

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

April 1, 2019

Volume 21 Issue 2

April – May 2019

“And now for something completely different...”

I’m following up my use of the catch phrase “Now this...” which I am told is very popular among millennials, with one near and dear to Baby Boomers: “And now for something completely different.” While I have never been a fan of Monty Python I have always liked this catch phrase.

Why do I use it here? Well last month I told you that copies of the proposed resolutions for Trinity leaving the Missouri Synod that to be voted on at the June meeting would be available on the reading table. Well, where are they? It’s true I had envisioned putting them out the Sunday after the March Voters Assembly. In consultation with the Synod Exit Review Committee, something not completely different but modified was decided. What is going to be put out is *exactly* what will be voted on. What the Voters got in March are *proposed* resolutions which they have a month to comment on and which the SERC will turn into the final resolutions. Those will be put out.

“And now for something completely different” was always an introduction of something funny. The GIF’s found on the internet have a difficult time conveying that without writing the words on it. This says something about the ability to communicate in only pictures. We’re told that the primitive Neanderthals communicated by drawings on cave walls, so why do we think we’re advancing when we communicate in only pictures? To me, the BTW, LOL, ROFL are the equivalent of the pops and whistles primitive tribes in the Amazon use to communicate.

Back to my point, “And now for something completely different” usually introduces something funny. The funny thing here is how attached we all become to organizations, institutions, and things created by men. The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod is a manmade thing. It exists by human right not by divine right. The same is true of every other denomination. On Sunday, not once, have we ever confessed to believe in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod but always in the Holy Christian Church. Never did we baptize a baby into the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod but always into the Holy Christian Church. Never have we or any LCMS church following one of our agendas confirmed anyone in the faith of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. It has always been in the faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church which faith is confessed in the Book of Concord of 1580.

We are not voting on leaving the one Holy, Christian and Apostolic Church. We are not voting on leaving the Evangelical Lutheran Church. We are voting on whether our membership in these God-made things - the Holy Christian

Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church - is compatible with remaining in the man-made Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. That’s the argument. If it is compatible, we dare not leave; if it is not we dare not stay.

The SERC debated about including a pointed, maybe humorous Luther remark in the proposed resolutions. We thought better of it. “And now for something completely different...” “In Coena Domini means ‘At the table of the Lord’ and it’s the name for a recurrent papal pronouncement (bull) from the 13th to the 18th centuries where the pope condemned heretics. It’s named for its first words “At the table of the Lord” and was read annually on Maundy Thursday (ODCC, 695). Luther joked in the last year of his life. ‘I have been in hell for 28 years, and I’m still quite healthy in spite of it’” (Reed, 502). If this sounds familiar, it’s because you’ve heard it before. I’m quoting from an April 13, 2107 sermon of mine. It’s a joke because the LCMS isn’t going to send us to hell if we leave; it’s not a joke in that if what I said in the paragraph above is the truth, staying could be on the path there.

“And now for something completely different”, really. Did you know if you want to read the newsletter on the first of the month you can do so online?

7 Reasons Hymns are Better than Contemporary Worship Songs

OCTOBER 25, 2018 BY [JONATHAN AIGNER](#)

You might notice I said “‘hymns’ are better than contemporary worship songs.” Not “old hymns.” Or “classic hymns.” Just “hymns.” There are a couple reasons for this.

First, there are good hymns still being written, though they are overshadowed in popularity by the dreck put forth by the so-called “worship industry.” So some hymns aren’t old, and there are brand new hymns being written as I write this.

Second, most of the time when people talk about “old” or “classic” hymns, I’ve noticed they are often talking about gospel hymns and songs that peaked in popularity between the late-19th and mid-20th centuries. While hymns like “Blessed Assurance” and “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” are in fact old compared to the songs of the modern worship machine, they are centuries younger than the bulk of traditional hymnody.

I’m not delusional. I know that the number of hymn-singing churches is shrinking these days. And while I’m not going to

deny that this is happening, I am going to continue talking about all the reasons I think this trend is so very tragic. Here are just a few of them.

1. We Should Honor Our History of Faith

I've often said that the contemporary church tends to worship as if Tom Brokaw had broken the events of Christ's passion as they happened. But to be a Christian means that we are part of a deeper, ancient story. In worship, we retell that story through an ancient, disciplined liturgy. We sing old songs and pray old prayers and bathe ourselves in the witness of the saints who have come before. And in doing so, the centuries that separate us from the events of the salvation history seem to collapse upon themselves, and we find ourselves a part of something transcendent and divine.

To cut the church off from their sacred lineage can only create a narcissistic and self-referential church that doesn't really care who it is. Worshiping in a contemporary vacuum is literally suffocating the church in a self-interested, masturbatory pursuit.

2. Hymns Are Usually Written By the Right People

The best of hymnody was written by theologians, pastors, poets, and scholars. Contemporary worship songs are written by marketable people who can write marketable songs. Most of these well-meaning folks have dubious credentials at best, and their work demonstrates this. Take a look at the theology and poetry in the nearest hymnal, and then check out the most popular worship songs. There's no real comparison.

3. Hymns Aren't "Popular"

Certainly the popularity of traditional hymnody has been waning for decades, but I mean something more specific. Hymns aren't written in a popular idiom that is marketable and profitable. They are written in a simple style that doesn't need to conform to any popular entertainment genre. The result is something more lasting, less derivative, and isn't bound by industry standards. Exclusive allegiance to contemporary worship allows the church's worship to be hijacked by the worship industry, which is first and foremost a money-making enterprise.

