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Table of Contents

Sacrificial Atonement by Jesus and God’s Wrath in the Light of the Old Testament	
John W. Kleinig	195
Reckoned among the Lawless	
Peter J. Scaer	209
The Cross, the Atonement, and the Eucharist in Luke	
Arthur A. Just Jr.	227
Penal Substitutionary Atonement?	
Walter A. Maier III	245
Justification as the Starting Point of Doing Theology?	
David P. Scaer	265
Good Works and the Law’s Exhortation and Accusation	
Gifford A. Grobien	279
Introduction to Martin Luther, “The Antinomian Disputations” (1537–1540)	
Jeffrey G. Silcock and Christopher Boyd Brown	291
An Embarrassment of Riches: Choosing What to Sing	
Paul J. Grime	329

“God Gave the Son—the Only One” (John 3:16): Theopaschism as Love	
Alexey Streltsov	351
Theological Observer	363
May We Sing the Sanctus, <i>Please?</i>	
“Male and female he created them.” (Gen 1:27)	
Book Reviews	369
Books Received	381
Indices to Volume 84 (2020)	383

Theological Observer

May We Sing the Sanctus, *Please?*

A not uncommon practice during the Service of the Sacrament in some LCMS congregations is the omission of the Preface, Proper Preface, and Sanctus. In an effort to abbreviate the service (ever so slightly, I might add), the resulting order is usually something like this: sermon, offering, prayers, Lord’s Prayer, and then immediately on to the Verba. While the transition is certainly smooth, it is worth pondering what is lost in the process.

What is lost is nothing less than some of the most ancient parts of the Divine Service. The opening Preface dialogue, for example, dates from the early third-century *Apostolic Tradition*, with the implication being that it was in use well before that time. That dialogue, which invites us to set our minds on things above (Colossians 3:1) as we begin our thanksgiving for the Lord’s rich blessings in this Sacrament, quickly became the settled start to the Service of the Sacrament in both the East and West. Within another century or so, its expansion was firmly in place throughout the Mediterranean world, with many of the ancient rites literally tripping over themselves in thanksgiving to God: “It is truly fitting and right, suitable and profitable, to praise you, [to hymn you,] to bless you, to worship you, to glorify you, to give thanks to you.”¹ The point made in all of these ancient rites is clear. There is no more fitting response to the mercy God shows us in this holy meal than to acknowledge that such thanksgiving is fitting at all times and in all places.

Of course, there is more. Through the Proper Preface, we hear—in little snippets scattered throughout the seasons of the Church Year—the saving deeds of Christ, of all that he accomplished for us. And then, with great fanfare, the Preface concludes with those familiar words (“therefore with angels and archangels”) that acknowledge a reality that comes only through faith—namely, that we who are gathered here, whether it be a congregation of hundreds or only a handful, are not alone in offering our thanksgiving. It is, rather, the unshakeable truth that our voices are joined to that grand chorus of saints and angels who dwell in the nearer presence of Christ. At no other place in the service is this mystery so clearly acknowledged or more eloquently stated.

What is it that we then join in saying with this grand company of heaven? It is the “holy, holy, holy” of the angels who are gathered around the throne of God

¹ “Liturgy of St. James,” in R. C. D. Jasper and G. J. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*, 3rd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1987), 90. Note the similarity of these words with those of the Gloria in Excelsis, which was itself of Eastern origin from this time period.

(Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8); to their ceaseless praise of God our voices are joined for this brief moment. Unlike the ancient Israelites, who were directed to seek the Lord's glory in one specific place (namely, the mercy seat atop the ark of the covenant), we acknowledge that the Lord's glory is now manifested in every place where his mandate to eat and drink of his flesh and blood is faithfully carried out. Thus, we acclaim him with cries for deliverance ("Hosanna!"), confident that the One who rides into our midst through the humble means of bread and wine brings life and salvation. Truly blest is he!

If, for the sake of time, one finds it necessary to shorten the service, let it not be the Preface and Sanctus that take the hit. Say goodbye to the closing hymn, which is not even listed as an option in the service, or the hymn of invocation, which only appears under a "may" rubric. Shave the ninety seconds that are needed from your sermon or prayers, if you must. But do not deprive the faithful of this grand moment when their voices are joined with the whole company of heaven to acknowledge the Lord who is in their midst.

Paul J. Grime

“Male and female he created them.” (Gen 1:27)²

[This sermon was preached in Kramer Chapel on February 19, 2020. The biblical text was Matthew 19:1–12. The Editors.]

She predicted the fall of Troy. Warned about the Trojan horse. Foretold the death of Agamemnon. Yet no one listened. Poor Cassandra. It’s no fun being a prophet.

If you’re lounging on deck, and ice cubes are rattling around in your cosmopolitan, you don’t want to hear about an iceberg. Knowledge can be a downer, and ignorance is bliss. And, maybe tomorrow will never come.

