

Trinity Te Deum

The official newsletter for Trinity Lutheran Church

1207 West 45 Street Austin, Texas 78756

Rev. Paul R. Harris – 512-453-3835 Church

Sunday School and Bible Study 9:15 AM – Divine Service 10:30 AM

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Living Through the Blitz

This is the 3rd newsletter now that I have had to postpone the article I wrote because the topic is not apropos for times like these. And what are these times? The closest I can liken to them is The Blitz.

The Blitz was the bombing campaign that Germany unleashed on Britain from 1940-41. I didn't live through it but my Aunt Mary did. She was an English war-bride. About 32,000 out of the approximately 8 million in population were killed. If my math is right, ha-ha, that's about a .004 death rate. Bombing is never the way wars are won; it always takes boots on the ground. Even after atomic bombs fell on Japan, soldiers had to occupy it. Hence the prestige of the Army infantry and the Marines. But I digress. What bombing London, or shelling the trenches in WW I, did, was drive people crazy with fear, anxiety, panic, paranoia, worry and every other word used to describe intense stress.

Please note. This is not about how bad the Germans were to us in WW I or II. We bombed and shelled them too. Read about the firebombing of Dresden sometime. The point here is that the last 4 months of pandemic rhetoric has been a constant shelling and bombing of our psyches, or if you prefer the English without the Greek goddess name, of our souls. Lots of you have reflected this to me, and I certainly have felt it too. Fearmongering headlines about lack of hospital beds, ventilators, soaring numbers, new strains of Covid-19, or another pandemic brewing among swine are bomb blast after bomb blast going off all around us.

Be clear. I'm not questioning the veracity or accuracy of these claims. I am saying the headlines are no different than clickbait and the way one positive story is followed by a negative one or two can't be accidental. These are the equivalent of air raid sirens going off in our heads. The problem is the bombs don't usually fall or they fall in very limited numbers. It is one thing to get all amped up while you face a danger and another thing to be repeatedly amped up but never see the danger. This is the stuff that is spiritually and emotionally draining.

I knew I had been selected to go to U.S. Army Ranger School at the beginning of May. I didn't start till the end of June. I remember the day – 44 years later – that I woke up to leave. I was so relieved. My 18 year-old-self said, "Well at last it's starting." Covid-19 is being kept over us as the Sword over Damocles was. Every ready to fall, held by the thinnest of threads. So how do you survive this?

Watching British TV have you noticed the distinctive way their police car sirens sound? That's because after The Blitz they had to change them so they didn't sound like the air raid sirens that had been going off nightly for almost two years. Just the sound induced the same physiological, emotional, and spiritual reaction of The Blitz even though everyone knew no bombs were going to fall.

When The Blitz of news reports on Covid-19 or on political issues set me off, I change the sound. I repeat Psalm 31:15, "My times are in Thy hand," O Lord. Or "Our help is in the name of the Lord" (Psalm 124:8). Or, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee" (Psalm 56:3). Or, Psalm 61:2, "When my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the Rock that is higher than I." Rather than go with the emotional, spiritual, physical responses triggered by the words and phrases that we all know by heart after 4 months, I respond with the Words of the Lord. I change The Blitz's air raid warning sound to the wa-wa of their police cars today. This is needed because the big difference between The Blitz my aunt lived through and the one we're going through is there is we never have an all-clear signal. In The Blitz each raid was followed by an 'all-clear'. Since March 16, the air raid sirens have been wailing, warning, non-stop.

Know this: doing the above, replacing the sirens with God's truth, is not a superstitious use of God's Word. "Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's" (Romans 14:8). I'm giving you a tool to live with this Blitz by putting your fear, your life, your family's future where it always has been and is: in God's hands not your own.

Creedal Christianity is....

A Nine Part Sermon Series Luther's Small Catechism's Second Chief Part: the Apostles Creed
Advent 2020 – Lent 2021

I have preached on the articles of Luther's Small Catechism since 1992. I got interviewed by a Christian radio program, not *Issues, Etc.*, some years back because the host called saying, "I wanted someone to speak about the 9th and 10th Commandments. So, I checked the internet and you've written way more than anyone else." Please note, having written more than others doesn't necessarily mean better. In fact, every single time I finish a series, I feel I didn't say all, most, or even any of what I really wanted to. Not that what I said was unscriptural or wrong, but I didn't think I conveyed to you what was clear in my thoughts. Like the movie ad says, "This time it's personal."

Okay, that was too much. This time I'm approaching the 2nd Chief Part, the Apostles' Creed, from the standpoint of things I have wanted to make mention of or be clearer about. All services are on a Wednesday. They start at 7:30 PM. With the exception of Ash Wednesday, you can be out the door at 8:15.

Creedal Christianity is....

