One appointed by God Himself to be a victim. "Therefore He was the true Lamb of God, the heavenly Lamb, the Lamb who was Himself God, the Lamb who offered Himself to God that He might perfect the saints" (Rom. 3:25). The αἴρων denotes the act of carrying or bearing, the transferal of a burden and as well the bearing of a transferred burden. The burden which Christ carried is sin, and He bore this burden as One guilty of sin (Lev. 5:5), as One taking the burden away from another (Is. 38:17). The burden is the singular ἡ ἁμαρτία, which is the reading in the best ancient MSS. By ἡ ἁμαρτία is not to be understood only original sin (Bellarmine), but everything which can be called sin, all sin collectively. There are many other passages where the singular ἡ ἁμαρτία refers not to original sin, but to specific acts of sin (cf. John 8:46; 15:22,24; Rom. 3:9,20). Finally it must be noted in this passage that the term κόσμος means all men and cannot be narrowed to future generations (Socinians) or those who have been chosen for eternal life by some absolute decree (Calvinists).²⁵

Francis Pieper

Luther states that it is paganism ... to imagine that God is gracious to men "without cost" – without the Vicarious Satisfaction. All the concepts belonging to the Vicarious Satisfaction are found in Luther. See, for instance, St. L. XX:1084 ff. (on John 3:16–21); St. L. VII: 1716 ff. (on John 1:29); St. L. IX:367 ff. (on Gal. 3:13).²⁶

The Son of God is indeed "the Revealer of God's love" toward sinful mankind. But He is the Revealer only by His vicarious atonement; only as the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world; only as the Son of God who in the fullness of time became man and in the stead of man assumed the obligations and punishment of the divine Law (John 1:29; Gal. 4:4–5; 3:13).²⁷

Whoever denies the substitutional satisfaction of Christ denies the very essence of the Christian

²³ Spangenberg, *Christian Year of Grace*, 222.

²⁴ Spangenberg, *Christian Year of Grace*, 156.

²⁵ Robert D. Preus, "The Vicarious Atonement in John Quenstedt," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, vol. xxxii, no. 2, 1961, 78–97, 88–89. The article is an exposition of Johannes Andreas Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-polemica sive systema theologicum* (1685), Part Three, Cap. III, Membrum II, "De officio Christi," Sec. 1, Th. 14 to 44.

²⁶ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), II:347.

²⁷ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, I:404.

faith, because only the reliance on Christ's vicarious satisfaction (1 Cor. 2:2; 15:1-3; John 1:29) is the Christian faith.²⁸

It is Scriptural to say that God did impute the guilt of man to the innocent Christ (Is. 53:6; 2 Cor. 5:21; John 1:29; Ps. 69:5) He did impose the suffering on the innocent Christ in the stead of guilty mankind. 1 Pet. 3:18 ... Gal. 3:13.²⁹

For whom did Christ render satisfaction? 1. Not for Himself. Scripture throughout attests that Christ was personally without sin and that the sin which He bore (John 1:29) and expiated (1 John 2:2; 4:10) was the sin of men imputed to Him *actu frenti* (2 Cor. 5:21: "He hath made Him to be sin for us"; John 1:29; etc.). His *obedientia activa*, too, as has just been shown, He rendered not for Himself, but for mankind.³⁰

The theology which has moved away from Scripture into the domain of the "pious faith-consciousness" is in a bad way. One of the deplorable products of this theology is its denial of the *satisfactio Christi vicaria*. Hofmann, for instance, who has been called the father of the subjective theology (*Ichtheologie*) among the conservative Lutheran theologians of the nineteenth century, has very definitely denied the substitutional atonement of Christ. And today the denial of the *satisfactio vicaria* is about as universal as the denial of the inspiration of Holy Scripture. And right here we have the real reason why Scripture is not recognized as Christ's Word. Whoever denies *satisfactio vicaria* does not know the Christ whom Scripture shows us. (John 1:29: "Behold the Lamb of God, etc."; Matt. 20:28: "to give His life a ransom for many.")³¹

Johann Gerhard

In Gerhard we see that the basic ideas of today's adversaries already were plaguing the church centuries ago, and they were refuted by Lutheran Orthodoxy.

Gerhard says:

There is nothing to our adversaries' objection: "Christ died for our sins. But now, He could not have died in place of or in the stead of our sins. Therefore when He is said to have died for us, this does not mean that He died in our place but for our sake."

We respond. The meaning of the particle "for" is not altogether the same in these propositions: "Christ died for us" and "Christ died for our sins." In the first statement, the preposition "for" is added to the person; and the Greek text has *αυτί*, which properly indicates the stead of another and an exchange. In the latter statement, "for" is added to the thing, and the Greek text has the word *περί* or *υπερ*. Christ died for us to redeem us; He died for our sins to expiate and remove them. For it is in this way that Christ died for our sins: that He Himself, of Himself, as just and innocent, on the basis of God's decree and will, took our sins upon Himself so that they might be thrown upon Him that He might endure their punishments (Ps. 69:6; Isa. 53:6; John 1:29). Therefore in the judgment of God, He is considered sin and a curse (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13).³²

He says:

We freely acknowledge that Christ was made to be sin in such a way that He became the

²⁸ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, I:232.

²⁹ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, II:353.

³⁰ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, II:380.

³¹ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, I:6.

³² Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces: On Justification through Faith*, trans. Richard J. Dinda, eds. Joshua J. Hayes and Heath R. Curtis (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2018), § 46, 73.

sacrificial victim for sin. But the imputation of our sins to Christ is not thereby excluded but rather established since it was for this very reason that Christ became the sacrificial victim for the sins of the world: because they were imputed to Him before the judgment seat of God. The Holy Spirit speaks about this as follows (Isa. 53:6): “The Lord placed upon Him the iniquities of us all.” Verse 12: “He carried the sins of many.” Observe here that in these words of the prophet two things are connected: that Christ took upon Himself both the punishments of sins and our own sins. John 1:29: “Behold the Lamb of God, who ἀρῶν” (“takes up, carries, and bears”) “the sins of the world.” Here the Baptist is referencing the sacrifices of the Old Testament in which the sins of those who were making the sacrifice were being transferred by a typological imputation onto the sacrificial victims. But the type of the scapegoat must especially be observed here (Lev. 16:21-22): “Let Aaron lay both hands on the head of the scapegoat and confess all the sins of the children of Israel and all their iniquities, and let him put those upon its head. He will send the goat out into the wilderness through a man prepared to do this so that in this way the goat will carry all their sins upon himself into the wilderness,” etc. No one can deny that this goat was a type of Christ. “He Himself bore (ἀνήνεγκεν) our sins in His body on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24).³³

He says:

There is nothing to Bellarmine’s retort: “One time in Holy Writ Christ is said to be sin as a figure of speech because He was a sacrificial victim for sin; and one time He is called a curse because He was subject to curses and insults and very many punishments.” This explanation is true, but it is incomplete because he is making opposites out of subordinates. Christ is said to be sin not only because He became a victim for sin but also because God laid upon Him the iniquities of us all (Isa. 53:6), for which reason He is called the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29), something we explained in detail earlier [§ 208].

