

Trinity Te Deum

The official newsletter for Trinity Lutheran Church

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

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Not Repeating but Emphasizing

Remember, if I wrote it at least 10 years ago and I publish it again, I'm not repeating but emphasizing. This is part of my brochure (pp. 3-6) [Explanation to the Divine Service in The Lutheran Hymnal](#). I wrote this at least 25 years ago. But introduction below only dates to 2011. Three things I would like to see Trinity continue in are Bible Story based Sunday School, Small Catechism based Confirmation instruction, and a proper view of the liturgy: valuing it but not worshipping it (prh).

An Introduction to our Divine Service

Posted on April 18, 2012 by Rev. Paul R. Harris

Our Order of Service is not unique to us Lutherans. Martin Luther did not break away from the universal Christian Church, but rather, he recalled the Church to Her original doctrine and practice. The Church still existed, but She had become corrupt through false teachings. It was Luther's intention to keep everything (the order of service, the furnishings, the music, vestments, candles) as long as they were not contrary to the Word of God. A manufacturer may put out an automobile with a faulty radiator, but one does not throw out the entire car for that reason – one replaces the radiator.

We use an altar, crucifix, vestments, candles, rites, ceremonies. These things are not the possession of any denomination. They belong to all Christendom, for they were handed down through the ages. In the order that they appear in our Divine Service, here is when they became component parts of the liturgy. Remember in all cases, they were in use before this time. This is when they became "official." Introit – 5th century; Kyrie – 6th century; Gloria in Excelsis – 5th century; Creed – 11th century; Preface – 3rd century. Sanctus – 1st century; Pax Domini – 4th century; Agnus Dei – 7th century (Rev. David Kind presentation "The Shape of the Liturgy", July 2010, Nashville, TN).

Although the "father" of the Lutheran church, Martin Luther, argued that ceremony can be used in a godly way and that we can't, in fact, live without ceremonies in the church (AE, 49, 55-56), many Lutheran churches have discarded the liturgy. While

Lutherans have never insisted that there is only one divine order of service, they have insisted that how you worship shows what you really believe. This outlook goes back to the first four centuries of the Christian Church's existence. "Every congregation declared what it stood for in its liturgies, its selections of lection [Bible readings], and in its prayers and hymns" (Elert, *Eucharistic and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, 49).

We are confessing something by using the same order of service that has been used by Lutherans since 1888. Those who attack this order as out of date, outmoded, boring, stale, etc. are also saying something. As G. K. Chesterton observed, "There is not really any courage at all in attacking hoary or antiquated things, any more than in offering to fight one's grandmother. The really courageous man is he who defies tyrannies young as the morning and superstitions fresh as the first flowers" (*What's Wrong with the World*, 33). Trinity defies both the tyranny that liturgical equals "Catholic" and the superstition that new means better.

On the first point, even the first president of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, C.F.W. Walther weighed in. He said, "It is a pity and dreadful cowardice when one sacrifices the good ancient church customs to please the deluded American sects, lest they accuse us of being papistic [i.e. Catholic]" (*Essays for the Church*, I, 197). On the second point, Plato weighs in. He warns of the State praising 'new songs' not knowing that they are new kinds of song. He said, "For any musical innovation is full of danger to the whole State, and ought to be prohibited....When modes of music change, the fundamental laws of the State always change with them" (*Republic*, 203). G. K. Chesterton makes the same point only specifically in reference to the church. "Those who leave the tradition of truth do not escape into something which we call Freedom. They only escape into something else which we call Fashion" (*Collected Works*, III, 388).

The monumental work, *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, has this to say about our Lutheran tradition of worship in the United States: "In the

United States, Lutherans of varied ethnic origin and theological bent had since 1888 agreed on a ‘Common Service’” (729). This came unraveled in the 80s, and now there are virtually as many different orders of service as there are Lutheran churches. And what we have is people who are like a character from a John Updike novel who “misses the familiar Lutheran liturgy, scratched into his heart like a weathered inscription” (*Rabbit, Run*, 197). Actually, if historian Will Durant got it right, we have something more. He puts this critique of Voltaire in the mouth of Pope Benedict XIV: “Tradition is to the group what memory is to the individual, and just as the sapping of memory may bring insanity, so a sudden break with tradition may plunge a whole nation into madness, like France in revolution” (*The Age of Voltaire*, 788). Attend a church that prides itself in contemporary, blended, praise, or cutting edge worship and you will see the “madness” of polka, country, or blue grass Communion services; of pastors strutting around the chancel as if they owned the place; of people being applauded for their performance. They will defend all this in the name of enculturation. As one of my members pointed out, what contemporary worship is really engaged in is de-culturation.

