

Trinity Te Deum

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Nones Want None of This

“Nones” is the designation of those who are non-religious. The numbers – and they vary depending on source – are anywhere from 40 to above 60 percent who say they have no religion. In the first Gulf War, the chaplain checked each troops papers for next of kin, life insurance, and religious affiliation. In the early 90s few had dog tags that said “none” or were blank. When encountering that, a Catholic chaplain would say, “Is that what you want your momma to find out when they ship you home.” Most would then identify as something other than ‘none.’

The major reason, I’m told that Nones want none of this (Word and Sacrament ministry, liturgy, Bible Study – oops the latter is true for many Christians.) is in one word: Science. It’s as if the Theory of Evolution was just propounded in 1999 instead of 1859. It’s as if the age of the earth was just discovered by science to be billions and billions of years. It’s as if Saints Irenaeus, Augustine, and even Luther hadn’t been confronted with the what science generally accepts or more often assumes.

Well, Nones want none of ‘religion’ but I find they want none of these sorts of observations either. At an LSU symposium, Sept. 1978 as reported in *Geotimes*, Vol. 23, September 1978, p. 18. Dr. Jack Eddy said, “I suspect that the sun is 4.5 billion years old. However...I suspect that we could live with Bishop Ussher's value for the age of the earth and sun. I don't think we have much in the way of observable evidence in astronomy to conflict with that” (*Creation and the Modern Christian*, 228). Bishop Ussher was a 17th century Irish bishop who computed creation to be 4004 B.C.

Jacques Barzun wrote a magisterial work on the 500 years from 1500 to his presence. He observed that the scientific method is incapable of analyzing either Love or Ambition for the parts are too many, and too complex to be accounted for. “It is from this incapacity that the belief in science and mathematics as the only forms of truth has arisen” (*From Dawn to Decadence*, 217). So, only what can be explained scientifically or mathematically are true. This is in the Nones wheelhouse, and should drive them to the nuthouse if they thought about it.

Christian thinkers approached things differently. “The approach no longer being, as for Classicism, through nature to God, but rather through God to nature” (*Christianity and Classical Culture*, 237). And this exposes, in my view, the problem with Intelligent Design which appears to be one of the few approaches to creation

that Nones resonate with. Intelligent Design takes us back to pagan, pre-Christian classical thinking: approaching God through nature.

Again, the Nones think the defeat of Christianity by Science started with the internet in 1997 and ended with the Rise of the Smartphone in 2007. Augustine, 400 A.D. already was railing against perversions of intellectual activity by scientific intelligence in order to become the instrument of control. He called them *fantastica fornicatio*, the prostitution of the mind to its own fancies.

One author sums up Augustine thoughts on this score: “That is to say, they originated from the temptation to eat of the tree of knowledge rather than of the tree of life” (*Christianity and Classical Culture*, 418). “[Augustine] drew the indictment of Classicism in one comprehensive formula, discovering the source of its difficulties in the fact that it acknowledged the claim of science to architectonic and, therefore, entitled to legislate with sovereign authority for the guidance of human life” (*Christianity and Classical Culture*, 419). When you hear ‘architectonic’ think ‘string theory’ or any other than claims to explain everything.

When science or scientist mount this high throne, they believe they have walked up to the tree of knowledge whacked it off at the ground and drug it away. This isn’t science but scientism “the fallacy of believing that the method of science must be used on all forms of experience and, given time, will settle every issue” (*From Dawn to Decadence*, 218). Nope, science will never be able to prove or disprove articles of faith, the mysteries of God, that man can only know if God reveals them. But Nones know what they know and want none of that.

Fences

A Nine Part Sermon Series on the Ten Commandments
Advent 2019 – Lent 2020

This is the beginning of our sixth trek through the Six Chief Parts of Luther’s Small Catechism. We go through all six every four years. We do this every Advent and Lent in keeping with a 16th century Lutheran practice of having midweek services devoted to catechetical teaching.