Therefore we invert the argument. Christ truly and really took upon Himself the punishments for our sins. Therefore our sins are correctly said to have been imputed to Him. Christ offered Himself as a victim upon the altar of the cross, “for a fragrance of sweetness to God the Father” (Eph. 5:2). Therefore “He bore our sins in His body on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24). “Christ was wounded for our iniquities,” and therefore God “placed upon Him the iniquities of us all” [Isa. 53:5-6]. Therefore Christ can truly be called a sinner and, yes, even sin, not by inhesion but by imputation.³⁴

He says:

In ch. 7 Bellarmine attacks the citadel of the controversy and tries to prove that our justification does not consist in the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. Furthermore, the Papists are still so hostile to the doctrine of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness that they call it “putative and imaginary righteousness.” (Andrada, *Defens. fid. Trid.*, p. 477, calls it “the maddest insanity.” Stapleton, *Antid. apost.*, p. 97, calls it “a specter from the mind of Luther.” The *Cens. Colon.*, says, “This imputation is unheard of in the world.”)

The Photinian Schmalztzius (*Contra Frantz.*, disp. 2) calls it “the deceit of Satan.” Cornelius a Lapide (on Ephesians 4) calls it a “worm.”

William Rainolds (*Contra Witak.*, p. 324) calls it “a black mathematical lie.” Sander (*Dejustific.*, bk. 5, ch. 1) writes: “By a dirty trick our people have translated the apostle’s word λογίζεσθαι with the Latin compound *imputari* [‘to be imputed’].”)

Sibrandus [Lubertus] (*Declarat.*, p. 110): “If living faith, insofar as it is alive, is imputed to

³³ Gerhard, *On Justification*, § 208, 391-392.

³⁴ Gerhard, *On Justification*, § 242, 451.

us for righteousness, it follows that Christ's obedience is not imputed to us." Page 76: "Faith in the narrow sense of the word is not reckoned to us for righteousness."

...

Lest Bellarmine reverse this so as to say, "The satisfaction of Christ but not His righteousness is imputed to us," we note that a man who has fallen into sin owes God not only the punishment but also therefore the full observance of the Law. Therefore because enduring the punishment was unbearable for man and because it was impossible for man to fulfill the Law perfectly, therefore Christ both took upon Himself the punishment for our sins and in our place provided perfect obedience to the Law. This satisfaction and obedience of Christ cannot become ours in any way other than by imputation alone, for it cannot be infused into the soul such that it inheres in it as an accident because it is not a quality but merit consisting in actions and passions. Therefore it remains that it is imputed to us. In this imputation two applications occur. The first is that of God, who imputes the satisfaction of Christ to us who believe, that is, the fulfillment of the Law and the payment of the punishment due to our sins, and He considers all of this to be ours just as if we ourselves had fulfilled the Law and had paid the punishments due to our sins. The second is ours, for we apply to ourselves the satisfaction of Christ when we firmly claim that God receives us into grace for Christ's sake, forgives our sins, and considers us righteous.

This can be clarified from the parable of the servant as it is set forth in Matt. 18:28. The sinner owes God ten thousand talents. The incarnate Son of God offers Himself as satisfaction for the entire sum and allows it to be transcribed to Him. He allows the guilt to be reckoned to Himself so that He Himself becomes the debtor. In this way that debt is imputed to Christ, and for this reason Scripture says (Isa. 53:6): "God laid upon Christ the iniquities of us all." "He made Christ to be sin for us" (2 Cor. 5:21). "Christ is the Lamb of God, taking upon Himself and taking away the sins of the world" (John 1:29), for which reason He is forced to pay for what He did not take (Ps. 69: [4]) and "was wounded for our transgressions" (Isa. 53:5). This was clarified earlier (§ 202) with the example of the imputation made to Christ, for as our sins have been imputed to Christ, so through faith Christ's righteousness is imputed to us.³⁵

Homiletically

Untold number of sermons have been preached in the Lutheran church on John 1:29. We cannot survey them here. Because the adversaries claim that Luther opposes Lutheran Orthodoxy,³⁶ let it suffice to consider the homiletical treatment of John 1:29 only by Luther. By this we shall see whether they are right to claim themselves as Luther's heirs and Lutheran Orthodoxy as a defection from Luther. We consider a sermon in "Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4" (1537-1540), AE 22:161-170.

Luther says, "Neither our thoughts nor our words can do the subject full justice" to the text of John 1:29. In the space available here, we cannot do justice even to Luther's sermon. But we consider some excerpts.

[The Lamb of God] has been ordained to bear on Its back the sins of the world. ... The Easter lamb is a Lamb from God, not a lamb selected from the wethers. The lamb of the Law was a shepherd's lamb or a man's lamb." John wants to say: "This is the true Lamb, which takes away the sin of the people. With your other lambs, sacrificed on the Passover festival, you did try to remove your sin; but you never succeeded. In this Lamb, born of a virgin, you will. It is not a natural lamb or wether referred to in the Law, and yet It is a lamb." For God prescribed that it was to be a Lamb that should be sacrificed and roasted on the cross for our sins. In other

³⁵ Gerhard, *On Justification*, § 235, 440-441.

³⁶ Kurt E. Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion: A Theological Analysis of the Missouri Synod Conflict*, Monograph Series, number 3 (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1977), 46.

respects He was a man like all other human beings; but God made Him a Lamb which should bear the sins of all the world. ...