December 2	... Ancient
December 9	... Consistent
December 16	... Resistant
Ash Wednesday	... Useful
February 24	... Mindful
March 3	... Hopeful
March 10	... Broad
March 17	... Narrow
March 24	... Nuanced

Women should be eligible for the draft, commission recommends

POLITICO Magazine, By LARA SELIGMAN
03/24/2020 11:40 AM EDT

The 11-member commission's report was briefed to the Pentagon on Monday and will be presented to the White House and congressional staffers Tuesday.

A congressionally mandated commission is recommending women should be eligible for the draft, a move that comes five years after the Pentagon opened all combat roles to women.

"This is a necessary and fair step, making it possible to draw on the talent of a unified Nation in a time of national emergency," the commissioners wrote in the 255-page report, obtained by POLITICO.

The 11-member commission's final report, which was required by the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act, was briefed to the Pentagon on Monday and will be presented to the White House and congressional staffers Tuesday.

The report does not require action, but its recommendations pave the way for lawmakers to move to include women in the draft more than 100 years after Congress passed the Military Selective Service Act in 1917. While no one has been conscripted into the U.S. military in more than 40 years, the act requires all American men to register for the draft when they turn 18. Men who fail to register can be fined, imprisoned, and denied services such as federal student loans.

A Pentagon spokesperson did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The recommendation comes five years after then-Defense Secretary Ash Carter formally rescinded the Pentagon's

combat exclusion policy that had prevented women from serving in combat roles. Today, more than 224,000 women serve on active duty, and at least 30 women completed the U.S. Army Ranger School as of August 2019, according to the report.

While it's not clear that Congress will immediately take up legislation to allow women to register for the Selective Service, the report gives lawmakers a mandate to do so. In 2017, Rep. Jackie Speier (D-Calif.) offered an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act that would have required women register for the draft, but the proposal was dropped from the bill. At the time, Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-Texas), then-chairman of the Armed Services Committee, argued the amendment was getting ahead of the mandated review.

A proposal to expand the draft to include women was first introduced in 2016 by then-Rep. Duncan Hunter, a vocal opponent of women serving in combat, in an unusual episode during negotiations over the annual defense policy bill. Hunter offered the amendment as a dare, and voted against his own proposal.

Today, the public's opinion on including women in the draft is mixed, with 53 percent supporting the change and 38 percent opposing in a 2017 survey cited by the commission. The commission heard from many people who "fervently" believed women should not be required to register for the draft. Some expressed concerns that including women would damage their ability to perform their "unique status in society" as wives, mothers and caregivers. Others raised concerns over the possible risks to women posed by combat roles, saying women are more likely to be injured in training.

Some asserted that integrating female conscripts would have a significant impact on military readiness "due in large part to natural physical differences between men and women that have practical consequences for the lethality of gender-integrated fighting units," according to the report.

But calls to expand the draft to women have been growing in recent years. In a 2019 case, a federal judge in Texas ruled that an all-male draft was unconstitutional in response to a lawsuit brought forward by the National Coalition for Men.

Experts argue that allowing women to participate in the draft will enable the military to access to a wider talent pool, as well as allow women to share in a fundamental civil obligation.

"It's insulting to suggest America's mothers and wives and daughters couldn't contribute, whether the need were rebuilding levees after a natural disaster or repelling an invasion from our shores," Kori Schake, director of foreign and defense policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute, told the commission. "America's daughters should be slotted into service as their physical and emotional suitability proves capable of, just like America's sons."

Confirmation Bible Knowledge Quiz

Junior Confirmation begins Monday, September 14, 5 PM. I have all returning students. I have a 3 year Confirmation Program beginning with 6th graders. All must pass a memory test on Luther's Small Catechism before starting. A digital and print copy of this is available from the secretary and our website.

I last put this quiz in a newsletter in 2004. I try to use it for every Confirmation class but don't always. Let me tell you the results are depressing. The best kids have scored 80%, the worst 20%, and the average church-attending, Sunday School-going child scores about 53%. Take the quiz. If you as an adult don't score at least 80%, you don't have enough Bible-knowledge to understand what a pastor means by referring to Aaron's rod or beard; Jacob's ladder or well; Peter's catches of fish; or which apostle was the Twin. So to paraphrase the Soup Nazi: "More Bible Class for you!"

