

Trinity Te Deum

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“Stop in the name of Love!”

If you're of a certain vintage and particularly if you're female, you know how this line is to be sung and the hand motion that goes with it. This line reflects how the Christian feels towards the Supremes, not the singing Supremes, the ruling Supremes. Of course, it was in the name of love that the gay activist wanted the right to marriage. But it is in the name of love, God's love in Christ, that we wish the Supremes would have stopped them. It is not loving to redefine immorality as morality, to declare what even natural man knows to be wrong, right.

But understand this. This is nothing new for the Supremes. They decreed that blacks weren't people but property in 1857, and they declared the right to privacy gave a woman the right to murder her unborn child in 1973.

You know how people are always saying “you cannot legislate morality?” They say this in the face of laws legislating you shall not steal, libel, slander, or drive drunk. It is true that no law can make someone moral, but from the beginning laws set the boundaries of what was moral and immoral behavior.

There is this difference though. The Church from Adam and Eve till now has believed

God determined the boundaries. Those outside the Church from Hammurabi to Aristotle to Blackstone to the Nuremberg War Trials have believed that natural law set certain boundaries. This meant that the laws of nations were answerable to a higher law than the whims and will of men.

Americans think they live in a pure democracy where the majority rules absolutely. Though this is not true, we live in a constitutional republic, nevertheless we are inoculated with the notion that if 51% of the people are in favor of something that thing is right. In essence, we live under the delusion that men by voting can determine what is right and wrong. Or as a slogan of the French Revolution had it: the voice of the people is the voice of God.

O no it's not. Never has been. Never will be. No matter how many men agree $2 + 2$ is 5 the truth remains that it is 4. When the Supremes decided black people were property, that didn't make them so. When the Supremes decided a right to privacy gave women the authority to kill their unborn child, murder didn't suddenly become moral.

Likewise, the Supremes declaring that the same sex can be joined in marriage didn't make that moral or even real. Man cannot join what God has not

joined together. That gay couple next store setting up house is no more married than the straight couple living together two doors down is. Both couples are playing house, and they are playing with fire. Romans 1 says the wrath of God breaks out particularly against those who suppress the truth.

But what you really want to know is what changes at Trinity? Nothing. We will not start confirming those in the Christian faith who accept homosexuality as a different lifestyle or won't recognize it as sin. I will not start marrying same sex couples, and our sanctuary will not be used for that purpose.

Sure our refusal may have consequences. They could be serious. But when the laws of men conflict with the laws of God, it is God who must be obeyed. God in Christ will stand by His Word and He stands by those who stand on it.

We wish that the Supremes to paraphrase the Supremes had stopped in the name of natural law knowing that they couldn't stop in the name of God's love in Christ. But God's love for us has not stopped or slowed down. Referencing how God delivered Lot from the debauched Sodom and Gomorrah, Peter comfortingly assures New Testament Christians: “The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punish-

ment until the day of judgment." For Jesus' sake the Supreme Judge of all has ruled in favor of us and will stop at nothing to bring us safely home to heaven.

Stop in the name of God's love for you in Christ and realize that you have never been at the mercy or in the hands of men no matter how supreme they may be.

Has the sun set on Sunday school?

Melissa Pandika, OZY 8:02 a.m. EDT March 22, 2015

It's a chilly Sunday morning in Oakland, California, and in the glass-paned school adjacent to St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Allison Sass is on a mission to teach 12 small children to love Jesus. Bless their hearts, and Sass' heart too, because despite her smile, this is going to be quite a struggle. One messy-haired boy, all of 6 years old, refuses to budge from the lap of his mom, who's there because he's a little shy. Two girls, both barely 10, are frankly dozing off, sprawled out on the carpet.

Sass holds up a drawing of Mary, Joseph and Jesus, and asks the kids to "help tell the story of the Christ child" through toys and other objects in the room. Some of the children pluck wooden figurines from a Nativity scene, and one girl with, yes, purple-tipped hair, chooses a baby doll in a white baptismal gown. It's a move that rouses some of the kids, who gather around the doll and, as Sass watches on, start chanting in a playground manner: "Take it off! Take it off!"

The girl obliges. Then she peeks beneath the doll's underwear and announces her verdict: "I think he's transgender."