We used the theme of “Fences” in our Vacation Catechetical School. Fences form boundaries; they warn;

they prohibit, and they can comfort. If you have ever been lost, how relieved you were when you finally got to a fence. Amusement park rides are fun precisely because you are “fenced in” so you can’t fall out. So the Law, like the hymn says, is “good and wise”, but it’s chief function is that of a mirror: to show us our sins. “But” as another hymn has it, “’tis the Gospel must reveal where lies our strength to do His will.”

All services are on a Wednesday. They start at 7:30 PM. With the exception of Ash Wednesday, you can be out the door at 8:15.

December 4	The Big Fence The 1 st Commandment
December 11	Fences with Signs The 2 nd Commandment
December 18	The Fence that Keeps In The 3 rd Commandment
Ash Wednesday	What’s a Fence Doing Here? The 4 th Commandment
March 4	A Fence Everyone Knows The 5 th Commandment
March 11	A Fence People Want Moved The 6 th Commandment
March 18	A Fence for Sea Gulls The 7 th Commandment
March 25	A Fence People Ignore The 8 th Commandment
April 1	Twin Fences That Stop All The 9 th & 10 th Commandments

Martin Luther got his Christmas melodies from tavern tunes.

THIS MYTH HAS BEEN AROUND for some time, and it’s fairly easy to disprove. Luther wrote 37 hymns, three of which were for Christmas. In volume 53 of *Luther’s Works*, all of the texts and tunes for Luther’s hymns are available in English translation, along with a brief historical background on each. A quick reading of this volume shows that none of the tunes that Luther used for his 37 hymns came from taverns. They were mostly existing church tunes, some of which he adapted, and the rest were original tunes of his own composition.

There is one slight exception, however – the original melody for his Christmas hymn, “From Heaven Above to Earth I Come.” In the earliest known printing of this hymn, Luther’s text was set to secular “garland song” melody. (A rough equivalent today might be a melody like “Ring Around the Rosie.”) And yet this popular melody never caught on in church, and four years later, an original melody by Luther was included instead with Luther’s text. This second melody is the one used to this day, found in *Lutheran Service Book* (LSB 358). Bottom line? The only time Luther tried using a secular melody (and hardly a

“tavern tune” at that) was for a Christmas hymn, and that melody was soon replaced with one of his own. (Vieker, Jon, *Six Myths About Christmas Hymns*, *Lutheran Witness*, December 2017,17)

Lenten factoids

Lenten Factoids: *The original period of Lent was 3 days: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. By the 3rd century, it was extended to 6 days and called Holy Week which is the week before Easter. Around 800 AD during the reign of the great Christian emperor, Charlemagne it was increased to 40 days. The Sundays in Lent are **not** included. The 40 days correspond to the 40 days in which Jesus fasted in the wilderness in preparation for His battle with Satan...a battle He won by the way.*

The earliest Lent can begin is February 5. That last happened in 1818 and it won’t happen again at least through 2100. The latest that it can begin is March 10. That will not happen again until 2038.

The day before Ash Wednesday is called Shrove Tuesday. The word “shrive” means to cut off, and it means to forgive sins. It was the custom on Shrove Tuesday to go to confession and have one’s sins forgiven in preparation for Lent. The day was also one of “saying farewell to meat,” which is the meaning of the Latin word “carnival.” So the custom was to use up all the fat in the house by making jelly rolls or pancakes, and to feast on a roast of fat meat. “Mardi Gras” is the French name for the day, and it means “Fat Tuesday.”

Originally, no meat was eaten during Lent, but this was gradually reduced to only Fridays and Wednesdays when fish was eaten instead.

“Giving up something for Lent” is not done to do something for Jesus, the One who did it all for us, but to purposely focus on spiritual things more than on physical things.

The most important thing about Lent is that it is the time we consider more closely the last week of Christ’s life, actually the last two days, where He suffered the most intensely for our sins. This time in Christ’s life is called the Passion. Every year for Lent we read the account of Jesus’s Passion. Over the six Wednesdays of Lent we read it from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. On Good Friday, we hear it from St. John. By following Christ on His way to the cross, we identify closely with His suffering. When Easter comes, we celebrate with great joy His Resurrection.