1. What were the names of the first man and woman created? _____
2. Where did God originally put them? _____
3. Who built the ark that saved eight people? _____
4. Which one of the twelve sons of Jacob was sold into slavery? _____
5. Who was the leader of God's people during their forty years in the wilderness? _____
6. Who was the first King of Israel? _____
7. What was the name of the giant David killed? _____
8. Name the King who built the first temple? _____
9. Where did the Children of Israel spend seventy years in captivity? _____
10. Name the town Jesus was born in? _____
11. Name the town Jesus grew up in? _____
12. Where did the angel tell Joseph to take baby Jesus to keep him safe from Herod? _____
13. Who baptized Jesus in the Jordan River? _____
14. What miracle did Jesus perform at Cana? _____
15. How did four men get a paralyzed man in to see Jesus? _____
16. Which disciple was a Tax collector before he followed Jesus? _____
17. What is Jesus most famous Sermon? _____
18. What did Jesus do for Lazarus? _____
19. How many apostles did Jesus chose? _____
20. Which apostle betrayed Jesus? _____
21. Which apostle denied Jesus three times? _____
22. What was the name of the Roman ruler who condemned Jesus? _____
23. What was the name of the place Jesus was crucified? _____
24. What happened 40 days after His resurrection from the dead? _____
25. What event will bring the world to an end? _____

You Won't Believe this Communion Statement!

Posted on May 18, 2020 by Rev. Paul R. Harris

I freely admit this is clickbait, but it's also true. The following story shows how it's possible to go from Closed to Communion to Open in less than a generation.

Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church was founded in 1985 by a Confessional Lutheran pastor who faithfully confessed and practiced the doctrine of Closed Communion. I was called there after him in 1990 and confessed and practiced the same till October 1999. In 2002, a 2002 grad of Fort Wayne was called there. By 2018 you won't believe their Communion statement!

Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church, Harvey, LA
<http://www.coslems.com/>

May I take communion?

We invite all adults who know Jesus as their Savior and Lord and who understand that the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ are truly present in the Lord's Supper to come to Communion with us.

© 2018 Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church
A congregation of the Southern District, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Breaking not only with the Book of Concord, Reformation-era churches, the church of the first four centuries, but the Holy Christian Church Herself, this church doesn't even require you to be baptized! Lord have mercy!

I don't know when they forsook Confessional Lutheranism. I do know in 1990 an Elder, who's not there now, told me that if they got a liberal pastor that's what they would become. He was right. How does a Fort Wayne-trained grad come to believe open Communion is just fine, faithful, and confessional? I don't know except to say he is also a graduate of Concordia, Austin. I've said for decades that these synod-owned colleges tear down the very faith I believe, teach, and confess. In recent years, I've been told by faithful confessional pastors who were graduated from a Concordia that my assertion, is wrong. It was spot on with this guy.

Has anyone tried to call this pastor and congregation to repentance? I honestly don't know. I do know that in an August 1990 "Letter to Pastors" rock-ribbed confessional Lutheran stalwart President Ralph Bohlmann wrote: "On

the question of admission to Communion, it is interesting to note the following statement developed by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1986 summarizing the official Roman Catholic practice regarding the admission of other Christians to Roman Catholic altars: ‘We welcome to this celebration of the Eucharist those Christians who are not fully united with us. It is a consequence of the sad divisions in Christianity that we cannot extend to them a general invitation to receive Communion. Catholics believe that the Eucharist is an action of the celebrating community signifying a oneness in faith, life, and worship of the community. Reception of the Eucharist by Christians not fully united with us would imply a oneness which does not exist, and for which we must all pray.’”

President Bohlmann went on to point out: that Canon Law does allow for exceptional cases of pastoral care; that the official practice of the LCMS is very similar to this; that although the practice will vary at the local level, at the official level the Roman Catholic Church’s rationale is “somewhat similar to that of our Synod.”

Geez! How come the LCMS doesn’t elect an outspoken man like that for Synodical president? I’m speaking tongue in cheek for those of you who never knew Ralph Bohlmann. But even his tepid endorsement and justification of Closed Communion is better than President Harrison’s “you could do better” to congregations practicing Open Communion. Now that’s an Ezekiel-esque warning!

I believe there are fewer congregations today practicing Closed Communion than when Harrison, the confessional candidate, was elected president of the LCMS in 2010. I know there is at least one less.

Statement on Supreme Court's Decision in *June Medical Services v. Russo*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 29, 2020

CONTACT:

Amy O'Donnell, Director of Communications

512.477.1244 (o)

amy@texasallianceforlife.org

AUSTIN, TX -- Today the United States Supreme Court, on a narrow 5-4 vote, issued *June Medical Services v. Russo* to prevent enforcement of Louisiana's law that requires physicians who perform abortions to have privileges to practice medicine at a nearby hospital. The decision continues to allow abortion providers to challenge laws in federal court without any women as actual plaintiffs. Justice Breyer wrote the opinion for the Court, with a concurrence by Chief Justice Roberts. Justices Alito, Gorsuch, Kavanaugh, and Thomas wrote dissents.