From the very beginning of the Lutheran Church as a distinct fellowship, we have warned of this. Our Apology of the Augsburg Confession says why we intend on keeping the “old traditions”: “But we cheerfully maintain the old traditions (as, the three high festivals, the observance of Sunday, and the like) made in the Church for the sake of usefulness and tranquility; (XV, 38). In a later article we assert “that with the greatest zeal we maintain the dignity of the Mass and show its true use” (XXVI, 99).

A word about our Divine Service in general. We are with Plato when it comes to hymn singing. He believed it was a fact without need of substantiation that “melody and rhythm will depend upon the word” (*Republic*, 156). Two Baptists, in writing about the hymns produced by the Reformation, say, “The great Reformation chorales were meant not to create a mood, but to convey a message” (*The Gift of Music*, 35). In other words, even when the sermon is bad there is still a message in our Divine Service. In a more serious vein, we should remember what 19th century poet Matthew Arnold said, “- such a price/ The Gods exact for song:/ To become what we sing” (Lines 232-234). Perhaps you have noticed what this biographer of Douglas MacArthur did: “In times of social upheaval

dazed populations turn to the irrational, the bizarre, the macabre. Laws of social gravity are suspended. People take up wild crazes, behave like freaks, laugh at horror, weep at wit. One of the surest signs of this psychedelic mood is popular music. Nonsense songs catch on, perhaps because sensible lyrics mock a demented world. They were found in Russia on the eve of the October Revolution, and in Weimar, Berlin. The British played “The World Turned Upside Down” at Yorktown, in the Depression and WWII Americans sang “The Music goes Round and Round,” “Three Itty fishes,” “Hut Sut Song,” and “Mairzy Doats.” Tokyo Rose crooned to the tune of London Bridge “Hello, hello, are you there? Are you there, are you there? Hello, hello, are you there? Ah that is so” (William Manchester, *American Caesar*, 488-489)!

Not only are our hymns “old school” so is our chanting. We preserve the Gregorian or plainchant. We don’t do this simply because it is old. As *The Oxford History of Christian Worship* observes. Plainchant is a more intelligible rendition of texts than polyphony and more acoustically pleasing (723). Or as a Catholic writer has observed, “Gregorian chant is music that is strictly wedded to language” (Mosebach, *The Heresy of Formlessness*, 16). Of course many churches, including the Catholic, have gone away from it for something more up to date. “What the bishops forgot was that this music had sounded strange even to the ears of Charlemagne and Thomas Aquinas, Monteverdi and Haydn; it is at least as remote from their contemporary life as it is from ours” (Ibid. 16). This Catholic writer’s view is supported by Pierre Riche, who was professor of the history of the Middle Ages at the University of Paris when he wrote the 1973 work, *Daily Life in the World of Charlemagne*. He observed, “We can be sure the people accustomed to the more abrupt rhythms of profane music were not easily seduced by the monodic purity of Gregorian chant” (236). Alfred Edersheim dates the use of Gregorian tones to the Temple itself saying, “There is no reason to doubt that in so-called Gregorian tones we have also preserved to us a close approximation to the ancient hymnody of the Temple, though certainly not without considerable alterations” (*The Temple*, 81).

Trinity Lutheran Church has not been “seduced” by sounds but by the words of the Gospel. Our Divine Service is in service to those words and, even more so, to the Word made Flesh.

Rev. Paul R. Harris, October 25, 2011

A Thank You and Report from Those Having Attended Higher Things

Dear members of Trinity,

Trinity sent four youth and four adults to the Higher Things conference in Bozeman, Montana, July 19-22. I'd like to first say thank you on behalf of the group for sending us, and also to report a little about the conference.