4. Hymnody Has Been Examined and Vetted

Are all hymns better than all contemporary worship songs? No, of course not. There has been some real crap written throughout the centuries. But for the most part, the body of hymnody we have today has been carefully examined and vetted, evaluated and scrutinized by generations of pastors, scholars, hymnal committees, and congregants. It is a rich, vast, broad, and varied collection in which churches and worshipers can be confident. As the ages roll, hymnody continues to adopt the very best of each generation into its ranks, retaining what is good, faithful, and solid, and letting the dross fall away.

Likewise, rejecting the body of Christian hymnody and relying only upon what is new and marketable is not only foolish, but is patently arrogant.

5. Hymns Are For Congregations

Hymns are a written tradition, contemporary songs are a commercially-recorded enterprise. This is important because recorded music is inherently non-congregational. It is fundamentally a piece to showcase an individual or small group. While that might be fine in any other setting, it's not worship.

6. Singing Our Faith Is Worship

I've often heard the argument that hymns are too wordy, too academic, too dense to lend themselves to worship. For instance, here is a Facebook comment I recently received on one of my posts.

"One of my complaints with the pre-worship music era is that the songs of that generation give TOO MUCH info – they are like musical sermons leaving no room to "ponder anew what the Almighty can do." We are too busy trying to figure out what an ebenezer is! When the Jesus Movement hit, it brought with it simple songs of worship TO God – I remember – I was there – I am old. And for a couple of decades we had songs in churches that transcended information-based music... there was deep, personal meaning to the songs for those singing and, dare I say, worshipping. At the same time I do completely agree that "Christian music" has very sadly become a type of faux worship and today we have far too many "worship stars" – it sickens me, to be honest. But that doesn't mean ALL the repetition is to be dismissed. My encouragement is for ALL of us to take a moment and allow the Holy Spirit to bathe over us AS we sing "Shout to the Lord" 3, 4, 5 or even 6 times." – Dan M.

There is some truth here, especially with the mention of the heavenly liturgy and the oft-maligned repetition of contemporary worship. Repetition can be good or bad, meaningful or inane. And he's also right that the Jesus Movement was natural response to vast paucity in 20th-century ecclesial life. Those are good topics for a later discussion. But the problem with Dan's comment is his implicit acceptance of the idea that worship is more about me doing something for God, or expressing my good feelings toward God, and less about God forming and molding me through scriptural and theological truth.

Boiled down, this argument is saying that "Hymns make me think so hard that I can't worship." The words and the truths and the poetry keep me from feeling all the worship-y things. But while emotions aren't in and of themselves bad or foreign to worship, they are not a litmus test, an indicator, or even a reliable sign that worship has taken place.

Yes, to sing a hymn requires a deeper level of effort and engagement. Therein is the discipline of corporate worship. Yes, liturgy is a discipline that asks much of us. It doesn't only confront us with the drama of the Christian story, but demands that we play a part. And in those moments of discipline, effort, and personal engagement, in the hassle of contextually deciphering words we don't know and concepts we don't yet grasp, we don't merely learn what the word "ebenezer" means, but we learn to give thanks for the God who has graciously brought wanderers like us to this place.

7. Because Words Mean Stuff

Who cares about the words? Many a pastor, worship leader, or aspiring worshiper has asked me that through the years. The answer for me is easy. I don't know, but you should.

Liturgy is about truthful and disciplined prayer. It relies on words for a reason. It relies on elegant, eloquent, and refined language so that we get the Christian story right. And as the truths present in the elevated language, repeated carefully and often, take root in us, we become the church we need to be. Through our careful, disciplined prayer, we become God's prayer for the world. The bulk of Christian hymnody is written with this endeavor in mind, and it acknowledges the gravity of Christian worship. It carries the substance needed to nurture and nourish a church that can rise to the task. The same simply cannot be said of the latest and greatest Jesus hits, no matter how well they sell.

My critics would predictably respond with accusations of worship warring and discord sowing. I reject those swiftly and completely. This isn't about feeding the worship wars, it's about transcending them. Congregational song was never meant to be a popularity contest.

Frankly, we've wasted enough time on the contemporary worship experiment. It has starved the church and triggered a crazy obsession with copying mainstream entertainment culture. A rejection of pop-worship and a return to historic Christian liturgy is sorely needed if the church is going to fulfill its purpose in the world around us. In that way, it's not just better to sing hymns, it's vitally important that we do so. <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/ponderanew/2018/10/25/hymns-are-better-than-contemporary-worship/?fbclid=IwAR1sBMKoXRmtJ3G9lhs1L-OMcPuwhzbQxrWDe4OEpbWYYouO3QVjJjaiAw>

A Former Concordia Religion Professor and Current LCMS Pastor Defends Abortion: The Complexities of Sin

By Rev. Philip Hale, Zion Lutheran, Omaha, NE.

Dr. Norman Metzler, former professor at Concordia University-Portland, and according to the synod's website, current pastor of River of Life Lutheran Church in Troutdale, Oregon, recently wrote an article entitled: "Sanctity of Life: The Complexities of the Abortion Issue." Since this article, published on thedaystarjournal.com (which has the slogan: "Gospel Voices in and for the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod"), is a wretched piece of filth by a supposed teacher of God's Word, it deserves a harsh response.

In this essay Metzler defends abortion by assuming the existence of "problem pregnancies." He relies on an analogy based on the imprecise and unpredictable reproductive

process, assuming death and everything in this cursed world is God's absolute will. He uses atheistic scientific assumptions to trump every statement of Scripture. He defines a person so narrowly, it is questionable whether any single person actually has the dignity of being created in God's image and the right to not be murdered by another. He concludes with attacking the pro-life camp by insinuating that they really do not advocate for life because they do not do enough for the living in their intense focus on the unborn who being slaughtered. The only thing Metzler demonstrates conclusively is that he should not be speaking as a pastor or a Christian, since he speaks for Satan, not the risen Christ.