I found this article fascinating, perhaps because it said well what I had been thinking for sometime. It is a review of a CD set on Woodstock but it is also a comment on contemporary culture. PRH

Woodstock won

New CD set shows the culture of the 1969 rock event has become the culture of America

by Arsenio Orteza

WORLD Magazine, August 17, 2019, p.28

One overriding impression emerges from Rhino's new 10-disc Woodstock: Back to the Garden, 50th Anniversary Experience.

It isn't that the music has aged badly. Those parts that seem to have weren't considered all that good to begin with. Besides, there were mitigating circumstances: the era's outdoor-concert technology, for example, and the fact that many of the performers, like much of the crowd, weren't entirely sober.

Happenstance also played a role. Richie Havens meandered (at one point do-be-doo-dooing his way through "With a Little Help From My Friends" as he didn't know the words) because the delayed arrival of the band Sweetwater required him to play twice as long as he'd planned. John Sebastian meandered too, but he wasn't supposed to play at all: Having been asked to improvise an acoustic set until the rain-drenched stage could be electrocution proofed, he complied.

The box's overriding impression also isn't that a lot of the music sounds surprisingly good considering the aforementioned obstacles. Not so much the folky first day and a half—there's a reason that Woodstock is remembered as a rock festival. But once bands started plugging in, they delivered the visceral, Dionysian thrills that the hippie hordes were gladly enduring rain, humidity, mud, hunger, and bad sanitation to experience.

Even acts that'd been signed simply because their relative obscurity made them affordable to promoters who'd already paid a fortune for Creedence Clearwater Revival, Jefferson Airplane, the Who, and Jimi Hendrix—acts such as the then little-known Mountain and the still-unknown Keef Hartley Band—achieved cruising altitude at one point or another.

The overriding impression isn't even that the more things change the more they stay the same, although the emcee Edward "Chip" Monck's increasingly exasperated requests for festivalgoers to get off the scaffolding make him sound like a schoolteacher overseeing unruly students on a field trip. "If your determination [to climb down] was the same as your selfishness," he says at one point, "we'd be able to have gatherings like this every week."

No. The overriding impression is that what was once limited to a long weekend on Max Yasgur's 600-acre dairy farm now runs rampant throughout much of the United States 24/7. Despite half a century of epitaphs

bemoaning its demise, in other words, the Woodstock generation has won.

Exhibit A: profanity. Country Joe MacDonald's anti-Vietnam War "Fish Cheer," Abbie Hoffman's pleas on behalf of John Sinclair, and Janis Joplin's 'tween-song patter sent a clear message: Only the uptight are bothered by bad language. Vulgarity is now the lingua franca.

Exhibit B: no walls. Woodstock organizers expected 200,000 attendees. More than twice that amount, most of them without tickets, showed up. They trampled the fences—defied border security as it were—and were granted immediate "citizenship."

Exhibit C: free everything. Most of Woodstock's food, medical care, and recreational drugs were provided gratis. A growing portion of the populace thinks that they—and everything else—can and should be free as well. "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" and all that.

Exhibit D: "One sometimes gets the impression," wrote George Orwell in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, "that the mere words 'Socialism' and 'Communism' draw towards them ... every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, 'Nature Cure' quack, pacifist and feminist in England." With the possible exception of the Quakers, Orwell described the Woodstock crowd to a T. It's a crowd known nowadays as "special-interest groups."

And, tail though they may be, they wag the dog.

Dangerous descent

How Darwinian thought seeped into every cultural crevice, and what we can do to counter it today

by [J.C. Derrick](#)

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John West is vice president of Discovery Institute, a Seattle-based think tank best known for its research and advocacy for intelligent design. West is also the author of several books, including *Darwin Day in America*, which examines how Charles Darwin's idea influences culture today. Here are edited excerpts of [our conversation](#) in Seattle.