Higher Things is meant to be a liturgical alternative to the LCMS National Youth Gathering. The conference we went to was held at Montana State University. There were a *lot* of worship services, where a gathering of around 900 youth and adults participated. Although these were held in a large convention room, changes were made to prepare the room as a worship space. An altar was set up, banners were hung, a crucifix was suspended from the ceiling, and even a baptismal font was brought in. Pastors were robed, a choir of volunteers from the kids sang parts of the liturgy, and a keyboard with an organ setting was used. Projection screens were not used during the service. Every attendee received a printed Worship Book with the full liturgy for all services. All in all, I found this very respectful and salutary.

The conference began and ended with a Divine Service with communion. Our group did not commune, but nearly everyone else did. Each day of the conference included Matins, Vespers, and an evening prayer service, which everyone attended.

Throughout the conference, we had six opportunities to attend breakout sessions, mostly led by pastors or vicars. We sometimes split up for these, so we heard about a variety of topics, including:

- "Revelation and End Times Theology"
- "The Walls are Talking" - what a church's building confesses about its theology
- "Blood Everywhere" - blood in the Old Testament sacrificial system, and how it pointed to Christ
- "But Esau I Hated" - on how Esau can be seen as a type of Christ
- "When Doubts Rise"
- "Love Your Enemies... Kill the Canaanites?"
- "The Seven Visions of the Prophet Zechariah"
- "Submit and Die: What I Wish I Could Tell My High School Self about Marriage"

- "Get Back on Your Horse and Ride: The Whys and Some Hows of Confessing One's Faith"
- "Who Wrote the Bible"
- "Real ID" - finding one's identity in feelings, desires, or physical traits versus finding it in Christ
- "Born That Way?" - on what the Bible teaches about homosexuality

The talks I attended emphasized distinctly Lutheran points. For example, the talk about confessing the faith mentioned the difference between "confessing" and "witnessing" and that the Holy Spirit works to create faith. This was contrasted with decision theology. The talk about homosexuality very clearly treated it as a sin and emphasized that claiming a sin as part of one's identity is not something Christians can do. In all the talks, Scripture was the authority.

There were fun activities for the kids, including playing pool, something called "knockerball" (basically running into each other inside inflatable hamster balls), a hymn sing, chalk art, and a talent show. We enjoyed mealtime discussions and generally being around a group of fellow Lutherans who care about the liturgy.

So thank you all for supporting our youth and encouraging them in the faith!

Sincerely,
Derek Kurth

Advent Vespers Begin Wednesday, November 30, 7:30 PM

Advent as a season of preparation for the Nativity originated in France. Its observance was general by the time of the second Council of Tours, 567. In some places six or seven Sundays were included. When Rome adopted Advent, she limited the period to four Sundays as we now have. It was probably not until the 13th century that Advent was universally recognized as the beginning of the Church Year. Up until that time it had begun with the Festival of the Annunciation, March 25, or in some places, at Christmas. Three comings of Christ are remembered in Advent: the first coming, the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity in the womb of the Virgin Mary; the Second Coming of Jesus at the end of the world to judge it; and His continual coming among us in Baptism, the Word, and Holy Communion. The Advent wreath is of

relatively recent origin, the 19th century. Only two candles have historically represented something specific, the pink one and the white one. Lit on the Third Sunday the pink one stands for joy. On this Sunday, the penitential theme is supposed to be lighter. Tinged with the white of the Christ candle, the purple of penitence shades to the pink of a joyous rose.

A further note on color. You'll notice that most churches, even some Confessional Lutheran ones, have switched from violet/purple to blue. This is to strike a note of 'hope' rather than penitence. Of course, color choices and paraments at all are neither commanded or forbidden. It still says something. "Hopeful blue" is of a piece and of apace with the world around us. Penitential purple is neither. While Advent never attained the extreme penitential character of Lent, it has always been regarded as a season of repentance and of solemn anticipation and preparation for the coming of Christ (Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 465-466). This is from 1947. See how that is toned down from this Lutheran scholar in 1924: "Since this period is to prepare for the high and holy joy of the Nativity, to welcome the Coming of God's Son in humility, it has always been considered a time of deep penitence. ...It was observed with strict fast, and clergy were forbidden to perform marriages. But the effort to attach this strict *Lenten*, penitential, character to this Season was never generally successful, although it was, and still (as of the 1924) is everywhere considered a general season of penitence and prayer. This is typified in the Liturgical Color of the Season, Violet." (Strodach, *The Church Year*, 23).