Metzler demonstrates that the phrase "sanctity of life" is practically worthless, since he affirms both it and abortion together. His tack is to insinuate that life itself, and therefore abortion, are complex issues that cannot be easily or absolutely decided. This particular article does a marvelous job of explaining the worldly point of view—one where the true God has no place. As also for Margaret Sanger, and her progeny of Planned Parenthood, the issue is not life itself, but its inconvenience to mankind, especially mothers. Metzler opines: "It must be stated very clearly at the outset that the issue of abortion only arises in the context of a problem pregnancy." This way of thinking is completely untheological and without any basis in Scripture. It defines life—or at least the only way God actually gives life—from a purely a human of view: the feelings, emotions, sufferings, and whims of a mother. But pregnancy or birth is not the issue. These things are not spared from evil since God first cursed childbearing before Eve, the first woman. Rather, the matter is what exactly does the mother carry in her womb, not whether she consents to, or delights in, this divine arrangement of procreation.

While the extreme case of carrying a child "when it threatens the life of the pregnant woman" is brought forward by Metzler, and other haters of life, the truth is that every pregnancy threatens the mother's life. The "problem pregnancies" are not just the ones certain mothers despise and wish they could end, even in cold blood, but every single one. Childbearing in totality is cursed, no matter how some would dress it up as beautiful and fashionable. Yet, Christians can separate the suffering, pain, and potential tragedy of bearing life from the life itself, which is always a divine gift. Pregnancy always ends, but life does not fully coincide with the mother's most intense involvement in growing and nourishing life. Women are simply the appointed means and instruments God has chosen to bring forth the people He makes. Mothers do not have the right to pit their life and will against the little lives they carry.

The fruitfulness of children results from the nature of marriage itself that God imprinted on mankind. There is no choice in the matter either way, though even Christians often talk like this. Metzler naively states: "it is safe to say that no woman gets pregnant so that she can choose an abortion." But no woman chooses to get pregnant at all—isn't that the real issue? Intellectual choices do not conceive life—God does. The barren woman and the one blessed with many children are

in the same boat, both living under God's providence. Having a child is not like picking out a puppy—it is not a pure, rational decision, quite obviously. Our part is minuscule compared to God's. There is no form, application, or survey God takes before He performs His work of making new life, a living person. The impetus toward children is built into our very nature, which informs us of marriage and its fruit.

It is true that many do not welcome children in our materialistic, godless world. This is no surprise among sinners. However, these supposed “problem pregnancies” are not caught like the flu. The cause, at least from our point of view, is quite specific. God links children to marriage and its specific duties for which we were designed. The problem is never the life God creates, but the sinners who sin by hating the life God intended and distributes through the marital act—as if children come in some other random way! But, Metzler counters: “One would wish that all pregnancies were both wanted pregnancies and healthy viable pregnancies.” Here he begins to tie miscarriage and sin's effect on bringing forth new life to the desecration and snuffing out of life in abortion. While both are tragic, one is a hateful, conscience choice and the other a heavy cross for the Christian to bear. They cannot be categorized together, any more than saying that a man who died of cancer is in the same boat with a murder who was justly executed. Besides both being dead, they have little in common, from the Christian perspective.

The fact that “human reproduction” and the “reality of fecundity” is complex (really, outside our control) makes the abortion question similarly complex, Metzler argues. In his words: “not every acorn becomes an oak tree,” illustrating that because not every marital act results in a life and not every conception results in a future adult, life itself is of negligible value. But he removes God entirely from the question and makes Him the guilty party, so that death should be allowed to be perpetrated by parents because it happens “naturally.” He feels justified in removing Christ from the discussion, making the Lord guilty of what, in his mind, is equivalent to willful murder: “If every fertilized egg is already a full human being, a person from the very first stages of gestation, why does God allow such a high percentage of these ‘persons’ to spontaneously abort, or miscarry, as part of his plan?” There is no doctrine of sin present here at all, since Metzler pretends as if every evil thing we see is God's final and ultimate will. It is unfathomable that a professor of religion cannot answer such a basic and fundamental question with the result of Christ's salvific work.

The truth is that death is not God's intent, nor is it His fault. It is man's fault and flows from Adam's sin, which we inherit. Scripture states this quite plainly: “sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12). So we cannot reason from what we see, because all we see is death. Metzler's thesis is simplistically summarized, in the case of an adult: retired professors died of heartaches and other things quite frequently, so morally one who takes the life of such a “problem” person is doing society a favor—so the murder is equivalent to any “natural” cause of mortality. This is the

absurd logic of one who equates the mournful death of miscarriage with the violent, death-causing sin of pulling an infant out of the womb piece-by-piece.

Sin is complex. Life as we know it, outside of Christ's baptism and promise, is actually death and separation from God. Every potential child is potential suffering, tragedy, and death. Sin makes it so. This universal cursing of humanity, however, cannot excuse purposeful murder—one is a human choice and rejection of the Author of Life, the other the fatal effects of sin we must bear in this fallen world. No doubt Metzler's denial of biblical creation and embrace of evolution (detailed in another article on the same website) leads to his denial of sin, which must also be a denial of Christ.