The following statement is attributed to our Executive Director Joe Pojman, Ph.D.:

The Supreme Court's ruling is disappointing; however, it is not a setback. We have lost no ground. The rule requiring doctors who perform abortions to have hospital privileges in Louisiana, Texas, and other states, reasonable as it is, cannot be enforced today just as it could not be enforced prior to this ruling. Abortion facilities can continue to challenge safety regulations that clearly benefit the women they claim to represent. Additionally, there was no expectation the Court would overrule *Roe v. Wade* today because Louisiana did not ask for that.

The takeaway from today's ruling is not lost on us. The Supreme Court's unjust *Roe v. Wade* precedent must be reconsidered from an unbiased perspective. That did not happen today. The Supreme Court needs more justices willing to take a fresh look at *Roe* like those appointed by President Donald Trump. Our organization will continue to urge voters to re-elect President Trump.

Background

In 2013, the Texas Legislature passed House Bill 2, with strong support from Texas Alliance for Life, to ban abortions after five months and to increase safety requirements at abortion facilities within the state. Among the safety requirements was a provision that abortion providers have admitting privileges at a hospital within 30 miles of the abortion facility and that the abortion facilities meet the same standards as ambulatory surgical centers.

In 2016, those safety provisions were blocked by the Supreme Court in *Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt*. In 2014, Louisiana passed a law similar to the admitting privileges law in Texas. This law was put on hold during the *Whole Woman's Health* decision, and using the Supreme Court's framework, it was not allowed to be enforced by a federal district court but was upheld by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. In January the Supreme Court blocked the Fifth Circuit's judgment while considering the case.

"The Decline of American Evangelicalism"

Dr. David Wells Distinguished Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary
Author of *No Place for Truth* and *The Courage to Be Protestant*
Interviewed May 27, 2009 on *Issues, Etc.* (Transcript edited by Pastor Harris)

WILKEN: It's a difficult thing to define and partly because American Evangelicalism has over the past 30-40 years almost defined itself out of existence, at least theologically. If you look at the thing as a theological movement, it started out fairly robust in the Protestant tradition but then, as I said, began to define itself out of existence. The tenets of American Evangelicalism theologically became fewer and fewer, until it's hard to find any at all—perhaps a kind of blanket adherence to the Bible in some sense as God's Word, Jesus seems to be pretty important in the mix, but beyond that, it's hard to get any consensus among American Evangelicals about what

they're really all about. And has the evangel, that is, the Gospel, survived the movements of American Evangelicalism? They've certainly been moving and shaking in the last 35 years, but in what direction? Dr. Wells, welcome back.

WELLS: Well, thank you so much, Todd. WILKEN: It was back in 1993 that you wrote *No Place for Truth*. It was a pretty bare-knuckled assessment of American Evangelicalism at the time. Have things improved at all in the last sixteen years?

WELLS: Well, thank you. What you describe is probably correct. When I wrote *No Place for Truth*, as one of my friends said to me after that book, "There would be no place for Wells." And I was describing very clearly what I was seeing. But not a lot of other people appeared to be seeing the same things. But I would say today, what back then—fifteen to twenty years ago— what back then was in germinal seed form has now burst out into view. And I'm really in a way gratified, although I wish I weren't, at how many people now are beginning to say and to see the very things that I was writing about when I wrote *No Place for Truth*.

WILKEN: Well, I'm wondering, one of the most intriguing things that you point out in, and it's been a sense of mine—adhering to a traditional, confessional Lutheran position in both doctrine and practice as a pastor in a Lutheran church body, a sense of mine for a long time—that the traditional church, as defined by those confessions especially in the Reformation, is under attack. You, I was shocked to find in your book, say yes, it is. Why, and by who?

WELLS: Well, it undoubtedly is under attack, and lest people misunderstand the point here, let us agree. There are some traditional churches which are moribund, dying, should not be defended, and are on their way out of existence. Let's agree that that is the case. But the whole point, I think, in the attack on the traditional church is that traditional churches have defined their lives by the doctrine which they have believed. This is what has given definition to the life of their church. This is what explains what they do. This is at the core of their message. Their Gospel message is a message of teaching, of doctrine, about the person and the work of Christ, and about the necessity of faith, and that Christ did uniquely, did what no one else has ever done, and that we need to entrust ourselves to Him and so on. This is what has defined the church and its message. The attack upon the traditional church is an attack upon the place of doctrine in defining the church. Because what people have wanted is a free hand to develop this enterprise in the way they want, for a consumer that they have in mind, in order to become more successful. And many of them have indeed become most successful, if by that you are judging by numbers. There are huge mega-churches, as you know, that have catered to a consumer, and the way