Obviously, this wasn't in the lesson plan. But while getting young kids to pay attention in church has often required miracles, something about this moment seems to reflect a broader current about Sunday school. Many a prayer has been said over the fate of the vaunted American institution, whose struggles cut across denominational lines. Between 1997 and 2004, churches lost tens of thousands of Sunday school programs, according to data from the Barna Group, and more recent studies show that enrollment has fallen across denominations. From 2004 to 2010, for example, Sunday school attendance dropped nearly 40 percent among Evangelical Lutheran churches in America and almost 8 percent among Southern Baptist churches, prompting speculation that the problem may be more than just a decline in American religiosity.

Parents and kids, as we all know, are just too busy on weekends, with everything from professional-level sports training to eight-hour SAT prep classes (at age 12!). The institutional inertia that churches are famous for has made it difficult for them to adapt to the times. But experts say that many churches are also discovering they're paying a far heavier price for past sex scandals than they had anticipated, and that Sunday school is the latest collateral damage. All of which raises a troubling question — at

least among the clergy and the deeply devout — about whether Sunday school has outlived its usefulness.

Decades ago, religious education programs served as the only social function after a grueling week. But today, Sunday schools must make an affirmative case to their audience. And so churches have entered the innovation game, with everything from "Godly Play" to global programs. They forge on, like Moses wandering in the desert, stripteases and all.

While Sunday school conjures up images of postwar America — mom and dad in the pews while Johnny and Susie played Bible games in the classroom — it's actually an English institution that dates back to the Industrial Revolution, in the late 1700s. The original Sunday schools didn't aim so much at enlightenment as at discipline: Factory children spent Sundays — their only day off from work — terrorizing neighborhoods, and parents were at a loss as to how to tame them. Like a gift from God, Christian evangelist Robert Raikes took it upon himself to gather them from the streets, scrub their faces, comb their hair and send them to school, where the Bible was the textbook. The children also learned the basic catechism, as well as prayers and hymns, and the townspeople were pleased. In fact, according to one Mr. Church, a hemp- and flax-maker who had hired many of the children, they had "been transformed from the shape of wolves and tigers to that of men."

Not surprisingly, Sunday school soon caught on in the U.S., where over the course of a century and a half it evolved from an educational and missionary venture, which tried to spread the Gospel and attract converts, into a cornerstone of towns and neighborhoods. Nearly every parent, even those who didn't regularly attend church, sent their children to Sunday school. Indeed, the schools emerged as the center of social life, hosting parades, picnics and prize days.

But the love affair would not survive the second half of the 20th century. The first crack may have been over race. Even as the civil rights movement gained momentum, churches remained racially divided in most parts of the country. (Indeed, Martin Luther King Jr. once remarked that "the most segregated hour of Christian America is eleven o'clock on Sunday morning.") By the 1970s, Sunday school and church in general, like many traditional institutions, fell victim to a society that increasingly questioned authority. Citizens questioned the draft, students protested racial injustice and children challenged their Sunday school teachers. Today, many people remember this transition as though it were yesterday. "They were essentially telling me to believe in a fantasy world without proof," recalls one Sunday school ejectee, Pennsylvania management consultant Thomas MacPherson, who says he was booted out after demanding evidence of heaven and hell.

But today, most church leaders probably wish that kids like little Tommy MacPherson were their main problem. We live in an era defined by a confluence of two big trends: Parents, especially middle-class ones, have become ever more concerned about the welfare of their children, whether it's demanding chemical-free playgrounds or ensuring they get into the best preschool. At the same time, Christian churches have been rocked by a series of sex-abuse scandals that are the worst nightmare for any parent, from youth groups being coerced into sex acts to priests' confessions of molesting boys. Even if the revelations have subsided somewhat in recent years, "people know the reality has been exposed," says Robert Orsi, a professor of religion at Northwestern University. "I'm sure parents are thinking of this."

LeeAnn MacNeil, a homemaker in McLean, Virginia, is a devout Catholic with four kids, but she has serious qualms about teacher selection at her church's Sunday school. "They're not vetted properly. That's a valid concern in my book," she says. And she can speak from experience: As a Sunday school teacher for several years, she says the sign-up process "was done very quickly. It's like, 'Have you been in jail before?' — the generic questions, like on a job application. They don't really check your background as much as they should when you're dealing with young children."