But what about the child who God gives due to “rape or incest?” One act of violence should not lead to another. Murder of a helpless third party does not undo the original sin, nor does it erase its staining guilt. The despicable sexual acts of sinners do not devalue the life God creates through these sinful acts. Such is the complexity of living in a sinful world. So also, the “the reality of naturally occurring spontaneous abortions or miscarriages throughout nature” does not undermine the Fifth Commandment: “You shall not murder.” Christians do not hasten, nor encourage death, instead, we suffer the curse of death with Christ's promise and look forward to the resurrection of all the dead. We live by hope in Christ who rose for the world, not the tragic obituaries we read and experience.

But because Metzler has no doctrine of sin, he has no apparent doctrine of grace. So what does he preach? “Such biblical references as the baby leaping in Elizabeth's womb, an individual being known by God from the womb, or proscriptions against violence toward pregnant women, are either poetic utterances or provisions of ancient Jewish law, and understandably do not reflect an awareness of the modern medical and moral complexities....” Modern scientific understanding, which cannot measure the divine image man is made from, or weigh the eternal hope in Christ we are given in the Gospel, supposedly invalidates the Bible. As one of his students commented on ratemyprofessors.com: “[Metzler is] actually fairly liberal when it comes to the scriptures. I was surprised. [He doesn't] treat them with authority. I took an ethics class as part of a business program. It had little or nothing to do with ethics.” Science, and the modern understanding of the world, can only deal with tangible things. And the suffering of those who have and care for children is real. But what we cannot see is how Christ baptizes a helpless infant into Himself to forgive him all his sins and welcome him into His kingdom. We see and experience death constantly, but Christians live by the promise of life in our Savior, who died for us and rose for our justification. God's will is not for anyone to die in willful sin and rebellion, but for all to live forever in Christ. The Scriptures and all the teachings of Christ “are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (Jn. 20:31). God's creation of life in His image and the Son's redemption color how the Christian views life: all earthly problems, even a life-

threatening pregnancy, are minor and temporary compared to eternal life. This is the hope of the Gospel, which cannot be proved by modern medicine.

Metzler's very interesting definition of a person is most heinous: "At none of the stages of pregnancy does the potential human being possess those essential qualities we associate with actual personhood: an independently functioning mind and body; a fully defined unique physical appearance; a distinctive personality; and interaction with others in a network of human relationships." Nowhere is God allowed a word in edgewise in this blasphemous concoction by an ordained LCMS pastor—creation by the blessed Creator is entirely left out. One could easily argue this narrow idea of a "person" rules out the first year or two of life after birth and maybe most of those over 80 years old. Is using a cane to get around or a hand railing to navigate steps truly an indication of "an independently functioning body?" Thankfully, man is not a machine to be thrown in the garbage when he needs assistance or has few friends. The "network of human relations" is precisely where people and their sinful, unloving hearts replace the holy deity. Man's sinful view of the value of life replaces the Lord's. So, of course, the "sanctity of life" is a throwaway phrase for this false teacher—nothing is truly sacred for the one who wants to define all life for himself in his own twisted way. In true atheistic fashion, the only thing to believe for the one without true knowledge of God is solely his own wisdom and authority. "They served their idols, which became a snare to them" Ps. 106:36.

The article continues with demanding that those who explicitly murder in abortion be treated the same as those who grieve the death of life in miscarriage: "Regardless of one's position on the legality of abortion, I trust all are agreed that Christians should reach out with compassion and to support women who for whatever reasons have had an abortion, just as we should deal compassionately with those who grieve the loss of a pregnancy due to a miscarriage." Is that not parallel to treating a serial murderer exactly the same as his victims? This is not logical or sane, but the god of death must be served at any cost by those who hate life. Abortion, by all honest accounts, is the ending of life—the goal is always to oppose, stop, and prevent a life. Miscarriage is simply death before birth—it says nothing about intent or wishes; it is a biological fact in this sinful world. But willful murder (abortion) is entirely preventable, since it is perhaps the most unnatural thing that is done on earth: murder of one's own progeny for the sake of selfish convenience. Yes, both categories of people should be forgiven. But no faithful pastor forgives without there first being confessed sin and guilt. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 Jn. 1:8-10). The one who continues in hate and embraces murder as good has no share in Christ or His life. True Christians welcome sinners by condemning sinful acts and extolling life as Christ originally made it and has already redeemed it in His own body. So life is good, but sin and its

course are not. Metzler overturns the truth by making murder complex and forgiveness simply acceptance.

Until Christ returns, we continue to live in the midst of the complexities of a sinful world with people who truly have God-given life, but reject the intrinsic value of that life in others and themselves. But, thankfully, murder, while not unpopular today, is quite a simple issue, despite the blathering of pompous pagans. Abortion, the taking of life, is and will always remain an evil incompatible with the Christian doctrine of man's creation in God's holy image. Amen.

A What Have we Wrought Moment?

PRH – This article is by a pastor of a Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Church. It is interesting that someone who comes from a tradition known for its rhythmic, swaying music and repetitive lyrics sees a bigger picture. Worth the read.

We Don't Sing for Fun

Tim Challies, blogger, author, and book reviewer
[January 23, 2019](#)

One of the trends that has swept our society through the past decades is the "funification" of pretty much everything. We have been told and become convinced that everything ought to be fun. I can't think of a better example than in schools where the rote memorization that was once considered essential to learning was deemed too difficult and unattractive, so was replaced by activities much more enjoyable but much less effective. We can see the theme in media where in-depth examinations of key issues were reduced to soundbite punchlines from late night hosts. The gamification of everything is just a progression from the funification of everything.