they have catered is by holding doctrinal beliefs in abeyance. They have been almost concealed so that somebody coming into this church would hardly know what the church believes. Now, this, I have to tell you, this is a strategic blunder of the first order. Quite apart from the fact that it goes to the very heart of what Christian faith is really about, but leaving that aside for a second, what these mega-churches are discovering, because so many of them now are simply imploding, is that the very consumers whom they were seeking to entice by this non-doctrinal, non-particular sort of message, are being despised by the consumers that they had wanted. These people come in one door, find that there is nothing particular about the church that they can't find somewhere else, and they go out the back door. Bill Hybel's study, called *Reveal*, which was a study on his and a few other churches like his, was simply stunning. And it was stunning because he was the one who had initiated it, and what he found was that this whole approach had produced virtually nothing in the lives of the people who were coming to the church. But, leaving aside the question of its effectiveness, the truth of the matter is that Christian faith is a counter-cultural message in the sense that it is saying that in the Christian Gospel and in the Christ who is at the heart of that Gospel, we are finding what cannot be found in ourselves or in our culture around us. It's not another twelve-step program. It's not a self-help program. This is something unique to Christian faith, and it cannot be found in our culture. So if we lose that, then we've lost everything.

WILKEN: So, with just a few minutes here before we take our first break, Dr. Wells, you mentioned the *Reveal* study that the Willow Creek Association undertook. They were rather alarmed to discover that the longer people remained associated with them, the less satisfied they were with what Willow Creek was offering, and the deeper they grew in their Christian faith, at least by measurable accounts, the more they wanted more meaty, Biblical teaching from the Willow Creek staff. I'm intrigued by what you make of Bill Hybel's solution, which was, "Well, you know, we're not going to feed these people with God's Word. We're just going to have to teach them to feed themselves." He used the term "self-feeders." And he seemed rather put out that people would want to be fed as sheep in a Christian church. [In April 2018 Billy Hybels 'retired' under charges of sexual misconduct that were later found to be credible by independent evangelical leaders. prh]

WELLS: What he did was to roll out a new business plan to replace the failed business plan. It raises the question as to what the church is about. My answer, which I think is from the New Testament, is that the church is there to teach people to walk with God, to believe the truth that He has given. In this time in which we are living, this is more needed than ever because living in the West, living in

a society like ours, with all of its wonderful, magnificent opportunities and choices, nevertheless is extremely difficult, and we need God's truth if we are to stand upright and survive.

WILKEN: So, what is the way back for American Evangelicalism? Back to its Protestant and Reformation roots? Do we have to reinvent the wheel? Dr. Wells, let's talk about marketing. You have written extensively about this. Has the marketing approach for American Evangelicals been a help or a harm to the enterprise of the Gospel?

WELLS: I would say it has been disastrous. Because what it has done has, if I can use the language, it has rebranded the meaning of Christian faith. It has taken, as it were, the old product and in effect transformed it so that it is now something entirely different and we are increasingly seeing the consequences of this. Not only in simple, Biblical illiteracy, because the Bible isn't taught, but in much more profound ways that the whole understanding of a Biblical worldview has simply disintegrated. If Bonner's studies are correct, among the 18-23 year old bracket, among those who claim to be born again, one percent has a Biblical worldview. And I don't know if you saw the Pew study, in which a majority of evangelicals believe that salvation can be found in other religions. Now, if you just take these little brief snapshots of the evangelical movement, something disastrous has befallen it. Now, I don't blame the marketers entirely for this. But a large degree of the blame falls on their shoulders because they have simply, in terms of numbers they have moved a large part of the movement off in the direction which is simply destructive.

WILKEN: All right, then. I was reading through your book and I was thinking to myself, my own church body, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, sad to say, at least in its leadership and the leading lights there, have been coming to these approaches like marketing and the very things that have plagued evangelicalism for the last 35 years, they're just coming to this now and saying, "Wow, this is just marvelous" as it is proving disastrous for American evangelicals. What would you say to someone who says, "Look, this is the future. Marketing ourselves, massaging and repackaging the message and paring down our doctrinal distinctives to be of a broader appeal to the culture." How would you respond?

WELLS: Well, I would respond by saying that every time the Christian faith has tried to pare down its essential beliefs in order to accommodate itself to the culture, going back to the Old Testament narrative but coming all the way down through history, every time this has happened, disaster has followed shortly thereafter. This is simply the old liberal mindset. The old, classical liberals made their accommodations to high culture; evangelicals are making it to popular culture. But the end result is going to be the same, and the end result is, in fact, what we see in the mainline denominations today, which are disintegrating. If

people were really on the cutting edge, instead of 20-30 years behind, as people you are describing, if they were really on the cutting edge, what they would be able to see is that the whole marketing enterprise is disintegrating before our eyes, and the emergents are falling apart also, heading off into different directions because of their multiple accommodations to postmodern culture. But there is, however—and I think it's located in the 20s and 30s and 40s—there is today a rather amazing rekindling of a desire for the real thing. A desire for what you see at the time of the Reformation and certainly what you have in the Apostle Paul in the New Testament. And the reason for it is that this is a segment of our population that on the one hand has been marketed to, to the death. So they don't want the Gospel to be marketed to them again as another product. And on the other hand, what they're trying to get away from are the consequences of capitulation to the culture that they have seen in all of their friends. So they're looking for the real deal. I don't know if you saw Time Magazine, maybe three weeks ago, it listed ten trends, and I think trend number three was what they called "The New Calvinism." Well, it's not narrowly Calvinism. What it is, is a new seriousness among, I think, younger people, 20s, 30s, 40s— younger by my standards—who are looking for the real deal, and I think this is where our real future is.