He assumes not only my sins but also those of the whole world, from Adam down to the very last mortal. These sins He takes upon Himself; for these He is willing to suffer and die that our sins may be expunged and we may attain eternal life and blessedness. But who can ever give adequate thought or expression to this theme? The entire world with all its holiness, rectitude, power, and glory is under the dominion of sin and completely discredited before God. Anyone who wishes to be saved must know that all his sins have been placed on the back of this Lamb! Therefore John points this Lamb out to his disciples, saying: "Do you want to know where the sins of the world are placed for forgiveness? Then don't resort to the Law of Moses or betake yourselves to the devil; there, to be sure, you will find sins, but sins to terrify you and damn you. But if you really want to find a place where the sins of the world are exterminated and deleted, then cast your gaze upon the cross. The Lord placed all our sins on the back of this Lamb. ...

This is the basis of all Christian doctrine. Whoever believes it, is a Christian; whoever does not, is no Christian, and will get what he has coming to him. The statement is clear enough: "This is the Lamb of God, who bears the sin of the world." Moreover, this text is the Word of God, not our word. Nor is it our invention that the Lamb was sacrificed by God and that, in obedience to the Father, this Lamb took upon Himself the sin of the whole world. But the world refuses to believe this; it does not want to concede the honor to this dear Lamb that our salvation depends entirely on His bearing our sin. The world insists on playing a role in this too. But the more it aspires to do in atonement for sin, the worse it fares. For there is no atoner but this Lamb; God recognizes no other. Would it not be reasonable and right to take these words into our hearts that we might become aware of our sin? ...

For how amazing it is that the Son of God becomes my servant, that He humbles Himself so, that He cumbers Himself with my misery and sin, yes, with the sin and the death of the entire world! He says to me: "You are no longer a sinner, but I am. I am your substitute. You have not sinned, but I have. The entire world is in sin. However, you are not in sin; but I am. All your sins are to rest on Me and not on you." No one can comprehend this. In yonder life our eyes will feast forever on this love of God. ...

This cardinal text still remains intact. It reads that I cannot bear my sin or render satisfaction for it, but that God has chosen a sacrifice which was slaughtered, roasted on the cross, and eaten. Upon this Lamb all sins were laid. ...

Holy Scripture declares that the sin of the world does not lie on the world, or St. John's sin on St. John, or St. Peter's on Peter; for they are unable to bear it. The sin of the world lies on Christ, the Lamb of God. He steps forth and becomes a vile sinner, yea, sin itself (2 Cor. 5:21), just as if He Himself had committed all the sin of the world from its beginning to its end. This is to be the Lamb's office, mission, and function.

Exegetically

Three weighty reasons warrant exegetical drill-down into the meaning of John 1:29.

First, the Agnus Dei is a summation of many of the preceding ordinaries (parts of the service that remain the same from week to week, i.e., ordinarily used) in the Divine Service.³⁷ John's words are repeated throughout the Divine Service and they are repeated from week to week in every Divine Service.

Second, as William C. Wenrich notes in the *Concordia Commentary*:

³⁷ Grime, "Service of the Sacrament," 616.

Outside the Prologue (Jn 1:1-18) “the Lamb of God” (Jn 1:29, 36) is the first title given to Jesus. It thus assumes the status of a primary interpretive title and gives content to the other two titles which are explicitly and implicitly given in this brief narrative, namely, “the Christ/Anointed” implicit in the descent of the Spirit (Jn 1:33) and “the Son of God” (Jn 1:34).³⁸

The interpretive status of “Lamb of God” for “Christ” and “Son of God” warrants close consideration of what “Lamb of God” means.

Third, there are different views of “Lamb of God” and “take away” that raise issues about atonement. To address these issues exegetically, first we will observe an expressive habit the Apostle John exhibits in his gospel. With that habit in mind, we will approach the expressions “Lamb of God” and “takes away” the sin of the world.

John’s Expressive Habit

Leon Morris observes that “It is the habit of the Fourth Evangelist to use expressions which may be taken in more ways than one, evidently with a view to including all the possible meanings.”³⁹

This habit commences in John’s first verse. When he says, “In the beginning,” one could wonder, does he mean “the beginning of history” or “at the root of the universe?” We come to see that he means both.⁴⁰ In chapter 3 when Jesus tells Nicodemus that unless he is born ἀνωθεν he cannot see the kingdom of God, does he mean “born again” or “born from above?” NKJV and NASB render it “born again” in the text and add notes giving an alternate rendering “from above.”

The Greek is patient of either meaning. Most scholars agree that both are true and that probably both are meant. John does this kind of thing repeatedly. It is his habit to use words which may be understood in more ways than one apparently with the deliberate intention that the full meaning should be understood.⁴¹

ESV renders it “born again” in the text and adds a note saying, “Or *from above*; the Greek is purposely ambiguous and can mean both *again* and *from above*; also verse 7.”

In the 12 (English) words, “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” there are three such instances. What does he mean by:

- Lamb
- of God
- takes away

Each of these may be taken in more than one way.

We do not ordinarily call men lambs.

The exact expression “the Lamb of God” ... is not found in any literature known to us before St. John’s Gospel. We are not in a position to say that John has taken the expression from such-

³⁸ William C. Weinrich, *Concordia Commentary: John 1:1-7:1* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 238.

³⁹ Morris, *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 129.

⁴⁰ Morris, *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 129-130, citing William Temple, *Readings in St. John’s Gospel* (London: Macmillan & Co., Limited, 1947), 3.

⁴¹ Morris, *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 130. *Contra* Lenski who says it cannot be from above and must be born again; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943), 233-234; Weinrich who says it cannot be born again and must be from above, William C. Weinrich, *Concordia Commentary: John 1:1-7:1* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 362-363; and Spaeth who says it makes no difference, Adolph Spaeth, *The Lutheran Commentary: Annotations on the Gospel According to St. John* (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1895), 37.

and—such a source. As far as we can see it originated with him. We are driven accordingly to examine ideas and expressions which are sufficiently akin to this one to be taken seriously as its possible sources. For, of course, if we have the source we may well find ourselves with the meaning.⁴²

Scripture provides us with many lambs that John might have in mind. What would an allusion to any of those lambs say about the atonement?

The genitive “of God” could mean “belonging to God” or “provided by God.”⁴³ How might either of these reflect differently on the atonement?