Churches have not been immune either and people began to demand fun from their worship services. The call to worship drawn from the Bible was replaced by the funny video clip drawn from pop culture. The sermon that expounded and applied deep biblical truths was replaced by topical sermonettes that skipped most of the deep exposition to focus almost entirely on trite application. Ed Young preaching from a bed and a [wrestling ring](#) is not the start of the trend, but its culmination. And then there's the music. Many churches consider singing the funnest part of the service. The songs they sing and the way they sing them is designed first to be entertaining. Less important than the words are the feels. Less important than the deep truths are the hooks, bridges, and choruses.

Yet singing is not prescribed for Christian worship for the purpose of fun. It actually serves a far higher purpose as a means through which we bring mutual encouragement by recounting common truths together. According to Colossians 3:16, [we sing](#) from the gospel, for one another, to the Lord. Singing is serious business! It is as serious as preaching and prayer and communion. It is not just a perk or pleasure, but a duty and obligation. It's both a "get to" and a "got to."

That's not to say, of course, that worship should be tedious or uninteresting or the barest recounting of facts. The alternative to fun worship is not worship that is drab or boring,

but worship that is meaningful and true, worship that gives voice to the full range of biblical truth and Christian experience. It's not just about emotion, but reflection. It's not just about feeling, but thinking. It's not just about having a good time, but serving others.

If we look to the psalms, we see quickly that "God's song book" uses the poetic form to recount the complete experience of the believer. The psalms stand in stark contrast to so much of modern worship and surely show us that our singing is to be far more than fun and to contain far more than declarations of victory. Some songs may be fun, but others are somber. Some of them may be full of joy, but others are full of sorrow. Some of them may prompt us to raise our hands and dance in the aisles, but others may prompt us to be stock-still and to weep in silence. Many of the psalms aren't particularly fun to sing, but they are good and necessary and healthy. They show us that we are to sing about everything, including things that are no fun at all. Singing allows us to celebrate, but also to lament; to give thanks, but also to confess; to declare, but also to beseech; to express, but also to ponder.

Singing *can* be fun and at times *will* be fun. But God has designed and prescribed it to serve a far higher, far better purpose than that.

About Tim Challies

Tim Challies I am a follower of Jesus Christ, a husband to Aileen and a father to three children. I worship and serve as a pastor at Grace Fellowship Church in Toronto, Ontario, and am a co-founder of Cruciform Press.

<https://www.challies.com/articles/we-dont-sing-for-fun/>

Justin Long-Lived

Posted on March 2, 2015 by Rev. Paul R. Harris

That wasn't his nom de guerre. Martyr was. There was a reason for that. He was an apologist not a satirist. About the same time Justin Martyr was making a defense for the Christian faith Juvenal was satirizing the Roman Empire. Justin was martyred for his apologetics; Juvenal might have been exiled, but he wasn't murdered. I watched a Lutheran satire on Mormons. It is spot on regarding the point of attack, but I still wish I hadn't watched it. Let me tell you why.

I'm not in favor of making points by satire for the same reason that I was not in favor of making Pro-Life arguments with gruesome pictures. I said at the time, 25 years ago, that the Pro-Abortionists would respond with kinder gentler pictures, and they did. I think non-Lutherans are better at satirizing than Lutherans and unbelievers are best of all.

Many of our cherished Lutheran points can be satirized. So you believe in a Real Presence that you admit has no physical manifestation? You believe that the Gospel cannot be accepted but that it can be rejected? You believe that salvation is solely by grace and that God is gracious to everyone but all are not saved? You believe the finite *is* capable of the infinite, that 25 pounds of flour can be stuffed in a 5 pound sack?

Picture a scene like the one in the Lutheran Satire video featuring the two grizzled Lutherans and the Mormon Missionaries. Have it be two Reformed pastors in Geneva gowns and two Lutheran pastors in albs. Have the dialect flow fast and furious between the two Reformed pastors with them directing yes and no questions to the Lutherans. Our position will be made to look at least funny and maybe ridiculous.

My second reason for not teaching by satirizing is that we train our people to think satire makes points, wins arguments, or advances truth. The end result is we train them to learn from it rather than simply be entertained by it. And so, we train them to be more vulnerable to satire.

Just because you can laugh at something doesn't mean you have overcome it or won the day. The early Church had apologists and martyrs. They left the satirizing to the unbelievers. I say we leave it to *Saturday Night Live*, *Family Guy*, and *The Simpsons*. What is worth dying for is worth being *laughed* at; for this you could learn from Justin Martyr. Not everything that can be laughed at is worth *dying* for. This you could learn from Juvenal and this is not what we want to teach.

Message by Humanism; Music by Disney – Visit to a PCUSA

Posted on November 7, 2018 by Rev. Paul R. Harris

I know the acronym for Presbyterian Church USA is not PUKE but that's how I have always thought and heard it. A visit to St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Austin, Texas confirmed that this wasn't a mondegreen on my part. The first thing you see on approaching the building is a banner that says: "St. Andrew's Stands with Our Muslim Neighbors." And they made a point of standing with the Green movement, Black Lives Matter, and socialism. The main problem in the world was men and their idols (The chief one being capitalism.). The solution was man, not God much less God the Son – who was referred to once in the sermon and in whose name the congregation prayed their leftist prayer for the world. In this prayer, they made a point of remembering Philando Castile (The black man killed by a policeman who had just been acquitted the day before), but no mention was made of the then recent gunning down of Republican politicians.