Where has Darwinian thought had the most influence on society today? The area of faith. Darwin's theory wasn't just about change over time—it was that we're part of an accidental process. So Darwin has been the greatest gift to people who would like to deny that God exists. But it's gone way beyond that: We've seen Darwinism used to devalue human life, because Darwin thought humans are basically animals. At the end of *On the Origin of Species* he says it's through death, disease, and starvation that the best things have come about in nature.

It seems like some of these ideas are not always connected to Darwin because people read *On the Origin of Species* without reading his later book, *The Descent of Man*. Exactly. I have met scholars who say Darwin has nothing to do with religion or morality—it's just about science. I ask: "Have you read *The Descent of Man*?" No. That is where Darwin talks about religion, morality, mind, and social policy, about how he thinks we're destroying the human race by inoculating people against smallpox and helping the poor.

Let the weak die on their own. Correct. Darwin was a kind and compassionate man, so he worried about the implications, but that's what he thought the theory meant. He thought that if we follow reason, we probably shouldn't be doing things to help the people he thought were defective.

'Darwin was not the world's first racist, but you're avoiding history if you don't understand the role Darwin played in virulent scientific racism.' How has Darwinian thought influenced the sexual revolution?

In *The Descent of Man* Darwin argues the original form of human mating was not monogamy, but community marriage—lots of different sexual partners. Darwin himself favored monogamy as in 19th-century Victorian England, but his overall claim was that appropriate mating practice was determined by whatever survival needs you had. So it would radically change over time. Darwin influenced many of the people who made these arguments more widely in what became known as the sexual revolution. No. 1 is Alfred Kinsey. Most people don't know he was trained as an evolutionary biologist. Only later did he look at animal and human sexuality and become the father of the sexual revolution.

What about crime and punishment? Like much of 19th-century scientific thought, Darwinian thought was reductionist: It tried to reduce everything about us—our moral beliefs, our actions—to the product of blind matter in motion. It's not something we can be held accountable for, because our environment dictates it. Today we say our genes made me do it. There was a whole school of criminal anthropology that followed Darwin and went in two directions. One, the liberal form of criminal justice, says we're not responsible for our actions, so you have a "Get out of jail free" card. The other, on the law-and-order side, says if this behavior is bred into criminals, then you have to either get rid of them—execute them—or cure them through things ranging from lobotomies to indefinite detention.

What about ideas of racial superiority? Darwin was not the world's first racist, but you're avoiding history if you don't understand the role Darwin played in virulent scientific racism. He believed everything about humans ultimately could be explained by natural selection, or survival of the fittest. And since it acts differently in populations according to different environments, Darwin said we shouldn't expect natural selection to produce races of equivalent capabilities. He provided a scientific agenda,

a research agenda, for several decades of evolutionary biologists and anthropologists who looked for how the races were inherently unequal. Mercifully, that is not the mainstream scientific view today.

How did that change? Not because of the scientists. It was the civil rights movement and many religious leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and others who, based on Christian convictions, pushed back and made that view unfashionable.

You mentioned reductionism—the idea that we're all a product of our genes and environment. How has that contributed to the tendency to over-medicate? Psychoactive drugs are a great benefit to society—I've had family members who have benefited from them. But I think it should concern people that in some schools in America, 40 percent or more of the young boys are put on Ritalin for ADHD. Ritalin is pharmacologically related to cocaine, so it is going to affect your concentration whether you have ADHD or not. This idea that we're just these material creatures leads to a psychoactive-drug-first mentality. You don't look at people as body, mind, soul; they're just bodies. If you think we're hybrids, both material and spiritual, then you'll want to explore a wider range of potential treatments.

As scientific research continues to undermine Darwin and strengthen the case for intelligent design, are we seeing a reevaluation of some of these associated ideas? A growing number of voices in and out of the scientific community are raising questions about Darwin's theory and pointing to the evidence of design, but the cultural cachet of Darwinian reductionism is still powerful, particularly in the social and in the nonscientific realm. Fields like political science, sociology, and psychology all took their underlying assumptions from 19th-century natural science, including Darwin.