Read the history of why the Church follows the celebration of the nativity with the Martyrdom of St. Stephen on the 26th, St. John the Apostle and Evangelist on the 27th, and the Holy Innocents on the 28th. This was done on purpose to tone down the exuberance and celebration of the Church. It may be Christmas, but She is still in the world.

“Faith worked Through these Means”

A 9-Part Advent-Lent Sermon Series on
The 4th, 5th, & 6th Chief Parts of Luther's Small Catechism

In the edition of *Aesop's Fables*, illustrated by Arthur Rackham, G. K. Chesterton authored the introduction. He says that "it is universally known among other things 'that there is such a thing as being too clever by half'" (xi). Since 1991 or perhaps 1992 I

have devoted the midweek services during Advent and Lent to preaching on the Catechism. I point out each year that this was the practice during the Reformation. I have done it for my entire time here. Which means this year we are completing our 6th passage through Luther's Small Catechism. And I fear that perhaps in my desire to be fresh, poignant, trenchant even, I ended up being too clever by half.

So, this year, I'm taking my title out of our Augsburg Confession Article V where we say this: "To obtain such faith, God instituted the office of the ministry, that is provided the Gospel and the Sacraments. Through these as through means, He gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where He pleases, in those who hear the Gospel" (Tappert, 31). In keeping with my desire to renounce my cleverness, I thought it would be good to just follow the Catechism's questions for my sermon themes if not titles. So, this is what that looks like.

All service times are at 7:30 PM. With the exception of Ash Wednesday, if you don't stay to visit, you can be walking to your car at 8:20 at the latest.

Nov. 30	What is Baptism?	Baptism 1
Dec. 07	What Benefits Does Baptism Give	Baptism 2
Dec. 14	How Can Water Do Such Great Things?	Baptism 3
Feb. 22	What is Confession?	Confession 1
Mar. 01	What Sins Should We Confess?	Confession 2
Mar. 08	What is the Sacrament of the Altar?	Sacrament of the Altar 1
Mar. 15	What is the Benefit of this Eating and Drinking?	Sacrament of the Altar 2
Mar. 22	How can Bodily Eating and Drinking do Such Things?	Sacrament of the Altar 3
Mar. 29	Who Receives This Sacrament Worthily?	Sacrament of the Altar 4

Obergefell v Hodges – Seven Years In

What it actually says about religious dissent from same sex marriage:

“Finally, it must be emphasized that religions, and those who adhere to religious doctrines, may continue to advocate with utmost, sincere conviction that, by divine precepts, same-sex marriage should not be condoned. The First Amendment ensures that religious organizations and persons are given proper protection as they seek to teach the principles that are so fulfilling and so central to their lives and faiths, and to their own deep aspirations to continue the family structure they have long revered. The same is true of those who oppose same-sex marriage for other reasons. In turn, those who believe allowing same-sex marriage is proper or indeed essential, whether as a matter of religious conviction or secular belief, may engage those who disagree with their view in an open and searching debate” (IV, 27).

What Justice Alito, in a minority opinion, thought about the Supreme Court’s recognition of a religious right not to accept same sex marriage:

“Perhaps recognizing how its reasoning may be used, the majority attempts, toward the end of its opinion, to reassure those who oppose same-sex marriage that their rights of conscience will be protected. Ante, at 26–27. We will soon see whether this proves to be true. I assume that those who cling to old beliefs will be able to whisper their thoughts in the recesses of their homes, but if they repeat those views in public, they will risk being labeled as bigots and treated as such by governments, employers, and schools” (7).