Of course, the only oppressed people St. Andrew's makes no mention or hint of standing with is the unborn. They would throw back at me: the only oppressed people you do stand with are the unborn; you ignore the homeless, the oppressed, the abused LGBTQ's, etc." I would reply: "There is some truth to your charge, but no one is killing 125,000 a day of any of these groups. Check that. About 900 black babies are killed every day in the womb. You want to talk about black lives mattering? Start with the fact that we accept the fact that we are killing black babies at 4 times the rate we are killing white babies (<https://rtl.org/outreach/>)!

The Triune God was not invoked, prayed to, or mentioned. Light, wind, the table of the earth's abundance, and "water, symbol of Love's ever flowing care" were all welcomed in the ceremony labeled "Creating Sacred Space." Please note the words of men not God's Word and the actions of men not God did this. The spirituality spoken of, praised, song of, and preached of was distinctively not Christian and therefore was not the Holy Spirit.

The text of the sermon was the Golden Calf. The pastor told us he did not believe this actually happened because nobody is so stupid as to do what they are purported to have done in that story. He then turned this around saying "but then again we are all that stupid." The point being that stories can do what history cannot. He made this point but not as bluntly. He admitted he was preaching about Capitalism (again); he did not say he was preaching against it, but he was. There is a lot wrong with capitalism, but that is not what we in the pew are dying from and being damned for. Ism's don't damn and they can't save. Separation from God damns and being reconnected through Christ saves. The only separation mentioned in the sermon was from our fellowman, and we were the answer to undoing that.

I say in the title that the music is by Disney. Look these hymns up "Justice is a Journey Onward", "Every Way of Compassion", "Sound Over All Waters", "Awe and Wonder" and "Thy Word is a Lamp". You will recognize the message, the medium, the rhythms as that of Disney. We should not kid ourselves. Our kids are being inoculated by humanism at a very early age. It's true; these hymns have more substance than the standard contemporary worship fare centering on what you do, feel, think, or believe, but the substance here is not Christian sustenance but humanistic "We are the World" and in the words of the 1973 Humanist Manifesto: "No deity will save us; we must save ourselves." And the people of St. Andrew's Presbyterian church say: "Amen!"

The Benediction, pronounced by the lead pastor, was Aaronic in form but in place of the Lord blessing, keeping, shining, lifting His countenance, and giving peace, Love was said to do these. This really is no more profound than Rita Coolidge telling us that love had lifted her higher than she has ever been lifted before, or the Beatles telling us that all we need is love. Augustine said of the Donatist (I'm going on memory here.), "As long as they say the 'Our Father' they will remain our brothers." St. Andrew's did not prayer the "Our Father" or recite any creed, ecumenical or otherwise. The Offertory song summarized the depth, breathe, and hope of their theological existence. It was the 1969 song, "One Tin Soldier", made popular by the 1971 movie "The Legend of Billy Jack". I have referenced this song in a sermon before. There is a worthwhile point here as there are in many 60s and 70s "anti" songs. However, left unconnected to Christ and His Gospel, they remain about us. And, in the words to Luther's "Sacristy Prayer", all we can do if left to ourselves is bring it all down around us. I heard the crumbling as I exited the darkness of this humanist church.

On Exploded Ordinance

Posted on June 18, 2018 by Rev. Paul R. Harris

If you drive about a major military installation, you will find signs warning you to be aware of live ordinance. An EOD, Explosive Ordinance Disposal, officer told me in 1993 that every year around Fort Hood someone is injured or dies because a passed-down 'heirloom' explodes. In a biography of the famous and furious Israeli warrior, Ariel Sharon, the story is related how his 11-year-old son took down an antique rifle that hung on the wall of the family home telling his father he would be out in front playing with it. He gave his father a playful salute and went out. Both father and son thought the gun wasn't loaded. That unloaded gun killed him when fired by a friend (Ariel: The Life of, 67-68). Eglin Airforce Base has a live bombing range. It's used for field maneuvers too. You can't walk past an unexploded 500-pound bomb without thinking, "I wonder if it could go off now." We do that with unexploded munitions but not with unexploded psychological "truths" like self-esteem.

For decades, literally my whole ministry, I've been lighting the fuse to safely explode this myth among us. But it prevails and in many cases it has already exploded unexpectedly in such doctrines as Original Sin, the Fourth Commandment, and Private Confession. Let me give it one more time.

My files are littered with information on this subject. Here's one from Scientific American, December 20, 2004. The title in this august periodical is "Exploding the Self-Esteem Myth." See the connection? Pretty cool on my part, right? I digress.

Here's some quotes from the article. The quote, though, most to remember is from Plutarch, "Don't shoot the messenger." That would be me.

"The corollary, that low self-esteem lies at the root of individual and thus societal problems and dysfunctions, has sustained an ambitious social agenda for decades. Indeed, campaigns to raise people's sense of self-worth abound." "The results [of a California study in the late 80s] were published in a book titled *The Social Importance of Self-Esteem*. The book stated "many, if not most, of the major problems plaguing society have roots in the low self-esteem of many of the people who make up society." "In reality," says the SA article, "the report contained little to support that assertion." This is why the four authors of this article came together under the auspices of the American Psychological Society and reviewed the scientific literature in a two-year study. Notice, they said scientific, not theological, not Biblical.

They fact-checked a 1995 study that concluded people with high self-esteem are the beautiful people. Our four intrepid researchers found "Clearly, those with high self-esteem are gorgeous in their own eyes but not necessarily so to others."

They consistently found the methodology of these studies flawed, so they decided they would have to cull some and not waste time on non-scientific, scientific studies. So when they culled those studies that didn't "emphasize objective measures," they went from 15,000 to – go ahead and guess and then triple your guess; you'll still be low – to about 200.