The expression ἀρῶν has been translated in two ways: “takes away” and “bears.” As Adolph Spaeth notes in *The Lutheran Commentary*, “Our English (Rev.) Version gives two readings of the verb in this sentence. In the text itself it is ‘taketh away;’ on the margin it reads: ‘beareth.’”⁴⁴ Similarly, the American Revised Version reads “taketh away the sin” in the text, with a note “Or, beareth the sin.” Many adversaries of Lutheran Orthodoxy admit that in some way Christ “took away” our sins while denying that He accomplished it by “bearing” them as our substitute. This denial of “bearing” affects what “takes away” means. What does John’s word “bearing” or “takes away” say about that?

All these exegetical issues bear upon vicarious satisfaction in the Agnus Dei. We will address them under two headings: “Many Lambs in One” and “Taking Away by Bearing.”

Many Lambs in One

Among the lambs of the Old Testament that have been proposed as filling some of the content of John the Baptist’s title for Christ, “Lamb of God” are:

- Passover lamb⁴⁵
- Goat and scapegoat on Day of Atonement
- Suffering servant in Isaiah 53⁴⁶
- Sacrifice of Isaac⁴⁷
- Perpetual (twice daily) offering⁴⁸
- Guilt offering
- Lamb in Revelation
- Abel’s sacrifice

Each of these has been criticized:

- a) as being in some aspect a misfit for the case of Christ, or
- b) as not being comprehensive of the case of Christ.⁴⁹

⁴² Morris, *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 130.

⁴³ Morris, *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 129.

⁴⁴ Adolph Spaeth, *The Lutheran Commentary: Annotations on the Gospel According to St. John* (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1895), 18–19.

⁴⁵ Weinrich, *Concordia Commentary: John 1:1–7:1*, 238–239, 245.

⁴⁶ Weinrich, *Concordia Commentary: John 1:1–7:1*, 238–239, 245.

⁴⁷ Weinrich, *Concordia Commentary: John 1:1–7:1*, 242–246.

⁴⁸ Weinrich, *Concordia Commentary: John 1:1–7:1*, 239–240.

⁴⁹ Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 144–148. Weinrich, *Concordia Commentary: John 1:1–7:1*, 238–246.

What did we expect? Sin has manifold ill consequences. The work of Christ in atonement kills many birds with one stone and does so in a panoply of ways. Scripture speaks of atonement using a variety of words and themes.⁵⁰ What one lamb should we have thought could be comprehensive of all that Christ accomplished for our salvation? What one lamb should we have thought, as a type or trope for the real Lamb, could perfectly fit the case of Christ? The manifold work of Christ requires a manifold type, trope, or title. John the Baptist's speech fits with the Apostle John's habit of using expressions susceptible to multiple meanings with the intent to include and convey a composite of them. The fitting aspects of the many lambs compose a harmonious portrait of the one true Lamb. As R. C. H. Lenski says:

The Baptist's title for Jesus should not be referred back to this or that particular "lamb" mentioned in the Old Testament rituals, but rather to all of them, since each could typify and illustrate prophetically only some part of the stupendous work God's own Lamb would perform.⁵¹

Along with Lenski, other Lutheran commentators support the inclusion of many Old Testament lambs in the title "Lamb of God." Weinrich says:

It "is most likely the case [that] definite lambs of the OT are in view, such as the paschal lamb (Exodus 12); the prophesy of Is 53:7; and the *tamid*, the "perpetual" (twice-daily) offering (Ex29:38-42; Num 28:1-10)."⁵²

According to Kretzmann:

John said...: Behold the Lamb of God that beareth the sin of the world. The herald proclaimed the coming of the King, undoubtedly with the passage in Is. 53 in mind. Christ was the prophesied Lamb, the sacrificial Lamb, the Passover Lamb, the Lamb that was led to the slaughter."⁵³

While none of the eight lambs listed above comprehensively portrays Christ, each of them portrays something true of him that contributes significantly to making us wise unto salvation. The portrait of Christ as "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" depicts his atonement by vicarious satisfaction. By his willing obedience to his Father and by his innocent suffering and death, both done for us as our substitute, he bears and takes away our sin.

Passover

Jesus associates his crucifixion with the Passover. "You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified." (Matthew 26:2) Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper during the Passover meal. He said, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." (Luke 22:15) John places the death of Christ at the time the Passover lambs were being slain in the Temple. "Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" (John 19:14) John's references in 19:36 for "Not one of his bones shall be broken" are Exodus 12:46 and Numbers 9:12 about the Passover lamb. The Passover lamb immediately precedes the Exodus. In the transfiguration, Jesus, Moses, and Elijah speak about Christ's "decease" or "exodus" that He shall accomplish at Jerusalem, namely, his cross. (Luke 9:31) Paul says, "Christ, our

⁵⁰ Scripture speaks of atonement in words and themes of covenant, testament, sacrifice, Day of Atonement, Passover, Pascal Lamb, redemption, reconciliation, propitiation, justification, the blood of Christ, Lamb of God, payment, Surety, covering, mercy-seat, deliverance, victory over our enemies (the Devil, the world, our sinful selves, death), and ransom, to name some. In Scripture and in dogmatics, these words and themes have usually related and sometimes partially overlapping meanings. Yet each remains a distinct theme.

⁵¹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943), 126-127.

⁵² Weinrich, *Concordia Commentary: John 1:1-7:1*, 219,

⁵³ Paul E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible: New Testament*, vol. I (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 410.