WILKEN: Okay. You mentioned the emergent movement, or "emergence" or "emerging," it goes by various terms, but give us a brief introduction to this attempt to respond to classical liberalism and pop American Christianity, and why it is already, after only, what, less than ten years, flying apart at the seams.

WELLS: Well, this is really just another attempt at marketing. But the target audience is different. Bill Hybels and company marketed to the baby boomers. The emergents are really marketing to a younger generation, principally Generation X. And it has a different cultural mindset. The consequence of this is that when you get this amalgam, this translation of Christian faith, into these cultural terms, it has a different look and feel to it from what you see in Hybels and Willow Creek and that whole movement. It reflects the generational shift and the different set of attitudes. And among emergents what you have is an even slimmer doctrinal core, and a willingness to make cultural alliances of a different kind. This is the generation that has been most hurt by divorce and the stresses and strains of our home lives, which have only increased with the passing of the years. And so this generation is much more relational, much more "clubby," if I can put it like that. They want to "hang together," they put great stress on this. They therefore correspondingly do not like judgmental attitudes, what they call judgmental attitudes. They don't want anything that will intrude upon relationships. They will not, therefore, judge personal lifestyle issues. They won't judge homosexuality. To their credit, they are much more attuned

to human suffering, but they are much less attuned to the potential of suffering beyond death, of which Scripture speaks. They just have an entirely different mindset. But by their very nature, they're not institution builders. They're trying to escape from the boundaries and the restrictions of doctrine. So they are pulling away from each other in a multitude of different directions, and some in their movement are already saying, "The movement's done. It's all over."

WILKEN: One of the things that Dr. Wells points out in his book is the disappearance of the church. It is replaced, of course. The vacuum is never left empty. It is replaced, of course, in the minds of many American evangelicals, with what is probably best called the "para-church," that is, an organization that doesn't claim to be church, but in some ways fills the gap left by a church that has disappeared. Many churches, classical congregations, have been happy to either morph into a para-church themselves, or to let the para-church swoop in and fill the gap that they are leaving there. But the last time I checked, according to Scripture, the church is not an optional institution, and it's not a human institution. It's a divine institution, left here by Christ in His Word and Sacraments that cannot be replaced. We'll talk more about that after this. Dr. Wells, let's talk about—you make a point in your book that churches have not so much declined as disappeared or been replaced, in a lot of cases, by the para-church. What is the para-church, and why can't it substitute for the churches we have known for nearly two millennia?

WELLS: Yes, and to that one should also add by online communities. You know, this takes the whole process even one step further. In fact, all over America today there are people who not only don't go to their church that they once went to, they don't even go to a small group with live people, but they simply go online to these virtual communities. Well, very quickly, this, I believe, is what's happened. First, when evangelicals came together after the Second World War, to try to put together a working coalition of believers, they reduced the core that had to be believed to some essentials. And freedom was given around those essentials. What has happened with the passing of time is that those essentials have become even fewer and they've become more slender. They've lost their substance and depth with the passing of the years. This is not true of everybody, but this is just a general tendency. So that's the first thing that's happened. The second thing that's happened is this: that evangelicals took what had been a distinction of the Reformation, a very proper distinction, and they ran with it. The distinction was between the Church visible and invisible. The Church invisible is that fellowship of all true believers who have trusted in Christ solely for their salvation, by grace alone, through faith alone. It is a fellowship that stretches across the ages. The visible Church is those who gather together Sunday by

Sunday for worship, proclamation, Sacraments, witness. And evangelicals said, "Now, of these two, which is more important? Well, of course it is the invisible Church." So they put all their eggs in this basket. In time, so much of the evangelical effort went into this, into the pursuit of ministries that were Gospel ministries, because they wanted to build the invisible Church. And the visible Church, by comparison, shrank. What happened then was that as local churches faltered and stumbled sometimes and didn't do the things that they should have been doing, structures and organizations popped up alongside them to do what the churches should have been doing but hadn't been doing. Now, a very good illustration of that is the Bible Study Fellowship. In the churches the Bible was not being effectively preached and taught and learned, and BSF came alongside the churches and started doing this very effectively and had a wonderful ministry. But in the early post-War years, para-church organizations functioned, as it were, within the church. They were for the church. They didn't look on themselves as having an independent life. What began to happen in the 70s and 80s, as the entrepreneurs became prominent in evangelicalism and as the whole business model took over, these para-church organizations became a thing unto themselves. They became business enterprises. They went out to get financing in the evangelical world, they lived for themselves, and increasingly evangelicals gave their time and attention to the para-church organizations and their interest in the local church diminished, and then in the final stage of evolution they moved on, many of them onto the internet. I don't know if Barna is right, but he projects a short period of time, a few years, 80 percent of evangelicals will get their spiritual sustenance online.