Jeeppers, I'm already to the 500 word magic self-destruct mechanism that blog readers – and I don't blame you – have. So let me summarize, "Modern efforts have, however, cast doubt on the idea that the higher the self-esteem actually induces students to do better." "They found that self-esteem in 10th grade is only weakly predictive of academic achievement in the 12th grade....Such results, which are now available from multiple studies, certainly do not indicate that raising self-esteem offers students much benefit." In another 1995 study "investigators asked 542 ninth-grade students to nominate their most-liked and least-liked peers, and the resulting rankings displayed no correlation whatsoever with self-esteem scores."

You know the teen years are when the self-esteem stuff crescendos, and you sure don't want to be swimming upstream at the expense of your kid. Rest easy. "All in all, the results do not support the idea that low self-esteem predisposes young people to more or earlier sexual activity. If anything, those with high self-esteem are less inhibited, more willing to disregard risks and more prone to engage in sex."

Okay if self-esteem isn't linked to sex that it has got to be to substance abuse! "The data, however, do not consistently show that low adolescent self-esteem causes or even correlates with the abuse of alcohol or other drugs."

So if low self-esteem doesn't correlate to grades, promiscuity, or addiction, surely it correlates to bullying. (If you don't know this, it's because you haven't watched enough teen shows where the bully is exposed by the gay character to have low self-esteem.) Sorry Disney, "perpetrators of aggression generally hold favorable and perhaps even inflated views of themselves."

The Intrepid Four concluded that the only thing correlated with high self-esteem was – wait for it – happiness. "The consistent finding is that people with high self-esteem are significantly happier than others. They are also less likely to be depressed."

Ah hah! You knew it. Not so fast. "First, causation needs to be established. It seems possible that high self-esteem brings about happiness, but no research has shown this outcome. The strong correlation between self-esteem and happiness is just that – a correlation. It is plausible that occupational, academic, or interpersonal successes cause both happiness and high self-esteem..."

"Should parents, teachers, and [the third member of the ruling triumvirate of our day] therapists seek to boost self-esteem wherever possible?" The Four Iconoclasts found some indications that self-esteem improves persistence in the face of failure. [So does a drill sergeant shouting in your face.] Individuals with high self-esteem "sometimes perform better in groups." Also, they say, a poor self-image (Why didn't they say low self-esteem?) is a risk factor for some eating disorders.

Their conclusion? They denotate the bomb of self-esteem. "And we have found little to indicate that indiscriminately promoting self-esteem in today's children or adults, just for being themselves, offers society any compensatory benefits beyond the seductive pleasure it brings to those engaged in the exercise."

You should re-read their conclusion because outside of their paper and this writing you won't read it again. Over 10

years ago they debunked a concept that has ruled and still rules schools, churches, and U.S. society. Most people willingly stay buncoed. They would rather live with the potential of a big explosion rather than cause one. But it is far better for you to purposely explode unexploded ordinance than for it to surprise you. Ordinance and hazy, fuzzy psychological constructs will always explode. You choose when and where. (Note: I don't cite page numbers because I downloaded this off the internet in 2005. It was at www.sciam.com.)

Plain Label Christianity and Hall Monitors

Posted on May 11, 2009 by Rev. Paul R. Harris

There are hundreds of shampoos on the market; far too many to make any logical, rational, certain choice, so I choose one called "Generic Shampoo." There are hundreds of beers too. All have competing claims and counter claims so I drink one called **Beer**. There are dozens of cars on the market each claiming to be the best, so I drive one called "Non-Detroit, Japanese, or European." I reported for jury duty to a large courthouse with many rooms; I couldn't decide which one to enter, so I stayed in the hall.

Of course, I don't do any of this. Yet people do this in the matter of religious faith. They choose Non-denominational believing they have answered the dilemma of competing claims to truth. They reason: since all denominations claim to be the truth, I'll choose the one that makes no claims to truth even though by definition a non-denominational church believes all the other denominations are wrong for being a distinct denomination and they are right for not being one.

It is like the generic craze of the early 80s. Wikipedia, the website everyone sites as untrustworthy except in the area they're citing it, says this: "In the early 1980s, generic products in the United States had plain white labels with blue or black lettering describing the product in simple terms - "Yellow Cake Mix", "Tuna In Water", "Chocolate Flavor Syrup", "Deodorant Soap" - with only ingredients and preparation details as appropriate. This was during a sharp economic downturn when many consumers were placing more emphasis on value than on brand loyalty. In the U.S. industrial [Midwest](#), a region especially hard hit by the recession, generics became a common sight in supermarkets and discount stores" (wikipedia.org/wiki/Generic_brand).

My new bride and I used these products. I well remember the black label beer, not Carling Black Label mind you, but a white can with black lettering that simply said **Beer**. (It was the first time I knew that 12 fluid ounces was 355 milliliters.) I drank under the label **Beer** but to be sure I was drinking from one of the major breweries of that time. And so non-denominationalists are drinking from one of the major streams of Christianity usually Reformed and probably Armenian Baptist. As I could say by drinking generic beer that I was above the fray of the beer wars, so they can say they are above

the fray of denominationalism. But what I did to save a dollar or two, they are doing to save relations with all the other denominations. I'm non-denominational, so I can go to a Baptist, Catholic, or Lutheran church if need be....all the while believing those churches are in fact wrong for being denominations.