Yet it's worth noting that the reason MacNeil's kids don't at-

tend Sunday school is lack of time. Instead of a day of rest, Sunday has become just another day for over-scheduled kids to be chauffeured from sports practice to music lessons or SAT tutoring. It doesn't help that parents themselves, so overwhelmed by life, are skipping church. "You would go to church, and then an hour or hour 15 minutes of Sunday school. It takes up all your morning. It felt like more of a chore for them to go, when you're giving up some of your weekend and attending school during the week," says MacNeil. "By the time they come home, it's 12 noon, and when you have a weekend, you want to play with your friends outside and be a kid."

Apparently a lot of people are busy, at least in rich countries. As marginalized as Sunday school has become in the United States, only about 5 percent of British kids went to Sunday school in 2010. A mere 11 percent of elementary school students in New Zealand were enrolled in Sunday school in 1985, down from 50 percent in 1950. Sunday school enrollment and membership in mainstream Protestant churches plummeted from 65 percent of Canadians in 1931 to 27 percent in 2001. All of which raises the question: What's a church to do?

Change is always difficult in a 2,000-year-old institution. But give the clergy credit: They've begun to innovate. At Skyline United Church of Christ, about a 15-minute drive from Sass' Sunday school class, the Rev. Laurie Manning has adopted something called "the Joyful

Path," where instead of Bible study in a classroom, kids visit families in homeless shelters, or raise money to build schools in poor countries. Such service projects help them "see the face of God," Manning says. Other churches are broadening their horizons, like teaching lessons about the Muslim holy book, the Quran. And then there's the obvious answer for the over-scheduled kid: Let them do Sunday school at home in their pajamas, with readings and activities set up for them by the church. "I don't think parents are looking for weekly Sunday school," says Day Smith Pritchartt, executive director of the Evangelical Education Society of the Episcopal Church. "I think families are looking for more quality time together."

But back at the music room at St. Paul's, Caroline Hickok, who leads the music and prayer portion of the class, asks two girls to pick a song. They flip through the songbook and settle on "Down by the Riverside." An old-school male gospel voice growls through the CD player's speakers. "Gonna lay down my sword and shield/ Down by the riverside," they sing in deep, gruff voices as they pass out folders to the other students. Hickok then asks the rest of the class if they want to sing along. "I want to dance! I don't want to sing!" pipes up one girl as she decorates her nametag with colored markers. Her classmates jump up and start dancing around the CD player.

"Usually I end up singing alone," Hickok says.

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/03/22/ozy-has-sun-set-on-sunday-school/25080073/> Music.

The Imminent Decline of Contemporary Worship Music: Eight Reasons

T. David Gordon

By imminent decline, I do not mean imminent disappearance. Commercial forces have too substantial an interest to permit contemporary worship music (CWM) to disappear entirely; and human beings are creatures of habit who do not adapt to change quickly. I do not predict, therefore, a disappearance of CWM, sooner or later. Already, however, I observe its decline. Several years ago (2011) Mark Moring interviewed me for *Christianity Today*, and in our follow-up communications, he indicated that he thought the zenith of CWM had already happened, and that the movement was already in the direction of traditional hymnody. He did not make any claims about the ratio of CWM to traditional hymns; he merely observed that whatever the ratio was, the seesaw was now moving, albeit slowly, towards traditional hymnody. If the ratio of contemporary-to-traditional was rising twenty years ago, it is falling now; the ratio is now in decline, and I suspect that decline will continue for the foreseeable future. What follows is a painfully abbreviated list of eight reasons why I think this change is happening.

1. CWM hymns not only were/are comparatively poor; they had to be. One generation cannot successfully "compete"

with 50 generations of hymn-writers; such a generation would need to be fifty times as talented as all previous generations to do so. If only one-half of one percent (42 out of over 6,500) of Charles Wesley's hymns made it even into the Methodist hymnal, it would be hubristic/arrogant to think that any contemporary hymnist is substantially better than he. Most hymnals are constituted of hymns written by people with Wesley's unusual talent; the editors had the "pick of the litter" of almost two thousand years of hymn-writing. In English hymnals, for instance, we rarely find even ten of Paul Gerhardt's 140 hymns, even though many musicologists regard him as one of Germany's finest hymnwriters. Good hymnals contain, essentially, "the best of the best," the best hymns of the best hymnwriters of all time; how could any single generation compete with that?