Justice Robertson’s dissent is sharper still:

Perhaps the most discouraging aspect of today’s decision is the extent to which the majority feels compelled to sully those on the other side of the debate. The majority offers a cursory assurance that it does not intend to disparage people who, as a matter of conscience, cannot accept same-sex marriage. Ante, at 19. That disclaimer is hard to square with the very next sentence, in which the majority explains that “the necessary consequence” of laws codifying the traditional definition of marriage is to “demean or stigmatize” same-sex couples. Ante, at 19. The majority reiterates such characterizations over and over. By the majority’s account, Americans who did nothing more than follow the understanding of marriage that has existed for our entire history—in

particular, the tens of millions of people who voted to reaffirm their States’ enduring definition of marriage—have acted to “lock . . . out,” “disparage,” “disrespect and subordinate,” and inflict “dignitary wounds” upon their gay and lesbian neighbors. Ante, at 17, 19, 22, 25. These apparent assaults on the character of fair-minded people will have an effect, in society and in court. See post, at 6–7 (ALITO, J., dissenting). Moreover, they are entirely gratuitous. It is one thing for the majority to conclude that the Constitution protects a right to same-sex marriage; it is something else to portray everyone who does not share the majority’s “better informed understanding” as bigoted. Ante, at 19” (29)

What's Ahead for the Missouri Synod?

We asked some knowledgeable people to grapple with what the Synod will look like on its 200th anniversary. Here's what we found.

Historical Footnote

Dr. Gene Edward Veith Jr., Dean of arts and sciences, Concordia University Wisconsin, Mequon; author, *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (CPH, 1994) is asked:

What do you believe the future holds for the Missouri Synod? As America accelerates toward "re-paganization" and as a new pop religion emerges that will become less and less recognizable as Christianity, only vigorously doctrinal churches will be able to withstand cultural pressures. Those churches will become less worldly in their faith.

Demographic changes are likely to affect the church in the future. But what about right now? What other forces, issues or trends of a secular- nature are currently influencing the Synod? "Pop culture"—which values hedonism, entertainment and shallowness—is taking hold in our churches.

Will the forces you identified remain as important in the future as they are now—or, will they give way to other influences? With the loss of a Christian consensus, we are now forming a new cultural religion. Pop religions will become less and less recognizable as Christian, as the culture demands moral "tolerance." Homosexuality is already being pictured as wholesome and normal, and the acceptance of homosexual marriage seems inevitable. Sex outside marriage will proliferate. Churches that uphold Biblical teachings will be under enormous pressure to

compromise their stands. Already, mainline liberal churches are flirting with "Gaia" worship, the earth "goddess" championed by feminists and environmentalists. Such paganism will become more and more attractive. Many megachurches have replaced preaching the Gospel to how-to, self-help motivational talks on the theme of "Biblical principles for successful living." We may soon see churches drop the very pretense of Christ. In His place, these churches will develop a new religion based on positive thinking, material success, antinomianism and New Age metaphysics.

Such issues as worship styles, close communion, the role of women in the church, and the expanding role of the laity in ministry have long been debated within the Synod. Will these issues remain important, or will they be replaced? If so, by which issues? Such controversies will intensify. Our Synod's position on communion fellowship will prove incomprehensible to those who assume that all religions are equally true. Our Synod's position that Scripture does not allow women to assume the pastoral office will seem outrageous to an increasingly feminist society. Our church must decide whether it will be governed by culture or the Bible. The early 21st century may well see legal challenges to our doctrinal positions. Do we have the courage to be persecuted for our faith?

Bruce Kueck *1975 and Beyond: What's Ahead?*
The Lutheran Witness, May 1997

Flame Rapper (Lutheran Rapper)

Posted on February 1, 2021 by Rev. Paul R. Harris

This was the title of the email I got. The email from a 30-something, confessional Lutheran went on to say: "He graduated with a Master's in Systematic Theology from St. Louis. The second song references a Dr. Joel Biermann [a Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, professor]. My personal favorite is "Sola Fide," but "2KR" and "Scattered Tulips" are good too."

You can watch the theological rap video here <https://youtu.be/F0pM0LrJSFo>.

I watched the video and this is my reply: Can content redeem form? At Higher Things one of their steps away from confessional Lutheranism was when they started having contests of pastors rapping the liturgy. Since our liturgy in the main says back to God what **He** has first said to us, ought we to be so loose

with it? Doing so smacks of Belshazzar toasting the gods of wood, stone, silver, and gold with God's sacred vessels. There are Lutheran churches that have the liturgy to Polka and Jazz music. Is that still the same liturgy?