Passover, was sacrificed for us.” (1 Corinthians 5:7) Weinrich says:

Jn 19:14 reports that Jesus was condemned on the day of preparation for the Passover, at the very time when the lambs began to be slaughtered in the temple. Similarly, that no bone of Jesus was broken (Jn 19:36) refers to the commandment in Ex 12:46 (also LXX Ex 12:10) concerning the paschal lamb. In view of these Passover allusions it is also highly likely the hyssop in Jn 19:29 refers to the hyssop used by the Israelites to dab the blood of the paschal lamb upon their doorposts (Ex 12:22).⁵⁴

Scapegoat on Day of Atonement

Granted, the scapegoat of the Day of Atonement is a goat, not a lamb. Yet, “If there is one thing that the scapegoat does it is to take away sin. It fits in very well with the words, ‘which taketh away the sin of the world.’”⁵⁵

The language of “member of a flock,” “lamb,” “ram,” and “goat” has a certain amount of fluidity in the scriptural prescriptions for sacrifices. Though we usually think of the guilt offering which took away sin as being a ram because often it was (e.g., Leviticus 5:16), yet on certain occasions it was prescribed that a lamb should be sacrificed as a guilt offering. (Leviticus 14:12ff., 21, 24f.; Numbers 6:12) Twice the Law uses the phrase “the Lamb of the guilt offering.” (14:24, 25) In the sacrifice of Isaac, when he asks, “where is the lamb,” the word means “member of a flock.” NKJV renders it “lamb” in the text and adds a note saying, “or goat.” While Abraham used the word “lamb” when he said God would provide, what God provided was a ram. “Behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.” (Genesis 22:13 ESV). If such use of language is good enough for Abraham, it should be good enough for us. If such use of language is good enough for God who provided the ram for a lamb and commanded the guilt offering, it should be good enough for commentators. “Behold, where is the lamb.” “Behold, behind him was a ram.” “Behold, the Lamb of God.”

John the Baptist alludes to the scapegoat carrying the people’s sins away (Lv 16:21-22). Luth: “[The Son of God] says to me: ‘You are no longer a sinner, but I am. I am your substitute. . . . All your sins are to rest on Me and not on you’” (AE 22:167).⁵⁶

Suffering Servant

A key suffering servant passage is Isaiah 53. There, “all we like sheep have gone astray.” (v 6). Yet we sheep who, because of our sin, deserve to be led to slaughter are not. Instead, our substitute, “was led as a lamb to the slaughter” (v 7) because “the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” (v 6) “As a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth” (v 7), as we see when Christ was before Pontius Pilate. “Pilate said to Him, ‘Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?’ But He answered him not one word, so that the governor marveled greatly.” (Matthew 27:13-14) “He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” The Ethiopian eunuch asked Phillip to explain the lamb in Isaiah 53. “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.” (Act 8:35)

Sacrifice of Isaac

The sacrifice of Isaac presents several aspects typifying Christ as the Lamb of God. Remember when God said, “No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations.” (Genesis 17:5). Whereas Abram means “exalted father,” Abraham means “father of a multitude.” We see Abraham willing to give his only son as a sacrifice. “Abraham stretched

⁵⁴ Weinrich, *Concordia Commentary: John 1:1-7:1*, 239.

⁵⁵ Morris, *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 136.

⁵⁶ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 1778, n. on John 1:29.

out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.” (Genesis 22:10) Abraham as father typifies God the Father. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.” (John 3:16)

Isaac says, “Behold ... where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” (Genesis 22:7) John the Baptist says, “Behold! The Lamb of God.” Behold, where is the lamb. Behold, the Lamb. That is an interesting linguistic echo.

“Abraham said, ‘My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering’” (Genesis 22:8) To make atonement, the sacrifice cannot be something Abraham offers to God. Abraham has no lamb that could atone. Not even his “only son Isaac, whom you love,” (Genesis 22:2) could make atonement. Instead, the sacrifice must be a lamb God provides, the Lamb of God.

Isaac, after all, is a sinner. He needs atonement to be made for him. He cannot make atonement. The Lamb of God substitutes for Isaac on the altar, as He substitutes for the whole world. Abraham offered the ram that was caught in the thicket “instead of his son.” (Genesis 22:13). This is clear language of substitution to match the narrative and liturgical action of substitution.

Nevertheless, Isaac’s willingness to be sacrificed typifies Christ. Jesus is a sacrifice and as such can be called a sacrificial victim. But for this sacrifice, He is a volunteer. His sacrifice is voluntary.

Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father. (John 10:17-18)

Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: “Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come – In the volume of the book it is written of Me – To do Your will, O God.’” (Hebrews 10:5-7, Psalm 40:6-8)

Perpetual Morning and Evening Offering

The perpetual offering, because it was done morning and evening every day, easily might come to the minds of John’s original hearers when he called Jesus the “the Lamb of God.” These sacrifices were done according to Number 28:3-8.

And you shall say to them, “This is the offering made by fire which you shall offer to the LORD: two male lambs in their first year without blemish, day by day, as a regular burnt offering. The one lamb you shall offer in the morning, the other lamb you shall offer in the evening, and one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a grain offering mixed with one-fourth of a hin of pressed oil. It is a regular burnt offering which was ordained at Mount Sinai for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the LORD. And its drink offering shall be one-fourth of a hin for each lamb; in a holy place you shall pour out the drink to the LORD as an offering. The other lamb you shall offer in the evening; as the morning grain offering and its drink offering, you shall offer it as an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD.

The Lamb in Revelation

Of course, the Apostle John had not written Revelation yet when John the Baptist pointed out Christ as the Lamb of God in John 1:29. So the Baptist’s original hearers could not have associated his words with John’s future words in Revelation. But Revelation builds on the Old Testament foreshadowing of the Lamb of God using the New Testament fulfillment in the person and work of Christ. Therefore Luther D. Reed in commenting on Agnus Dei in *The Lutheran Liturgy* says that we Christians can associate “Lamb of God” with some “thirty references to Christ as a lamb in John’s Revelation.”⁵⁷

On a purely humanistic or naturalistic basis, this association would be illogical and absurd. But we

⁵⁷ Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 368.

Christians know that the Holy Spirit is the Author of Scripture. (2 Peter 1:21) We know that when the Spirit revealed Jesus to John the Baptist (John 1:32-34) as the “Lamb of God,” the Spirit already knew He would inspire the Apostle John to write Revelation and call Christ a Lamb 30 times. From our vantage point, we know that we are meant to make this association between John’s Gospel and John’s Revelation. In John’s Revelation, many Old Testament and New Testament tributaries flow into one mighty river.

Answering Objections

Commentators who reject this or that Old Testament lamb as being among John’s references in the title “Lamb of God” often base their criticism in part on contentions that Messianic and other necessary understandings of those lambs did not exist before John revealed the title. That hardly succeeds as a critique, however.

The Pharisees did not know whose son Christ is. Jesus said to them, “If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his Son?” And no one was able to answer Him a word.” (Matthew 22:45) The fact that they did not understand Psalm 110:1 does not mean we should not understand now that Jesus has revealed it. While the Pharisees did not understand, in that same event “the common people heard Him gladly,” (Mark 12:37) and so should we.