Just speaking arithmetically, one would expect that, at best, each generation could represent itself as well as other generations, permitting hymnal editors to continue to select "the best of the best" from each generation. Were this the case, then one of every fifty hymns we sing should be from one of the fifty generations since the apostles, and, therefore, one of every fifty should be contemporary, the best of the current generation of hymnwriters. Perhaps this is what John Frame meant when, in the second paragraph of his book on CWM, he indicated that he had two goals for his book: to explain some aspects

of CWM and to defend its “limited use” in public worship. Perhaps Prof. Frame thought one out of fifty constituted “limited use,” or perhaps he might have permitted as much as one out of ten, I don’t know. But our generation of hymnwriters, while talented and devout, are not more talented or more devout than all other generations, and are surely not so by a ratio of fifty-to-one.

2. Early on in the CWM movement, many groups began setting traditional hymn-lyrics to contemporary melodies and/or instrumentation. Sovereign Grace Music, Indelible Grace, Red Mountain Music, Reformed Praise all recognized how difficult/demanding it is to write lyrics that are not only theologically sound, but significant, profound, appropriate, memorable, and edifying (not to mention metrical). If the canonical Psalms are our model, few hymnwriters could hope to write with such remarkable insight (into God and His creatures, who are only dust) and remarkable craftsmanship (e.g. the first three words of the first Psalm begin with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, aleph (א) dna ,(ש) nihs a sah osla hcae ,(ס two of the three also have a resh (ר), even though each is only a 3- letter word. Even those unfamiliar with Hebrew cannot miss the remarkable assonance and alliteration in those opening three words: “ashre ha-ish ash-er”).

3. As a result, the better contemporary hymns (e.g. “How Deep the Father’s Love,” “In

Christ Alone”) have been over-used to the point that we have become weary of them. These two of the better CWM hymns are sung a half-dozen times or even a dozen times annually in many CWM churches; whereas “A Mighty Fortress” may get sung once or twice (if at all); but neither of the two is as good as Luther’s hymn. What is “intrinsically good” (to employ Luther’s expression about music) will always last; what is merely novel will not. Beethoven will outlast 50 Cent, The Black Eyed Peas, and Christina Aguilera. His music will be enjoyed three hundred years from now; theirs will be gone inside of fifty years.

4. It is no longer a competitive advantage to have part or all of a service in a contemporary idiom; probably well over half the churches now do so, so we have reached what Malcolm Gladwell calls the “Tipping Point.” CWM no longer marks a church as emerging, hip, edgy, or forward-looking, because many/most churches now do it. Churches that do not do other aspects of church-life well can no longer compensate via CWM; they must compete with other churches that employ CWM. Once a thing is commonplace, it is no longer a draw. And CWM is now so commonplace that it is no longer a competitive advantage; to the contrary, smaller churches with smaller budgets have difficulty competing with the larger-budgeted churches in this area.

5. As with all novelties, once the novelty wears off, what is

left often seems somewhat empty. In a culture that celebrates what is new (and commercial culture always does so in order to sell what is new), most people will pine for what is new. But what is new does not remain so forever; and once it is no longer novel, it must compete by the ordinary canons of musical and lyrical art, and very little CWM can do so (again, because its authors face a fifty-to-one ratio of competition from other generations). Even promoters of CWM prefer some of it to the rest of it; indicating that they, too, recognize aesthetic criteria beyond mere novelty. Even those who regard novelty as a virtue, in other words, do not regard it as the only virtue. And some, such as myself, regard novelty as a liturgical vice, not a virtue because of its tendency to dis-associate us from the rest of our common race, heritage, and liturgy.

6. Thankfully, my own generation is beginning to die. While ostensibly created “for the young people,” the driving force behind CWM was always my own Sixties generation of anti-adult, anti-establishment, rebellious Woodstockers and Jesus freaks. Once my generation became elders and deacons (and therefore those who ran the churches), we could not escape our sense of being part of the “My Generation” that The Who’s Pete Townsend had sung about when we were young; so we (not the young people) wanted a brand of Christianity that did not look like our parents’ brand. Fortunately for the human race, we are dying off

now, and much of the impetus for CWM will die with us (though the commercial interests will “not go gentle into that good night,” and fulfill Dylan Thomas’s wish).

7. CWM is ordinarily accompanied by Praise Teams, and these have frequently (but by no means always) been problematic. It has been difficult to provide direction to them, due to the inherent confusion between whether they are participants in the congregation or performers for the congregation. In most circumstances, the members of the Praise Team do the kinds of things performers do: they vary the instrumental or harmonious parts between stanzas, they rehearse, etc. In fact, if one were to watch a video of the typical Praise Team without any audio, they ordinarily look like performers; their bodily actions and contrived emotional expressions mimic those of the entertainment industry.