This is from my paper "Church Music – Turn the Beat Around." The date on the edition found on www.trinityaustin.com is 2004, but it's at least 10 years older than that. "Well, if you think the music is neutral, then you wouldn't mind singing your beloved *What a Friend We Have in Jesus* to the tune of *Gilligan's Island*? And a favorite closing hymn, *Savior, Again to Thy Dear Name We Raise*, let's start singing that to Helen Reddy's *Delta Dawn* —if the music is neutral to you. And if you like Lennon's tune, *Imagine* so much, with a few adjustments we can sing *Abide O Dearest Jesus* to it."

I didn't see the 2020 Super Bowl halftime show, but I heard on talk radio the day after many people being offended by the raciness, objectifying of women, and the dress. One commentator asked himself what I ask myself when I come up against things like Christian rap. "Have I reached an age where culture, society [and in this case theology] has developed beyond what I am capable of appreciating? It's just too different." The commentator concluded no: that halftime show was objectively offensive according to any normal standard.

I don't know if I can say the same about this rap and rapper. The fact its pedigree is linked to the St. Louis seminary where "change or die" is an unofficial motto inclines me to say 'yes.' And it's worth remembering: In the Old Testament the Baal worshipers claimed they were indeed worshiping Yahweh at their high places and altars, just in another form.

Just a Tool?

(A yet-to-post blog, PRH)

But is it? Are smartphones, social media, tablets, smart watches, and more just tools? They can be used for good or bad. Sure they can be abused, but the ancient dictum applies abuse doesn't destroy use.

Executives in charge of Big Tech sure don't see it as an inert tool. They know the user is being effected by merely using their "tools", and in some cases, they exploit that use. For that reason, they monitor their own children's use of their products. That right there should tell you something.

John Perritt says in *A Students Guide to Technology*, “we look at our phones every 4.3 minutes...” Then he comments, “If that’s not worship, I don’t know what is.”

Since I don’t use a smartphone at all and social media only in a very limited way, you can justifiably write me off as one who doesn’t know what he’s talking about. To this I say, listen to the creators of Facebook, Google, and Amazon. Read *The Four: The Hidden DNA of Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google* and *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*. I’ve read both, and I am amazed that people still engage so much with the Four and the Internet so uncritically.

I think this is apropos of all the above but particularly social media. Read Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s “Live Not By Lies”. It’s a short essay he released in 1974 right after being arrested. This is the text that spurred me to not watch TV passively. I denounce, renounce, criticize, and identify the lie when I see and hear it. But, truthfully, with TV there is so much that much still comes through.

I haven’t read this book but Marvin Olasky, in the 1-16-21 *WORLD* magazine recommends it: “David Morrow’s *Drowning in Screen Time* (Salem/Regnery, 2020) shows that more screen time means less teen intercourse, brawling, and boozing, but also less volunteering, job-holding, church or youth grouping, and maturing. Screens give adults access to more news and views, but also more misinformation and paranoia. Morrow’s chapter titles accentuate the negative.: ‘Sleepier, Fatter, and Sicker: What Screens Are Doing to Our Bodies,’ ‘Screens – Anxiety Machines,’ ‘How Screens Divide Us Into Warring Tribes,’ ‘Swipe Left: How Screens are Weakening Relationships.’ He gives suggestions – ‘How Excessive Eddie Cut Back’ – and has chapters on how to help kids, friends, spouses, students, or parishioners addicted to screens.”

In the 80s I read *Taming the TV Habit*. The author predicted that future generations would be appalled how uncritically we consumed TV. Similar warnings were posted about the computer in the 90s. Smartphones and social media were real gamechangers, but they were all of a piece with tools that aren’t inert. I have never read a warning about typewriters or telephones. Those too could be used evilly, but in using them you are not being used. Modern technology in my view, and others, is not ‘just a tool’. In fact, in the use of we seem to be the tool in the Merriam-Webster’s third sense of the word: one who “is used or manipulated by another”

The Library of Babel

Posted on May 9, 2022 by Rev. Paul R. Harris

Below is an excerpt from the book *The Square and the Tower* by Niall Ferguson. Two things commend this book in my mind. None of the 5 or so people I have recommended it to have been disappointed. Also he is able to get far more out of author Jorge Luis Borges than I can. After reading Ferguson’s remarks, I brought the *Collected Fictions* of Borges. Here’s what I wrote after reading them: “Read the translators notes and don’t read the book.” Here’s Ferguson’s remarks about Borges’ work.