On the road to Emmaus, “beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” (Luke 23:13). That was necessary. It was a revelation. In another post-resurrection appearance to his disciples,

“These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.” And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. (Luke 24:44-45)

In the same way, John, the greatest prophet other than Christ, reveals new things from old ones. Neither John nor Christ was confined to the state of understanding of the scribes, Pharisees, or even the disciples. Once John says, “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” that is a revelation.

Not only does the conclusion that those commenters draw from their alleged factual premise not follow, their premise also is suspect. Morris points out that,

“For the Palestinian Jew, all lamb sacrifice, especially the Passover lamb and the Tamid [perpetual morning and evening] offering, was a memorial of the Akedah [the binding of Isaac upon the wood of the altar] with its effects of deliverance, forgiveness of sin and messianic salvation.” Since all lamb sacrifice pointed back to the Akedah so must the reference to “the Lamb of God.”⁵⁸

Paul J. Grime’s says in *Companion to the Services*:

Multiple Old Testament images undoubtedly came to mind when John’s disciples heard those words. On the Day of Atonement, for example, one goat was sacrificed for the sins of the people, while upon a second goat – the scapegoat – the sins of the people were confessed before it was released into the desert. (Leviticus 16), Equally prominent, the image of the Passover Lamb, while not speaking directly to the taking away of sin, brought to mind the sacrifice of a spotless lamb and the sprinkling of its blood upon the doorposts as a sign that death had already come to that house (Exodus 12). In addition, in the most significant of the Suffering Servant passages (Isaiah 53), the Lord is likened to a sheep who goes silently to slaughter and bears the sins of many (especially vv. 7, 10, 12). All of those images undoubtedly came to mind as the Baptist

⁵⁸ Morris, *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 140, quoting Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1961), 225.

exclaimed that Jesus was this Lamb who takes away the sin of the world.⁵⁹

Similarly, Willam C. Weinrich says in the *Concordia Commentary*:

In view, therefore of the explicit associations made in John between the paschal lamb and Isaac as the lamb of the burnt offering, and in view of the very possible association between Isaac and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, it seems likely that the Lamb of God of Jn 1:29 is an amalgam of these three backgrounds: the Passover lamb, Isaac, and the Suffering Servant. Jesus is identified by John to be the true *Paschal Lamb* who is offered by his Father (“the Lamb of God”), even as *Isaac* (“only son,” Gen 22:21) was offered by his father, and who as the *Suffering Servant* became the chastisement of God for the sins of the world.⁶⁰

The title “Lamb of God” particularly when it is kept intact with the rest of John’s sentence, “who takes away the sins of the world,” merges many lambs into one. As Adolph Spaeth says in *The Lutheran Commentary*,

The “sins” of his hearers had been a constantly recurring theme in the discourses of the Baptist. His preaching and baptizing were unto repentance and forgiveness of sins. But neither the personal repentance of the sinners, nor that symbolical baptism in itself, had the power of taking one sin really away and burying it out of sight. Here is the man to do this, and the true, divinely-appointed method of doing it: “The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” It is the Lamb of God, provided by Him, appointed and chosen by God Himself; not altogether unknown in Israel, foreshadowed in the Passover-lamb, whose blood turned the avenging angel aside from the door of God’s people, directly prophesied in the well-known words of Isaiah liii, which were commonly accepted by the Jews as referring to the Messiah.⁶¹

Similarly, Johann Gerhard says,

Not only was the slaying of this animal [by Abel, Genesis 4:4; Hebrews 11:4] a type of Christ’s sacrifice but also the two lambs which had to be offered morning and evening every day (Num. 28:3)—and, in fact, all the sacrifices of the Old Testament offered for the expiation of sins and transgressions. That is why John calls Christ “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), for He fulfilled the figures of the Levitical sacrifices in His own body, not just later in His ascension but on the altar of the cross where He died for our sins.⁶²

Apparently from the commentators just quoted, the assertion that Messianic and other necessary understandings of the Old Testament lambs did not exist before John revealed the title is false and, in any event, is not an obstacle to John merging many Old Testament lambs together in Christ.

The Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) uses the noun ἀμνός 96 times. In 85 cases, the text speaks of offering a lamb or lambs in sacrifice. Indeed, 71 of them refer to the burnt offering. Putting that together with John saying the Lamb of God “takes away the sin of the world,” speaks strongly to vicarious satisfaction.

It is difficult to wash out “Lamb of God” to be so faint a title as to designate only *Christus Victor*, exemplary, or some other theory of the atonement lacking vicarious satisfaction. This is especially true when the title is kept intact with “takes away the sin of the world.” Subtract vicarious satisfaction and then try to explain what “Lamb of God” means. Try to base an explanation on any single or combined allusions to lambs in the Old Testament. Or, excluding any reference to the Old Testament, try to explain why John the Baptist called Jesus “the Lamb of God.” By discarding “the legal scheme” of the Old

⁵⁹ Grime, “Service of the Sacrament,” 615.

⁶⁰ Weinrich, *Concordia Commentary: John 1:1–7:1*, 245.

⁶¹ Adolph Spaeth, *Annotations on the Gospel According to St. John*, 18.

⁶² Gerhard, *On Justification*, § 43, 69.

Testament, the adversaries leave us with no exegetical key to understanding the Agnus Dei though we pray it in every Divine Service.

Taking Away by Bearing

Some commentators drive a wedge between two possible translations of ἀρῶν as “take away” sin or “bear” sin. In turn, some of the adversaries use a notion of taking away sin without bearing it to deny vicarious satisfaction.