Some pushback in science? We are seeing more pushback to the garden variety science claims you still get from people like Neil deGrasse Tyson or Bill Nye—that Darwinian science shows we're the product of this unguided process. That sort of village atheism is getting harder to sustain. In physics and cosmology, lots more people are talking about the exquisite fine-tuning that leads to life. And in biology, they're talking about the exquisite molecular machines.

How can the average Christian affect the cultural conversation surrounding Darwinism? The No. 1 thing Christians can do: Be responsible for those in their own circles of influence. Don't fret if you don't have 100,000 people listening to you on YouTube or Facebook. Pay attention to your own kids. Pay attention to the kids of your friends. Even in evangelical churches, parents often farm out the raising of their kids. You can't cede your parenting to schools—public or Christian. And you certainly can't cede it to the internet, social media, or video games. If you feel ill-equipped, there's good news: Various groups have produced lots of great resources to help you talk about these things with your kids. You don't need to be

an expert. Just watch a video with your kids each week and engage them in discussion around the dinner table.

The Keys do not Belong to Pastors, but to the Church

Rev. Phillip Hale, Omaha, NE

In the journal *Logia* (Reformation 2019, vol. 28, no. 4) LCMS parish pastor Robert Mayes makes the case that the keys to heaven (the forgiveness of sins) may only effectively be used by ministers. He considers the keys as synonymous with having the office of public ministry, and as just meaning the Church has the right to call ministers to actually use the keys. This might sound Lutheran, but it is not. It is an extremely dangerous teaching that undermines the power of the Word—the very Gospel of forgiveness—itsself.

Mayes starts out by admitting that Luther *does* acknowledge the power of laymen to forgive sin. Rather than state that is a private use and in no way undermines the public use of the Word by pastors, he reduces the private use of the keys in the home and elsewhere to the most dire emergencies. Mayes does not use Luther, even though our foremost teacher is so clear on this issue. Instead, select quotes from the generations after Luther are read through the lens of the assumption that “lay forgiveness” is completely different in nature than “pastoral forgiveness.” By begging the question, Mayes ends up with two different kinds of forgiveness. Since the Gospel and its powers are one in Scripture, this “lay forgiveness” is said to do nothing—it removes no guilt before God and is not a reliable foundation for faith. In effect, the Word of God, in its full binding and loosing power, is limited to clergy, a la Romansim.

This particular article is not so crass as to say that the keys belong wholly to the clergy. Instead, Mayes repeats what the Lutheran confessions say, but reinterprets them, so that what belongs to the Church is simply the power to call pastors to use the Word for them: the keys effectively only belong to the clergy. The Word in the hands of a layman is ineffective and of no eternal or heavenly consequence. No doubt Mayes is desiring to lift up the office of pastor, but in this novel scheme of two classes of forgiveness, laymen are pitted against the clerical estate in a way that utterly undermines Luther’s understanding of the Gospel.

In confining the private use of the keys by non-ordained Christians to “lay absolution” and redefining “need” as demanding a “life-or-death situation” (8, 9), the un-Lutheran paradigm of making the clergy superior in power and effectiveness in speaking the Word has already been founded. Mayes contends that modern Lutherans have misunderstood the keys and he uses examples from the late

1500’s to buttress his assumptions. But the keys are ill-defined here and the question has already been begged by making a lesser category of “lay forgiveness.” All Mayes’ historical evidence is filtered through a faulty lens and unscriptural dichotomy, proving nothing. Luther explains it well: “Besides this public, daily, and necessary confession [in the Lord’s Prayer], there is also the secret confession that takes place privately before a single brother or sister. This comes into play when some particular issue weighs on us or attacks us, eating away at us until we can have no peace nor find ourselves sufficiently strong in faith. Then we may at any time and as often as we wish lay our troubles before a brother or sister, seeking advice, comfort, and strength. This type of confession is not included in the commandment like the other two but is left to all to use whenever they need it. Thus by divine ordinance Christ himself has placed absolution in the mouths of his Christian community and commanded us to absolve one another from sins (“A Brief Exhortation to Confession”).