Theologically and liturgically, however, it is the congregation that is to sing God’s praise, and what we call the Praise Team is merely an accompanist. But there is a frequent and ongoing tension in many CWM churches between the performers feeling as though they are being held back from performing for the congregation, and the liturgists thinking they’ve already gone too far in distinguishing themselves from the congregation. Many pastors have told me privately that they have no principial disagreements with CWM, but that they wish the whole Praise Team thing

“would go away,” because it is a frequent source of tension. I have elsewhere suggested that the Praise Team is not biblical, that it actually obscures or obliterates what the Scriptures command. I won’t repeat any of those concerns here; here I merely acknowledge that many of those who disagree with my understanding of Scripture agree with my observation that the Praise Team is an ongoing source of difficulty in the church.

8. We cannot evade or avoid the “holy catholic church” of the Apostles’ Creed forever. Even people who are untrained theologically have some intuitive sense that a local contemporary church is part of a global and many-generational (indeed eschatological and endless) assembly of followers of Christ; cutting ourselves off from that broader catholic body may appear cool for a while, but we ultimately wish to commune with the rest of the global/catholic church. Indeed, for many mature Christians, this wish grows as we age; we become aware that this particular moment, and our own personal life therein, will pass away soon, and what is timeless will nonetheless continue. Our affection for and interest in the timeless trumps our interest in the recent and fading. We intuitively identify with Henry F. Lyte, whose hymn said, “Change and decay in all around I see; O Thou who changest not, abide with me.” We instinctively wish to “join the everlasting song, and crown Him Lord of all” (to use Edward Perronet’s lan-

guage). Note, in fact, the opening lines alone of each stanza of Perronet’s hymn, and observe how, as the stanzas move, our worship is connected to both earthly and heavenly worship, past and future worship:

All hail the power of Jesus’
Name! Let angels prostrate
fall;...
Let highborn seraphs tune the
lyre, and as they tune it, fall...
Crown Him, ye morning stars of
light, who fixed this floating
ball;...
Crown Him, ye martyrs of your
God, who from His altar call;...
Ye seed of Israel’s chosen race,
ye ransomed from the fall,...
Hail Him, ye heirs of David’s
line, whom David Lord did
call,...
Sinners, whose love can ne’er
forget the wormwood and the
gall,...
Let every tribe and every
tongue before Him prostrate
fall...
O that, with yonder sacred
throng, we at His feet may fall,
Join in the everlasting song, and
crown Him Lord of all!

It is not merely that some churches do not sing Perronet’s hymn; they can not do so, without a little dissonance. Everything that they do intentionally cuts themselves off from the past and future; liturgically, if not theologically, they know nothing of martyrs, of Israel’s chosen race, of David’s lineage. Liturgically, if not theologically, everything is here-and-now, without much room for angels or seraphs, nor every tribe and tongue (just those who share our particular cultural moment).

To sing Perronet's hymn in such a setting would fit about as well as reading Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech at a Ku Klux Klan gathering.

"Contemporary worship" to me is an oxymoron. Biblically, worship is what angels and morning stars did before creation; what Abraham, Moses and the Levites, and the many-tongued Jewish diaspora at Pentecost did. It is what the martyrs, now ascended, do, and what all believers since the apostles have done. More importantly, it is what we will do eternally; worship is essentially (not accidentally) eschatological. And nothing could celebrate the eschatological forever less than something that celebrates the contemporary now. So ultimately, I think the Apostles' Creed will stick its camel's nose into the liturgical tent, and assert again our celebration of the "holy catholic church, the communion of the saints." The sooner the better.

Want millennials back in the pews? Stop trying to make church 'cool.'

(John Jay Cubuay/for The Washington Post)
By Rachel Held Evans April 30, 2015

Rachel Held Evans is a blogger and the author of "Searching for Sunday: Loving, Leaving, and Finding the Church."

Bass reverberates through the auditorium floor as a heavily bearded worship leader pauses to invite the congregation, bathed in the light of two giant screens, to tweet using #JesusLives. The scent of freshly brewed coffee wafts in from

the lobby, where you can order macchiatos and purchase mugs boasting a sleek church logo. The chairs are comfortable, and the music sounds like something from the top of the charts. At the end of the service, someone will win an iPad.