“The twenty-first century increasingly looks like the fulfilment of Jorge Luis Borges short story ‘The Library of Babel’. In it, he imagines a library containing not only all the books ever written, but all the books that ever could be written. With an infinity of information at their disposal, men swing swiftly from euphoria to madness. Some are seized by a ‘hygienic, ascetic furor’ to ‘eliminate useless works’, leading to the ‘senseless perdition of millions of books’. Others seek the one book that is ‘the formula and perfect compendium of all the rest’ – or they seek the librarian who had read that book and is therefore ‘analogous to a god’. In some parts of the vast library, men ‘prostrate themselves before books and kiss their pages in a barbarous manner, but they do not know how to decipher a single letter’. In other parts, ‘epidemics, heretical conflicts, peregrinations which inevitably degenerate in to brigandage, have decimated the population.’ The twenty-first-century often seems like a vast realization of Borges’ vision” (Ferguson, Niall, *The Square and the Tower*, chapter 50, page, 333).

Two closing remarks: A character in Larry McMurtry’s, *Streets of Laredo*, is Famous Shoes. He’s a legendary Indian-tracker. He keeps a Bible but can’t ever make the tracks speak like he can animal and human ones. I think there is an increasing number of individuals who can read and understand computer code better if not in place of the written word. This may be no different than centuries before when mathematicians or musicians spoke in those languages.

Finally, I am concerned that people less and less seem to read entire books. Search engines can make out of any person, any era, or any topic the equivalent

of *Bartlett's Quotations*. There is a time and place for *What Luther Says* sorts of books and computer searching, but the person referencing them is being less than honest who doesn't let you know that's how he sourced them. He didn't read the work himself. He read what someone else has found Luther said in this or that place.

At the end of the day – or beginning of any particular century – men eventually realize what Solomon does in Ecclesiastes 12:12, “And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.”

Pleasantly Surprised – Visit To Redeemer, Austin, Texas

Posted on April 18, 2022 by Rev. Paul R. Harris

Over twenty years ago a confessional pastor after visiting the above's 8 AM traditional service said, “There was nothing about the service that you would recognize as Lutheran.” So when I “attended” the 8 AM traditional service for 28 February 2021, I was expecting anything from loincloths to tongue-speaking. I got vestments, liturgy, and clear gospel.

Don't request a transfer just yet. If you value an indicative absolution and not the Protestant declaration of pardon, don't go here. The pastor doesn't say, “I forgive you in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ.” Nope, he declares, “For Jesus sake your sins are forgiven.”

But then again to my surprise the Collect of the Day was prayed and the Nicene Creed was confessed. Then again a woman does the Children's Sermon; she closes with a prayer to God but says “in your name we pray.” Jesus was conspicuously absent, but I don't think that was purposeful. That's just Protestantism. However, I did like her “message” on the sign language for peace. Actually, it was quite insightful. (N. B. her description and demonstration doesn't match the ASL dictionary here: <https://www.handspeak.com/word/search/index.php?id=1609> .) You clasp your hands together as in clenching them first right hand on top then flipping with left hand on top. She said this doesn't connote peace to us but stress. But then she separates her hands and pushes them away from her side palms out. That motion does speak peace in the manner of Ps. 46:10 of “let go” (GW) and know that I am God.

The sermon was in one sense the standard Non-Denom of how to pray. Two funny things. The pastor pointed out how music is an aid to prayer. After mentioning hymns, contemporary, and praise, he actually said, “even if its Bach”. And he did trot out that old chestnut: count your blessings to relieve depression. For a church that prides itself as being 21st century leaders, his return to the 18th and 19th centuries was surprising. Nevertheless, he did clearly preach the incarnation and substitutionary, universal atonement.

They celebrated Communion. It was self-serve. The pastor stood there robed, masked, and looking like the Phantom of the Opera as people came forward. They also offer drive-through and online Communion.