It is stated that “the loosing key is not given to individual believers to use, except in a life-or-death situation” (8). But the keys are not a power separate from the Word. The forgiving Word of Christ is always an effective absolution, however the means of communication. So any use of God’s Word, public or private, by layman or pastor, actually looses sins and opens heaven. The high church crowd of our day thinks of absolution as a particular rite and formula, reserved for pastors, but Christ instituted the keys as a power, the very power which underlies every use of the Word. Luther and Melancthon clearly define the Gospel itself as an absolution, in fact, the primary one: “The preaching of the holy gospel itself is principally and actually an absolution in which forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in general and in public to many persons, or publicly or privately to one person alone. Therefore absolution may be used in public and in general, and in special cases also in private, just as the sermon may take place publicly or privately, and as one might comfort many people in public or someone individually in private” (LW 50:76-77). While the case the reformers dealt with here concerned the formal absolution, any absolution, no matter how informal, is a real loosing of sins. To negate an absolution because of how it comes to the sinner is to deny the efficacy of the Gospel. Christ, not the pastor, is the power of the keys, as Luther stated: “Consequently, there must lie hidden in the keys of Christ his blood, death, and resurrection, by which he has opened to us heaven, and thus imparts through the keys to poor sinners what he has wrought through his blood” (LW 40:328).

The keys are clearly given to Peter (Matt. 16:19) and the apostles (Jn. 20:23), but there is no contradiction or difference in the power of the keys when used by every Christian. Christ Himself gave them to all in Matt. 18:18. With the same authority, privilege, and effectiveness, the Word actually binds and looses sins through any

imparting—it does not depend on the person or estate of the speaker. The Word of Christ spoken through a child is just as forgiving in heaven as when spoken through the highest bishop. It always remains Christ’s Word and work. To import a spiritual caste system into the Church puts doubt upon the Word of forgiveness and dishonors the comfort which is as sure as Christ is risen from the dead. Every Christian “brother” has the same command, authority, and power to use the Word as Peter did. Since the three separate institutions of the keys in Scripture do not give different powers or authorities over sin, Luther biblically dismantled the pastoral office as a higher, spiritual estate. “For there are many doubts which a man cannot resolve by himself, and so he takes a brother aside and tells him his trouble. What harm is there, if he humbles himself a little before his neighbor, puts himself to shame, looks for a word of comfort from him, and takes it to himself and believes it, as if he heard it from God himself, as we read in Matthew 18:19: ‘If two of you shall agree as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them’ ” (Eighth Invocavit Sermon, *Works of Martin Luther*; LW 51:97-100). “Need” is simply the presence of doubt for Luther, which is the great enemy of faith. The enemy to guard against is not non-clergy using the great consoling power of God’s Word, but any distrust of God’s faith-creating Gospel that always opens heaven to sinners. Faith needs a real and effective Word that removes sins before God. A key that needs a certain person to activate it is not a reliable key in itself.

What do laymen do, if the Word of Christ they speak cannot turn the key to heaven, because they are not public ministers? They can talk about forgiveness, but cannot actually remove sins, in the sacerdotalist scheme. According to Mayes, “There is a subtle distinction between forgiving a penitent sinner and announcing that Jesus forgives a penitent sinner” (10). It seems that nothing happens, if the keys cannot be used by laymen, when a Christian without call or ordination speaks on behalf of Christ—it is simply “a good reminder,” Mayes claims (10). Cursed be this ineffectiveness of the keys of Christ. What takes the place of forgiveness? Merely human reconciliation—simply putting aside personal differences—that any pagan can achieve. Sins and God’s wrath are not addressed in such a powerless announcement. But thankfully, no man can limit the power of God’s Word. In 1545 Luther said regarding John 20, clearly interpreting it in light of the more universal words of Matt. 18: “For here we have the Lord himself, over all angels and creatures, who says, ‘They shall all have the same power, keys, and office’—even two simple Christians assembled only in his name” (LW 41:318).

