

MORAVIAN MOMENTS #86

Agnus Dei...Lamb of God

Agnus Dei is a Latin term meaning *Lamb of God*, and was originally used to refer to Jesus Christ in his role of the perfect **sacrificial offering that atones for the sins of humanity in Christian theology, harkening** back to ancient Jewish Temple sacrifices. *Agnus Dei* is used to refer to several things related to this imagery.

In Church or Religious art, an Agnus Dei is a visual representation of Jesus as a lamb holding a cross. The Lamb in such a posture symbolizes victory. The cross normally rests on the lamb's shoulder and is held in its right foreleg. I encourage you to take a moment and examine again the seal of our Church and the high symbolism that it portrays. Often the cross will have a white banner suspended from it charged with a red cross, though the cross may also be rendered in different colours. Sometimes the lamb is shown lying atop a book with seven seals hanging from it. This is a reference to the imagery in the Book of Revelation 5:1-13. Occasionally, the lamb may be depicted bleeding from the area of the heart: **Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the centre of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.** (Revelation 5:6). This imagery symbolizes Jesus shedding of his blood to take away the sins of the world and John in his Gospel speaks of his conviction of the significant role of the Lamb: **The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!** (John 1:29). This is a very powerful imagery of the liberator, deliverer, and freedom fighter for the embattled human race who was imprisoned by sin. **John makes a defining statement that the Lamb of God is the only one who can take away the sins of the world. This for the Moravian Church is the rock on which we stand, that Jesus is Supreme, indeed, and he is the centre of our Church.**

In the Roman Catholic Church it is also a tablet of wax stamped with a representation of Jesus as a lamb bearing a cross, then blessed by the Pontiff or the Pope.

The Moravian Church uses an Agnus Dei as their seal with the surrounding inscription *Vicit agnus noster, eum sequamur* ("Our Lamb has conquered, let us follow him.").

Although the depiction of Jesus as the Lamb of God is of ancient origin, it is not used in the liturgical forms of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The reason for this is that the depictions of Jesus in the Orthodox Church are anthropomorphic rather than symbolic, **that is the depictions themselves have life**, as a confession of the Orthodox belief in the Incarnation of the Logos, where the Word becomes flesh. However, there is no objection to the application of the term "Lamb of God" to Jesus. We therefore glorify the Lamb of God.

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