WILKEN: So, is it the beginning or perhaps the first years of a post-evangelical era? When we say the word "evangelical" now, are we uttering nonsense?

WELLS: I think that we are at the end of what has been quite an extraordinary story and extraordinarily good in many ways. But I think that we are now at the end. I think it is disintegrating. I think you will see happening, if it hasn't already, what happened last century. Don't forget that the classical liberal Protestants were all born in evangelical homes. Then they encountered the modern world. Typically, it was in university where they came face-to-face with Darwin and some of the other intellectual challengers. And they made their peace with the modern world. And today what is happening, I think, is that, coming out of the loins of evangelicalism, we are giving birth to a new, nascent, liberal Protestantism. And you see it in particular in the emergents. So I see this as the end of a chapter, and what I am looking for and hoping for is the birth, the beginnings, of a new movement that will take, will draw together serious-minded, Biblically-focused, Christ-honoring evangelicals from the current time and perhaps we can redo

the story all over again, but without what in fact has become baggage on the evangelical world.

WELLS: If you think back—and maybe some of the people listening can't think back thirty or forty years because they're too young—but I can think back to that time, and I remember how important theology was to evangelicals. Indeed, it was so important that we sometimes had difficulty reigning in our passions over our differences. Today, you know you're hard-pressed to find people like that. What divides us today, and I'm speaking here in general, what divides us today is not so much doctrinal differences as differences in the way in which we appropriate culture. Now, part of our culture is, of course, that we are consumers. Our world is filled with marketing. And so one of our differences is, what do you make of this marketing? How much can you use? Should you use it in the church? This is where our debates are. But the underlying debate that we really should be having is the point that's just been made. It is about the nature of Christian truth, with respect to the person of Christ, with respect to the nature of the Gospel, to fallen human nature, to human destiny, to faith and grace. These are the things that are the bedrock discussions that we really need to be having if the church is to survive.

WILKEN: Some final questions for Dr. Wells: Does he expect megachurches that have marketed themselves into this current position to follow the mainline Protestant liberal denominations on moral issues, and how ironic is it that the church has not succumbed by persecution or suppression, but by surrender, capitulation, and accommodation to the culture?

WELLS: Well, as a famous English churchman said, "He who is married to the spirit of the age today will be a widow tomorrow." And that's what's going to happen if we court and marry the spirit of our own age, what we're going to find is it's quickly going to move on, and the favor that we might have been granted today might very well turn to hostility tomorrow. But in any case, even if it doesn't, we will be judged irrelevant as a new cultural mood moves through the nation.

WILKEN: Rebecca in Michigan emails us. She says, "Are most of us lay people too ill-equipped to reign in some of the marketing tendencies of the church? Who will have to do the heavy lifting for gaining Biblical knowledge? If it will be the ordained ministers, where have they been?" Your response, Dr. Wells?

WELLS: I think she asks a wonderful question. Where have the ordained ministers been? I think it's very hard for lay people to see the situation and to know exactly what to do. Indeed, I don't know what to do, except to try my best to describe what's happening and hope that maybe somebody, somewhere, will listen. But it's very hard to put the brakes on this train because it seems to be, has seemed to be, so successful. There are, as you know, churches that

are mammoth size that have become so with very little, or even no reference to Christian truth. And I would say that Joel Osteen's church is a prime example. So how do you put the brakes on this? How do you alert people to it? Unless people really want to know the truth, and want to pursue the God of that truth, they will be seduced by almost anything.

WILKEN: How far will American Evangelicalism, as long as it continues to survive institutionally, how far will it follow the culture? We know that classical kind of mainline Protestant liberalism has been willing to follow the culture, up to this point, wherever the culture leads. We have the Episcopal Church USA with openly homosexual bishops and gay marriages and all the other things, and who knows what's coming next. Do you expect the mega-church movements, that have marketed themselves so successfully, as you say, to the culture, will they follow so far?