Go here: <https://www.redeemer.net/communion> for instructions on being an in-home Communion assistant training. Evidently, they believe in electronic consecration.

This does not surprise me. Redeemer has practiced open Communion for the 40 years I've been around her. They are a flagship church of the Texas District LCMS. In agreement with Luther and Sasse, I don't believe Open Communion churches have the Lord's Supper at all. “It is quite true that wherever the preacher administers only bread and wine for the Sacrament, he is not very concerned about to whom he gives it, what they know or believe, or what they receive” (Luther in *Closed Communion*, 14). “Open Communion' is not Communion at all; it may be a fascinating rite, a religious experience, but is not the Sacrament of the New Testamen” (Sasse in *Closed Communion*, 430). So, whether online, in-person, or driving through, people communing at Redeemer, Austin or any other Open Communion church aren't getting the Lord's Supper and therefore they aren't getting forgiveness, life, or salvation either. I'm not saying they couldn't possibly have these elsewhere in open Communion Churches just that they don't have them in the Elements, orally. And I'm not alone. The Mothership of the entire LCMS published the book the above quotes came from. Sadly, her leadership, as ever, doesn't have the courage of their convictions.

You noticed I refer to Redeemer, Austin. That's because that's what their emblem reads and most of their material. As Church Growth has preached for 40 years and the Church of Christ has for a century, denominational labels divide. Her website use to read: “a *member* of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod”. It

was in fine print, but there. Now, "Redeemer is affiliated with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS)" (<https://www.redeemer.net/about>). Am I making a distinction without a difference between "member" and "affiliated"? Well, my foot is more than affiliated with my body, right? And who wants to be merely affiliated with the Body of Christ rather than a member of? I suppose those content with an online, a drive-through, or an open understanding of His Presence.

A Guest "Rant"

Below in an unsolicited response to my blog which delves deeper into the morass of Open Communion, Consecration by technology, and the Gospel

Hi Pastor,

The following is mostly a pointless rant:

Thanks for writing a review of Redeemer. I watched those in-home communion videos. You can tell that deep down they know they shouldn't do this by how frequently he reassures you that they are doing

this well, with good teaching and "oversight from the pastors."

Once you sign up for their list of "at-home communion assistants," they send out a Zoom link that has a password on it. The password is there to make sure only those who have done the training (i.e., those who watched the two YouTube videos) are using the Zoom. "This," he says, "is our way of being good stewards of the sacraments." So rigorous! But how do you get on that list? You fill out an online form. This is like agreeing to the "terms of service" to use an app.

Who is eligible to receive communion? Those who have completed the "101 class." This class is held "on a Saturday late morning into early afternoon." I know, you've told me that before, but I had to read it on their website to really believe it.

Yet there is still a Bizarro form of Lutheranism underlying some of this. I can believe that you heard the Gospel preached at Redeemer, in spite of things like this. My church at A&M was similar -- the Gospel was preached, Scripture was treated as God's word, but we practiced open communion. Many of us didn't know better, but a pastor should.

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October 2022

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	
						1	
2	3 CONFIRMATION 5:30 PM	4	5	6	7	8	
9	10	11	PASTOR ON VACATION			14	15
16	17	18				19	20
23	24 CONFIRMATION 5:30 PM	25 BUDGET MEETING 6:30 PM	26 HEBREWS BIBLE STUDY 7:15 PM	27	28	29	
30 REFORMATION FEST – 505 1:15 PM	31 NO CONFIRMATION						

November 2022

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2	3	4	5
		6 ELDERS MEETING 6:30 PM	7 HEBREWS BIBLE STUDY 7:15 PM			
6	7 CONFIRMATION 5:30 PM	8 VOTERS MEETING 7:00 PM	9 HEBREWS BIBLE STUDY 7:15 PM	10	11	12
13	14 CONFIRMATION 5:30 PM	15	16 HEBREWS BIBLE STUDY 7:15 PM	17	18	19
20	21 CONFIRMATION 5:30 PM	22	23 THANKSGIVING EVE COMMUNION SERVICE 7:30 PM	24	25	26
27	28 CONFIRMATION 5:30 PM	29	30 ADVENT VESPERS I 7:30 PM	29	30	

OCT. - NOV. 2022