This is hypocrisy. I didn't deny I was drinking beer even if I didn't know the brand. They claim they aren't imbibing a particular brand of Christianity when in fact they are. Furthermore, they claim to be above judging any of the truth claims of denominations when in fact they reject them all. In drinking **Beer**, I wasn't claiming that I was above judging any of the flavor claims of breweries. I was "above" paying for their name. It's "beneath" Non-denominationalists to come out and judge truth. I gained a few bucks; they lose the concept of truth.

C.S. Lewis would've been gentle, I think, with Christians caught up in these non-denomination, denominations. He would've called them *mere* Christians. In fact, in 1943 long before the existence of Non-denominational as a denomination, he likened this type of Christian to a person who remains in the hall rather than go into one of the several rooms off the hall. He can't yet bring himself to go into any of the rooms of the existing communions of faith, so he stands out in the hall. Lewis goes on to say, "But it is in the rooms, not in the hall, that there are fires and chairs and meals. The hall is a place to wait in, a place from which to try the various doors, not a place to live in. For that purpose the worst of the rooms (whichever that may be) is, I think preferable" (*Mere Christianity*, 11-12).

Yes, with Lewis we can be gentle with a Christian in the common hall of Christianity, but I think we should be more like no-nonsense hall monitors when it comes to generic denominations. They are harming the Body of Christ when they invite people to make the heatless, restless, foodless hall a place to live.

The Lutheran Study Bible More Aptly Named Self-Study Bible

Posted on August 29, 2018 by Rev. Paul R. Harris

You'll recall that the 1986 Bible published by Concordia Publishing House was titled *Concordia Self-Study Bible*. The knock on it was that it was a Lutheranized version of Zondervan's *NIV Study Bible*. However, even given the inherent Calvinistic, Reformed, Millennialism bias of the 1984 NIV Bible translation as well as the weakness of some of the notes they didn't remove, it still was a study Bible that aided

in studying the Bible by one's self. This is as opposed to the 2009 *The Lutheran Study Bible* which is study of the self.

I'm not talking about its weakness towards post-modernism which in itself puts self at the center. I referred to this in an August 19, 2013 blog. Neither do I refer to its weak Confessional Lutheranism. I referenced this in a November 16, 2009 blog. No, I'm talking about the embrace of narrative, story-telling to enhance Bible study.

The 1990s is where narrative preaching and teaching flowered. At Advanced Officer Chaplain School, I heard a United Church of Christ pastor give a narrative sermon. It was entertaining, engaging, enthralling even, but, in the end, I had no idea what the point of the message was. It was great narration but no education and little real information.

Also in the 90s was the famous O.J. Simpson trial. Recently, upon the recommendation of one millennial and one Gen-Xer, my wife and I watched a supposedly non-fiction retelling of the mid-90's saga. Neither the misses nor I were impressed. Perhaps because we were adults at the time and were saturated with it then. In any event, both sides of the case realized that it's the side with the better narrative that wins. The defense doesn't in try to address the facts presented by the prosecution. Instead it spins a narrative of intuitional and individual racism. The facts don't matter, the story does.

Enter *The Lutheran Study Bible* which advances the study of self by appealing to the fact that good stories keep you engaged. Each book of the Bible begins with a section titled "Reading" followed by the book(s) involved. They are like a Targum on the entire book(s), but they're vaguer. They're stories appealing to all five senses.

They go well with many of the notes which aren't so much a recitation of the facts, as was the case with the 1986 *Self-Study Bible*, but a stirring of emotions. The story drives the facts. This goes well with Dr. Voelz's 1999 inoculation of the Missouri Synod with post-modern communication theories. The words, i.e. the facts don't drive the message; the perception of facts by the writer and the reader do. This in turn goes well with the post-modern textual criticism techniques where the facts of the text aren't determinative but whether you can tell the story of Christ with them is.

Think about the times your child asked you to make up a story rather than read one. Inevitably, no matter what story you told, it was about you. It had to be for it came from you. The *Lutheran Study Bible* makes the Bible about you. At first blush, this sounds Lutheran. Nope. Lutheran would be "for you."

Trinity Lutheran Church
1207 West 45th Street, Austin, TX 78756 ~ 512.453.3835 ~ www.trinityaustin.com
Trinity Te Deum is published bi-monthly.

Deadline for all articles is the 15th of the odd months.

All articles must be approved by Rev. Paul R. Harris. Articles with no author are written by him.

April 2019

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
	1	2	3 7:30 PM Lenten Vespers V	4	5	6
7	8	9	10 7:30 PM Lenten Vespers VI	11	12	13
14 12:15 PM Adult Confirmation	15	16	17	18 7:30 PM MAUNDY THURSDAY	19 7:30 PM GOOD FRIDAY	20
21 10 AM THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD NO Adult Confirmation	22 5 PM Jr. Confirmation RE-TESTING	23	24	25	26	27 1:30 PM RANGE DAY @ BEST OF THE WEST
28 NO Adult Confirmation	29 NO Jr. Confirmation	30				

PASTOR ON VACATION 23RD -30TH

PASTOR ON VACATION 23-30

MAY 2019

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
			1 NO ROMANS CLASS	2	3	4
5 NO Adult Confirmation	6	7	8	9	10	11 11 AM WINERY TOUR
12 12:15 pm Adult Confirmation	13	14 6:30 PM Elders Meeting	15 7:15 ROMANS BIBLE CLASS	16	17	18
19 12:15 pm Adult Confirmation		21	22 7:15 ROMANS BIBLE CLASS	23	24	25
26 12:15 pm Adult Confirmation 12:00 PM HOTDOG/BRAT SUNDAY LUNCH		28	29 7:15 ROMANS BIBLE CLASS	30	31	

PORT A COUPLES TRIP 5TH -9TH