Nearly all our English translations render ἀρῶν in John 1:29 as “takes away” or “is taking away” the sin of the world. Some render it “bears” the sin of the world. Luther rendered it into German as *trägt* (1545) or *traegt* (per Lenski⁶³) which would be “bears” in English. Lenski takes issue with Luther. After giving his reasons based mainly on the present tense of the verb, he says, “So we correct Luther’s version *traegt* and abide by our English versions, “taketh away.”⁶⁴ While I usually consult Lenski, always appreciate him, and like him particularly for his linguistic commentary, in this case, verb tenses ran away with him. In the *Concordia Commentary*, William C. Weinrich notes:

As May has properly emphasized, Jn 1:29 is not a direct quotation [from the OT or LXX], so the linguistic data may not be determinative. Too sharp a distinction between “bearing” and “taking away” is unwarranted (especially since נָשָׂא can have either or both meanings).⁶⁵

Weinrich says:

Thyen also rejects any opposition between “carrying” and “taking away.” When Jesus employs ἀρῶν to tell the paralytic to “take up” his bed and walk [in John 5:8], the man lifts up his bed in order to carry it away. Likewise the Lamb of God removes sin by carrying it away, and he carries it in order to remove it.⁶⁶

Thus Weinrich, May, and Thyen lend support to Adolph Spaeth’s view in *The Lutheran Commentary*.

Our English (Rev.) Version gives two readings of the verb in this sentence. In the text itself it is “taketh away;” on the margin it reads: “beareth.” The two combined give the full meaning of this momentous term. The “taking away” of the world’s sin is the principal idea, thus ridding the world of sin and all its consequences of guilt and judgment. But how can this terrible burden be lifted up and taken away if there is no one to put his hand to it, to take it up, burden himself with it, *bear* it on his own person and thus bring full deliverance from it?⁶⁷

Lenski himself quotes Luther saying:

Sin has but two places where it may be; either it may be with you, so that it lies upon your neck, or upon Christ, the Lamb of God. If now it lies upon your neck, you are lost; if, however, it lies upon Christ, you are free and will be saved.⁶⁸

It certainly involves bearing sin when sin either lies upon your neck or lies upon Christ. Luther associates sin lying upon Christ with him being the Lamb of God. He says, lies “upon Christ, the Lamb of God.”

Not only when translating the Bible, but also when working liturgically in preparing the German Mass,

⁶³ Lenski, *Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel*, 127.

⁶⁴ Lenski, *Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel*, 127.

⁶⁵ Weinrich, *Concordia Commentary: John 1:1–7:1*, 221, citing Erik Edward May, *Ecce Agnus Dei: A Philological and Exegetical Approach to John 1:29*, 36 (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1947), 114–115.

⁶⁶ Weinrich, *Concordia Commentary: John 1:1–7:1*, 221, n. 17, citing Hartwig Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 123.

⁶⁷ Spaeth, *Annotations on the Gospel According to St. John*, 18–19.

⁶⁸ Lenski, *Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel*, 129–130.

Luther emphasizes Christ bearing sin. Ulrich S. Leupold translates Luther's Agnus Dei as follows:⁶⁹

Lamb of God, O Jesus, Who doest bear the whole world's sin,
Have mercy on us

Lamb of God, O Jesus, Who does bear the whole world's sin,
Have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, O Jesus, Who doest bear the whole world's sin,
Peace in mercy grant us. Amen

Luther says that what makes Agnus Dei so suited to its placement in the Service of the Sacrament is that Christ bears our sin. He says, "Particularly the Agnus Dei, above all songs, serves well for the sacrament, for it clearly sings about and praises Christ for having borne our sins."⁷⁰ Of course, Luther is not excluding that the effect of Christ's bearing sin is to take sin away. But these are oriented as ground and benefit or, if you will, cause and effect. The cause or ground is Christ's bearing our sin. The effect or benefit is Christ's taking away our sin.

Lutheran liturgists carry Luther's view forward. Friedrich Lochner in *The Chief Divine Service* says.

Luther found the use of the Agnus Dei during Communion all the more appropriate and sensible. He writes: "The Agnus especially, more than any song, is of service to the Sacrament, since it clearly sings about and praises Christ as the one who bore our sins."⁷¹

He goes on,

During the threefold repetition we consider how the Lord Jesus (1) took away our sin, (2) personally bore the punishment for it, and (3) has conveyed His merits into our heart in the preaching of the Gospel and in the most Holy supper.⁷²

This is a formulation of vicarious satisfaction. The active obedience of Christ is expressed in the third element of that passage about His merits. The passive obedience of Christ is expressed in the second element about bearing our punishment. The satisfaction worked by Christ's active and passive obedience is expressed in the effect that, as stated in the first element, Christ "took away our sin." Because God is satisfied by Christ's bearing, our sins are taken away.

Luther's view passes into the Lutheran confessions in his own Smalcald Articles.

The first and chief article is this, that Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, "was put to death for our trespasses and raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). He alone is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). "God has laid upon him the iniquities of us all" (Isa. 53:6). Moreover, "all have sinned," and "they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, by his blood"⁷³

There he ties taking away the sin of the world with God laying upon him the iniquities of us all. He ties "bearing" of our sins to vicarious satisfaction. "Neither can the satisfaction be uncertain, because it is not our uncertain, sinful work. Rather, it is the suffering and blood of the innocent Lamb of God, who

⁶⁹ AE 53:152.

⁷⁰ Martin Luther, *Admonition Concerning the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of our Lord*, 1530, trans. Martin E. Lehmann, AE 38:123.

⁷¹ Lochner, *The Chief Divine Service*, 276, citing EA 23:191; StL 10:2195 (AE 38:123)].

⁷² Bishop William Durand from *The Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* as quoted in Lochner, *The Chief Divine Service*, 276 (in turn quoting from other intermediary sources).

⁷³ Martin Luther, Smalcald Articles, II.I.1-4, 292, Theodore G. Tappert, trans. and ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1959), 292.

takes away the sin of the world [John 1:29].”⁷⁴

There are many more places where Luther teaches vicarious satisfaction as an essential part, albeit not the only part, of the atonement. Here I have confined the discussion to some of his expositions on the Baptist’s words in John 1:29.

In the volume of *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* on John, Leon Morris notes:

MacGregor, agreeing that the verb *αἴρω* means not “take upon oneself”, but “take out of the way”, yet says, “But the latter thought, while enriching the former, also includes it, for a lamb can only ‘remove’ sin by vicariously ‘bearing’ it, and this Christ did”. J. Jeremias sees two possible meanings of the verb in this passage: “to take up and carry” and “to carry off”. He says, “In both cases it is a matter of setting aside the guilt of others. In the former, however, the means of doing this is by a substitutionary bearing of penalty; in the latter sin is removed by a means of expiation” (*TDNT*, I, pp. 185f.). In the Johannine manner probably both meanings are in mind.⁷⁵

The orientation of the two meanings is that in bearing our sins, Christ deals with the guilt, and thus takes sin away. A failure to deal with the guilt would provide no basis for the effect of taking away. As William C. Weinrich notes in the *Concordia Commentary*, “Most probably behind this Greek is the Hebrew *נָשָׂא עוֹן* or *נָשָׂא חַטָּא*, which speaks not of evil but of sin and guilt (often in a cultic context).”⁷⁶ The Septuagint is helpful here.