This, in the view of many churches, is what millennials like me want. And no wonder pastors think so. Church attendance has plummeted among young adults. In the United States, 59 percent of people ages 18 to 29 with a Christian background have, at some point, dropped out. According to the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, among those of us who came of age around the year 2000, a solid quarter claim no religious affiliation at all, making my generation significantly more disconnected from faith than members of Generation X were at a comparable point in their lives and twice as detached as baby boomers were as young adults.

In response, many churches have sought to lure millennials back by focusing on style points: cooler bands, hipper worship, edgier programming, impressive technology. Yet while these aren't inherently bad ideas and might in some cases be effective, they are not the key to drawing millennials back to God in a lasting and meaningful way. Young people don't simply want a better show. And trying to be cool might be making things worse.

You're just as likely to hear the words "market share" and "branding" in church staff meetings these days as you are in any corporate office.

Megachurches such as Saddleback in Lake Forest, Calif., and Lakewood in Houston have entire marketing departments devoted to enticing new members. Kent Shaffer of ChurchRelevance.com routinely ranks the best logos and Web sites and offers strategic counsel to organizations like Saddleback and LifeChurch.tv.

Increasingly, churches offer sermon series on iTunes and concert-style worship services with names like "Vine" or "Gather." The young-adult group at Ed Young's Dallas-based Fellowship Church is called Prime, and one of the singles groups at his father's congregation in Houston is called Vertical. Churches have made news in recent years for giving away tablet computers, TVs and even cars at Easter. Still, attendance among young people remains flat.

Recent research from Barna Group and the Cornerstone Knowledge Network found that 67 percent of millennials prefer a "classic" church over a "trendy" one, and 77 percent would choose a "sanctuary" over an "auditorium." While we have yet to warm to the word "traditional" (only 40 percent favor it over "modern"), millennials exhibit an increasing aversion to exclusive, closed-minded religious communities masquerading as the hip new places in town. For a generation bombarded with advertising and sales pitches, and for whom the charge of "inauthentic" is as cutting an insult as any, church rebranding efforts can actually backfire, especially when young people sense that

there is more emphasis on marketing Jesus than actually following Him. Millennials “are not disillusioned with tradition; they are frustrated with slick or shallow expressions of religion,” argues David Kinnaman, who interviewed hundreds of them for Barna Group and compiled his research in “You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church . . . and Rethinking Faith.”

My friend and blogger Amy Peterson put it this way: “I want a service that is not sensational, flashy, or particularly ‘relevant.’ I can be entertained anywhere. At church, I do not want to be entertained. I do not want to be the target of anyone’s marketing. I want to be asked to participate in the life of an ancient-future community.”

Millennial blogger Ben Irwin wrote: “When a church tells me how I should feel (‘Clap if you’re excited about Jesus!’), it smacks of inauthenticity. Sometimes I don’t feel like clapping. Sometimes I need to worship in the midst of my brokenness and confusion — not in spite of it and certainly not in denial of it.”

When I left church at age 29, full of doubt and disillusionment, I wasn’t looking for a better-produced Christianity. I was looking for a truer Christianity, a more authentic Christianity: I didn’t like how gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people were being treated by my evangelical faith community. I had questions about science and faith, biblical interpretation and theology. I felt lonely in my doubts. And, contrary to popular belief, the

fog machines and light shows at those slick evangelical conferences didn’t make things better for me. They made the whole endeavor feel shallow, forced and fake.

While no two faith stories are exactly the same, I’m not the only millennial whose faith couldn’t be saved by lacquering on a hipper veneer. According to Barna Group, among young people who don’t go to church, 87 percent say they see Christians as judgmental, and 85 percent see them as hypocritical. A similar study found that “only 8% say they don’t attend because church is ‘out of date,’ undercutting the notion that all churches need to do for Millennials is to make worship ‘cooler.’”

In other words, a church can have a sleek logo and Web site, but if it’s judgmental and exclusive, if it fails to show the love of Jesus to all, millennials will sniff it out. Our reasons for leaving have less to do with style and image and more to do with substantive questions about life, faith and community. We’re not as shallow as you might think.

If young people are looking for congregations that authentically practice the teachings of Jesus in an open and inclusive way, then the good news is the church already knows how to do that. The trick isn’t to make church cool; it’s to keep worship weird.