The Gospel, not the pastoral office—which is simply an instrumental service and divine duty—reigns supreme in the Church: “There is not always a sermon being given publicly in the church, so when my brother or neighbor

comes to me, I am to lay my troubles before my neighbor and ask for comfort. . . . Again I should comfort others, and say ‘dear friend, dear brother, why don’t you lay aside your burdens. It is certainly not God’s will that you experience this suffering. God had his Son die for you so that you do not sorrow but rejoice’ ” (Luther, 1537 Sermon on Matt. 18:15-18, in Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith*, 135). This informal, comforting conversation is entirely appropriate and desirable for laymen. When they do this they are not pretending to be public proclaimers of the Word or temporary, uncalled ministers, but simply being Christians—spiritual priests of God most high who have His Word. There is no battle or fight for spiritual authority between pastor and the priesthood of all believers for Luther. Both, in their own spheres, honor and use Christ’s Gospel. A Word of forgiveness that cannot fully be trusted is of Satan. Christ Himself is the one forgiving in His Word. Forgiveness is universally in the Gospel for all. So to limit the use of forgiveness is to limit Christ’s grace, making the pastoral office more significant than faith and what it depends upon. This is simply not Lutheran. Every Christian has the privilege of using the all-powerful name of Christ against sin: “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:32).

There is one Christ, one forgiving key, and one Gospel. No human distinction undercuts this divine institution of our Lord that gifts the keys to the Church. Understood rightly, this will not lead to a power play against pastors, but the honoring of the office God created to speak on behalf of the gathered saints publicly and in good order. Stripping laymen of their God-given right to use the Word privately, and in an emergency publicly, is not of the Gospel or Christ, but simply a veiled Roman slavery coming in the back door.

When the power of the Word is limited by earthly office, other doctrinal deformities must occur to not damn those who happen not to be near a pastor. Because even in dire emergencies the Word is assumed to be basically ineffective when used by a layman, Mayes teaches that “the layperson becomes an emergency pastor, as long as the emergency exists. When the emergency is over, it is understood that the layperson reverts to his former status” (8). This is simply enthusiasm, without any word of Scripture. In trying to glorify the office, he actually makes everyone a potential minister. Need does not make one a minister in the least, though. Females do not become ministers, sinning against God’s Word, when they baptize a sick infant or forgive their children in Christ’s name. Males do not usurp the office without a call when they use the Word at home, or when a pastor cannot be obtained. Ministers do not have an inherent higher spiritual authority to be able to forgive, baptize, and console consciences. They merely have a calling from God to do so publicly in the congregation, on behalf of all. That is it. Limiting the

Word and its power does not uplift the public ministry—quite the opposite, actually. It makes the ministry as moldable and formless as Play-Doh.

The pastoral office, in itself, actually does nothing, when the keys of Christ are not actually used. The public office of the Word will be honored most when the Word of Christ is used rightly and sinners find comfort in the loosing key. Not because the keys are exclusive to the clergy and unable to be used by laymen, but precisely because they are for all Christians. The private use of the keys (simply the saving Word) is also something faith can rely on. The time Christians spend with a pastor is quite limited, but faith and forgiveness are not. Need, for Luther, is simply guilt and doubt which is to be eradicated by the Gospel. The forgiveness found in reading Scripture privately, Sunday school lessons, and home devotions does forgive before God in heaven and is a valid and efficacious use of the keys.

The Gospel does not require a pastor, as if Christ Word's alone is not enough. On the contrary, every use of the Word, is a use of Christ's keys. Faith demands a real, loosing Word of Christ. In true Lutheran practice there is an easy and clean interplay between the use of the Word at home and public preaching and teaching. The distinction is one of vocation, service, and earthly order, not power or spiritual ability. "And we must have many absolutions, so that we may strengthen our timid consciences and despairing hearts against the devil and against God. Therefore no man shall forbid the confession nor keep or drive any one away from it. And if any one wrestles with his sins, is eager to be rid of them and looks for some assurance from the Scriptures, let him go and confess to another in secret, and receive what is said to him there as if it came directly from God's own lips" (Luther, *Eighth Invocavit Sermon*). That absolution is heard and believed as God's pure Word and action is what counts.