In the LXX *αἴρω* (usually in compound forms) renders at least twenty-eight different Hebrew verbs, but in the great majority of cases it renders *נָשָׂא*, “to lift up,” “to bear,” “to carry away.” The Greek [phrase] corresponds to the Hebrew idiom ... “bear iniquity” ... or “bear sin.” The idioms can express bearing one’s own sin and guilt and also bearing the sins of another (Lev 16:21–22 [the scapegoat]; Is 53:12 [the Lord’s servant, who bears the sins of many]).⁷⁷

Christ certainly does take sin away, and He does it by bearing sin in our place. Sin is out of the way for us because of Christ’s vicarious satisfaction. God imputes our sin to him and in that sense makes “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

In his *Popular Commentary*, Paul E. Kretzmann succeeds in summing up all of this in a succinct statement, “The first work of the Savior is this, that He bears and takes away the sin of the world.”⁷⁸ A little more elaborately yet still briefly, Kretzmann says:

In his capacity as Lamb of God, He lifts up and carries away, He puts away entirely, without leaving a trace behind, He renders full satisfaction for sin, all the sin without exception, all the transgression with all its guilt. This bearing and taking away was a continuous work and labor. The entire life of Jesus was a bearing and atoning for sin and the guilt of sin. The sin of the world, of the whole world, He bore and took away, without restriction or reservation.⁷⁹

There is no warrant for divorcing “takes away” from “bears.” Jesus takes away our sin by bearing our sin in vicarious satisfaction.

⁷⁴ Martin Luther, Smalcald Articles, III.III.36, Paul T. McCain, ed. *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 276.

⁷⁵ Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 148, n. 61.

⁷⁶ Weinrich, *Concordia Commentary: John 1:1–7:1*, 242.

⁷⁷ Weinrich, *Concordia Commentary: John 1:1–7:1*, 220.

⁷⁸ Kretzmann, *New Testament*, I:411.

⁷⁹ Kretzmann, *New Testament*, I:410.

Liturgical Summary

In the Roman Mass the Agnus Dei receives “the Roman emphasis on moral duty” such as with the priest striking his breast in two of its phrases similarly to the striking in the Confiteor at the words, “*mea culpa*” (through my fault).⁸⁰ By contrast, as Luther D. Reed says,

In the Lutheran conception the Agnus is closely connected with the distribution and has a strongly sacramental interpretation. It is not so much a renewed confession of sin as a means of spiritual communion with the Christ who is directly addressed, not the Father. The text contains a threefold confession of Christ’s vicarious atonement in fulfillment of prophesy (Isa. 53:7, 12; I Pet. 1:19–20), and a prayer for mercy and peace which his death on the cross has won for us (Eph. 2:13–17). ... The reference to Christ as a lamb recalls to the worshiper not only the sacrificial character of his death, but also his freedom from guilt, his patience and gentleness, and his voluntary submission to sufferings and death. Thus, reception of the elements in the Holy Communion is intimately connected with our Lord’s sacrifice on Calvary and its fruits, which are forgiveness and peace.⁸¹

Reed’s liturgical exposition embraces all the elements of vicarious satisfaction. He says “vicarious atonement.” He refers to the active obedience of Christ in “his freedom from guilt.” He refers to the passive obedience of Christ in “his voluntary submission to sufferings and death.” He refers to satisfaction in “mercy and peace which his death on the cross has won for us” and in “the fruits” of Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary “which are forgiveness and peace.”

Arthur A. Just, Jr. says:

Within the Divine Service, the Agnus Dei sums up the themes woven throughout the ordinaries. The atonement of the Lamb is the most obvious, hearkening back to both the Gloria in Excelsis and “Worthy Is Christ.” Likewise, the petition for mercy begun in the Kyrie now takes concrete shape as the communicants ascend to the altar to receive Christ’s mercy in the Supper singing “**Lamb of God**, You take away the sin of the world.” Most remarkable, however, is that the Agnus Dei ends as the Kyrie [in Settings One and Two] began, with the petition for **peace**. Peace describes the condition of the faithful in the Divine Service from beginning to end, and the Lord who joins earth and heaven together in peace now gives the Prince of Peace into the mouths of the communicants.⁸²

Paul J. Grime says,

The words of Isaiah 53 echo in the words of Jesus: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life *as a ransom for many*” (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45); emphasis added; cf. Hebrews 9:28). This emphasis surfaced later in Jesus’ institution of the Lord’s Supper, where He said, “This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out *for many* for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28; emphasis added). In the context of the Divine Service, the communicants have just heard the Lord’s words where He speaks of giving us His blood to drink, His blood of the new testament or covenant. It is the blood that was shed on Calvary “for the forgiveness of sins.” The Lamb who once was slain has gathered the communicants; their robes have been washed white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14) When the Church sings “Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us,” she comes before her Lord with empty hands, waiting to receive that body and blood that are about to be given

⁸⁰ Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 368.

⁸¹ Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 368–369.

⁸² Arthur A. Just, Jr., *Heaven on Earth: The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), 233, bold emphasis in original.

out to her for the forgiveness of sins.”⁸³

Conclusion

The Agnus Dei bleeds with vicarious satisfaction as congregants anticipate their walk to the Communion rail. In the Sacrament, Christ now is with us in Real Presence. Because the Lamb of God has taken away the sin of the world, we can stand in his presence. Instead of striking terror, his presence grants peace. We receive his true blood. We receive with his blood what He shed it for, the forgiveness of sins. The Church has understood this and so she has prayed it liturgically for centuries. The Agnus Dei could not mean what the errant theology of the adversaries says and necessarily implies. The Agnus Dei confesses what Lutheran Orthodoxy teaches, God’s mighty work of vicarious satisfaction in Christ’s atonement on the basis of which He comes to us with forgiveness and peace.

⁸³ Grime, “Service of the Sacrament,” 615–616.