But here we are. Back to Matthew 19. The Pharisees put our Lord to the test, asking him about divorce and marriage. Our Lord responds by affirming the creation account. No surprise. The Gospel of Matthew is, after all, the book of the Genesis of Jesus Christ.

But the topic of marriage has never been an easy one. Not even for Moses. So divorce gets little pulpit time. And the pews are empty, and the fields are barren from seeds not sown.

Perhaps a trip down memory lane.

At Owen Marsh Elementary, I was best friends with Mark Burnett. He was the only kid in class whose parents were divorced. It was, we might say, an honorable estrangement. But those were different times. At the church I pastored twenty years ago, there were five couples we hung out with, all about the same age. All faithful in church attendance. All well matched. All with great kids. And now, twenty years later, all divorced. With kids scattered to the wind. Souls jeopardized. Sheep lost.

So it goes, social issues and church teaching, culture and doctrine, once poured into life’s blender, can hardly be separated.

So, what shall we confess? It was once as simple as saying, “Jesus is Lord.” Then came the Apostles’ Creed, followed by the Nicene. *Homoousius. Homoiousius.* Everything depending on an iota. Now we have the Lutheran Confessions—the truth in even greater clarity. But will it be enough?

A little leaven, and the lump goes sour. And the world creeps into pulpits and pews. You say Jesus is the bridegroom and the church the bride. But you think marriage is just a social issue. You speak glowingly about the nativity of our Lord, but you won’t speak out against the holocaust of abortion. But a house divided soon falls. There is no chance of gazing into heaven if we are blind to the world around

² Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

us. Such an ethereal gospel is nothing but sound and fury, signifying not much at all.

A man journeys from Jerusalem to Jericho, falling among robbers, stripped, and beaten and left half dead. But priests and Levites hurry on, lest they be late for the temple. By our inaction, we confess. And we speak volumes by saying nothing at all.

So, we've seen Satan move up the food chain of Matthew 19. First, there is a dead calm surrounding abortion, accompanied by a silence on divorce. It was all about the adults, who had the power. No thought to the children who suffer the consequences. Before we knew it, marriage lost all definition. Gay marriage, now polyamory. So quickly.

And today's domino? "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female?" (Matt 19:4). But many have not read. Or at least have not believed. Will it matter? Can we sing of Christ as groom and church as bride if we can no longer even confess what marriage is? What will it mean to call God our Father if we say a man can have a baby? If we play along and say that he is she? Or she is he?

There is a growing crisis among us. And it's risen in the last seven years. It's dysphoria among our children. And it's a fast-moving leaven. Boys and girls confused. Puberty blockers, hormone treatment, and mutilating surgery. I've seen the children: girls with low voices, infertility and sterilization, horrible dismemberment. I've talked to desperate moms and dads. So what do we say?

Just across the state line, an Ohio college professor, not wishing to use false pronouns, just lost a lawsuit. A Brownsburg high school teacher likewise was fired for not playing along. Closer to home, a student at Purdue University Fort Wayne, a young Lutheran, received a memo from his employer. Use the new pronouns, or you're fired. I just spoke with a woman desperately trying to save her daughter from the onslaught.

In the early church, it was burning incense to the emperor. Could we offer up a pinch, and then in the next sentence say that Jesus is Lord?

Say $2 + 2 = 5$. Cross your fingers behind your back, and pretend it doesn't matter. Say that $2 + 2 = 5$. What harm could come from that? Soon, you will find that there is a twist-tie around your tongue, your mind will be imprisoned. If you say that $2 + 2 = 5$, then words will have no meaning. And if words have no meaning, then the Word of God has no meaning. And we might as well stop preaching altogether. For we will have become slaves, beholden to the father of all lies.

But our Lord came to release the prisoners. And if the Son sets you free, you are free indeed. Our Lord came to unplug our ears, that we might hear and obey. To open our lips and loosen our tongues that we might sing his praises and speak rightly.

By his death, he has paid the price of our sin, and by his resurrection, he has taken away death's sting. If true, we are free from the threats of the world. Free from fear eternal. Free to confess.

And so we will. We will proclaim that Christ is God's Son. We will tell others that Christ is the groom who laid down his life for his bride the church. And, following St. Paul, in the very same breath, we will speak the truth about marriage. About male and female.

And so our Lord asks, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female?" (Matt 19:4).

Male and female he created them. Male and female he created them. Now say it with me. Male and female he created them. And in doing so, you affirm the God of creation, and you confess that Jesus is Lord.

"We shall soon be in a world in which a man may be howled down for saying that two and two make four, in which furious party cries will be raised against anybody who says that cows have horns, in which people will persecute the heresy of calling a triangle a three-sided figure, and hang a man for maddening a mob with the news that grass is green."³

Peter J. Scaer

³ G. K. Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton: The Illustrated London News, 1926-1926* vol. 34 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 144–145.