WELLS: Let me just make a small distinction. There are some mega-churches which have become large, but not by marketing themselves. And the difference is that the churches that I'm talking about are large because they have made known up front their nature as Biblical, doctrinal believing churches. They haven't tried to hide that in the interest of reaching consumers. So there is that little distinction. But in answer to your question, the marketing mega-churches, I think, actually are in a real bind right now. If you look at some of the studies that have been done of their pastors, most of them still think of themselves as being orthodox in an evangelical kind of way. If you ask most of them whether they believe in the divinity of Christ or His saving work on the cross, they wouldn't dispute or deny it, most of them. But when you go into their churches, that is not what you hear. Or if you hear it, it is in such disguised ways because they're trying to appeal to consumers. Now, I think they are in a real bind, because the method that they have adopted is simply deaf on Christian faith. So they've got to make a choice, and I think the choice is now upon them, and I think Bill Hybel's study only pointed this out. The time to choose has come. Either they go the marketing way, in which case there is nothing to stop any compromise at all, or they turn back and recover their true Biblical identity.

WILKEN: Joe in St. Louis has a question about Christian education. He says, "What has been the impact of these trends on our Christian schools, and what is the remedy to combat these influences?"

WELLS: Well, of course, some of our Christian schools are trying to train kids to think Christianly about their world, Christianly and Biblically, in a way that you don't see in the typical mega-church. So some of our Christian schools are, by their very nature, sort of countercultural, both in terms of the culture and the evangelical world. But for those young people who are growing up in these mega-churches, I can tell you that they are Biblically and morally illiterate. When Christian Smith did his recent study on

them, he summed it up by saying, and he researched a wide swath of young people in churches of an evangelical kind, and he said their belief is in a theism—that is to say that God never interferes in this life—which is of a therapeutic kind. They're just interested in internal healing. And they don't have rules in their lives. So that's where we're headed.

WILKEN: With only thirty seconds, then, is the way forward really, in fact, the way back—that is, a return to the classical assertions, beliefs, and tenets of the Protestant Reformation? Thirty seconds, Dr. Wells.

WELLS: The way forward is the way back, but not simply to arid beliefs. These beliefs, we have to make our own. We have to feel their weight and their depth. We have to hold them in the tension that is always there in relationship to our culture. These have to be ours in the presence and the face of God.

WILKEN: We are recalled by the apostles to their teachings, and the earliest church spends the better part of its time recalling the teachings of the apostles: the way back. To what? Well, it's the way back to the heart and center, the living, vital, the beating heart of the Christian faith and of the Church itself; the way back to Christ and His cross. Would that evangelicalism lived up to its name: men and women of the Gospel. But one of the first

casualties in evangelicalism's attempt to find success in the eyes of the world—and boy, have they found success in the eyes of the world—one of the casualties was the Gospel itself. It had to go. And so when you walk into many of those churches you simply will not hear it sung, prayed, preached, or even mentioned. It's considered a scandal. Well, that's because it is a stumbling block. And yet it is the only message that saves a lost and condemned world: the message of Christ, perfect life, death, and resurrection for us. And the way forward for the Church is always the way back to Christ and His cross, to the bold proclamation and confession of the Christ and of His apostles, of the Church, as it has stood the test of time and against the gates of hell, because of that confession of Jesus Christ, crucified for a world of sinners, and is the only hope for that world. Now, the Church will survive, make no mistake about it. Evangelicalism may have already fallen, and may already be nothing more than dust. But Christ's promise, the gates of hell will not prevail, remains for the true Church as it continues to confess Christ.

Trinity Lutheran Church

1207 West 45th Street, Austin, TX 78756

512.453.3835

www.trinityaustin.com

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August 2020

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
NOON TRI-TIP DINNER			7:15 PM DANIEL BIBLE STUDY			
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
ADULT CONFIRMATION 12:15 PM			7:15 PM DANIEL BIBLE STUDY			
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
ADULT CONFIRMATION 12:15 PM			7:15 PM DANIEL BIBLE STUDY			
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
ADULT CONFIRMATION 12:15 PM			7:15 PM DANIEL BIBLE STUDY			
30	31					
ADULT CONFIRMATION 12:15 PM						

September 2020

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
		6:30 PM ELDERS MEETING	7:15 PM DANIEL BIBLE STUDY			
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
ADULT CONFIRMATION 12:15 PM	JR. CONFIRMATION BEGINS 5 PM	VOTERS MEETING 7:00 PM	7:15 PM DANIEL BIBLE STUDY			7 AM-1 PM GARAGE SALE
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
ADULT CONFIRMATION 12:15 PM	JR. CONFIRMATION 5 PM		7:15 PM DANIEL BIBLE STUDY			
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
ADULT CONFIRMATION 12:15 PM	JR. CONFIRMATION 5 PM		7:15 PM DANIEL BIBLE STUDY			
27	28	29	30			
ADULT CONFIRMATION 12:15 PM	JR. CONFIRMATION 5 PM		7:15 PM DANIEL BIBLE STUDY			