You can get a cup of coffee with your friends anywhere, but church is the only place you can get ashes smudged on your forehead as a reminder of your mortality. You can be dazzled

by a light show at a concert on any given weekend, but church is the only place that fills a sanctuary with candlelight and hymns on Christmas Eve. You can snag all sorts of free swag for brand loyalty online, but church is the only place where you are named a beloved child of God with a cold plunge into the water. You can share food with the hungry at any homeless shelter, but only the church teaches that a shared meal brings us into the very presence of God.

What finally brought me back, after years of running away, wasn’t lattes or skinny jeans; it was the sacraments. Baptism, confession, Communion, preaching the Word, anointing the sick — you know, those strange rituals and traditions Christians have been practicing for the past 2,000 years. The sacraments are what make the church relevant, no matter the culture or era. They don’t need to be repackaged or rebranded; they just need to be practiced, offered and explained in the context of a loving, authentic and inclusive community.

My search has led me to the Episcopal Church, where every week I find myself, at age 33, kneeling next to a gray-haired lady to my left and a gay couple to my right as I confess my sins and recite the Lord’s Prayer. No one’s trying to sell me anything. No one’s desperately trying to make the Gospel hip or relevant or cool. They’re just joining me in proclaiming the great mystery of the faith — that Christ has died, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again —

which, in spite of my persistent doubts and knee-jerk cynicism, I still believe most days.

One need not be an Episcopalian to practice sacramental Christianity. Even in Christian communities that don't use sacramental language to describe their activities, you see people baptizing sinners, sharing meals, confessing sins and helping one another through difficult times. Those services with big screens and professional bands can offer the sacraments, too.

But I believe that the sacraments are most powerful when they are extended not simply to the religious and the privileged, but to the poor, the marginalized, the lonely and the left out. This is the inclusivity so many millennials long for in their churches, and it's the inclusivity that eventually drew me to the Episcopal Church, whose big red doors are open to all — conservatives, liberals, rich, poor, gay, straight and even perpetual doubters like me.

Church attendance may be dipping, but God can survive the Internet age. After all, He

knows a thing or two about resurrection.

More Computing Power than it took to get to the Moon

Posted on June 1, 2015 by Rev. Paul R. Harris

How many times have you heard that a desktop computer, a laptop, a tablet, and now I suppose a smartphone has more computing power than they had to get to the moon? I don't know about that one way or the other. I do know that we shouldn't forget that a similar thing can be said about Bible manuscripts.

There are people, scholars mostly, some well-meaning and some meaning ill, who will cause you to doubt the Bible you have in your hands. This started after the 1952 RSV was published. The sainted Dr. Buls said, "That translation made everyone a textual critic." It has notes in the margins: "not all manuscripts have" or "most manuscripts do not have." To a layman that information is as useful as telling me that my electronic device does or

doesn't have a quad dual core processor.

The fathers of the Church from Ignatius and Irenaeus, to Augustine and Ambrose, to Luther and Chemnitz had access to far fewer manuscripts than we have now, and they went to the moon with them. They went *beyond* the moon. They went where no man had gone before to the Trinity, to the Two Natures of Christ, to justification by grace through faith, and to more, so much more.

They had all the riches they needed in the "poverty" of their manuscripts to save souls and thoroughly furnish any man for every good work. I advise lay people to ignore the scholars who want to speak of an explosion of manuscripts subtly indicating that their Bible is being blown to bits. I advise scholars to realize that if this really is an academic pursuit then the result is academic, i.e. not that important.

It's not important that we have so much more computing power than they did who got to the moon. What is important is that they got to the moon with the computers they had.



August 2015

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
			10am Bible Stories 7:15 Colossians			
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
			10am Bible Stories 7:15 Colossians			
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
			10am Bible Stories 7:15 Colossians			
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
			10am Bible Class 7:15 Colossians			
30	31					

September 2015

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
			10am Bible Class Choir 6:15 7:15 Colossians			
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
		7pm Voters Assembly	10am Bible Class Choir 6:15 7:15 Colossians			
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
	5pm Confir- mation	Elder's Meeting 6:30 pm	10am Bible Class Choir 6:15 7:15 Colossians			3pm Beer, Brats, & Bride
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
	5pm Confir- mation		10am Bible Stories Choir 6:15 7:15 Colossians			
27	28	29	30	30		
	5pm Confir- mation		10am Bible Stories Choir 6:15 7:15 Colossians			