In our own confessions, Luther himself destroys this idea that makes the keys unable to be used by non-ministers: "We will now return to the Gospel, which not merely in one way gives us counsel and aid against sin; for God is superabundantly rich in His grace. First, through the spoken Word by which the forgiveness of sins is preached in the whole world; which is the peculiar office of the Gospel. Secondly, through Baptism. Thirdly, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar. Fourthly, through the power of the keys, and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren, Matt. 18:20" (SA III:IV). Evangelical "mutual conversation and consolation" is not a "life-or-death" situation, but its power to deal with sin is no less than that of private absolution, though the form and context are very different. Pastors do not have a monopoly on comforting conversation or a godly use of the Gospel in private situations. "Brothers" is clearly all Christians, since

the cited text is again Matt. 18 and Scripture so often uses the term in this way.

The Gospel itself is the power behind every use of the keys, so that faith may be made sure and firm upon Christ. Luther says there is no distinction in the power or effectiveness of the keys in public preaching and comforting, individual conversation. Private absolution has no special spiritual authority apart from the general proclamation of the Gospel, or even the bare reading of comforting Scripture. Its form and practice is not divinely mandated in Scripture. "Private absolution is nothing else than the proclamation of the Gospel to the individual sinner. . . . It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That private absolution has, is based on, or confers some power outside the Gospel, e.g., a power inherent in the person or office of the person pronouncing the absolution" (CTCR, "Theses on Justification," 21). It will not do to limit the universal power of the Spirit in the Word to a certain class of people. To limit the Gospel, which is not to be played against God's ordained order, is evil.

Despite the many public examples Mayes brings forth to show that the keys were routinely used by ministers throughout Lutheran history, he makes a critical error. Of course, the public exercise of the keys will normally be done by called, public ministers. But all the examples of the public use of the keys by pastors in the world do not negate the private use of the keys, away from the public assembly. Luther did not absolutely limit the keys, as Rome did, but merely the public function of them when it would go against good order and God's office: "For since we have proved all of these things to be the common property of all Christians, no one individual can arise by his own authority and arrogate to himself alone what belongs to all. Lay hold then of this right and exercise it, where there is no one else who has the same rights. But the community rights demand that one, or as many as the community chooses, shall be chosen or approved who, in the name of all with these rights, shall perform these functions publicly" (LW 40:34). In the home, apart from assembly and pastor, the Word still reigns and unlocks heaven, and so it is to be exercised directly. In fact, the forgiveness of Christ doled out by every Christian is intrinsically linked to remaining in God's forgiveness: "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Matt. 6:14). Scripture knows of no distinction between "lay forgiveness" and "pastoral forgiveness." Just because not all are called to use the keys publicly, does not mean Christ is inactive in His words when they are spoken by the layman in the private arena.

Unfortunately, Mayes is simply following the pattern of Rome. The Council of Trent stated: "the holy synod declares that all doctrines are utterly false and alien to the truth of the Gospel which perniciously extend the ministry

of the keys to any persons whosoever outside of bishops and priests, thinking that these words of the Lord: [Mt 18:18] and: [John 20:23], were spoken to all the faithful of Christ indiscriminately” (Chemnitz, *Examen* II:620). How sad is it that Chemnitz, the great defender of God’s Word against Trent, is cited as proof for a limited use and effectiveness of the keys. No voluntary limitation in exercising the keys, due to respect for God’s pastoral office, limits the Word itself or the Christian’s ability to use it. This “Romanizing doctrine of some Lutherans on absolution as an exclusive right of ordained pastors, according to which lay absolution has but little or no significance, and as declared to be only a comforting encouragement without a real communication of the forgiveness of sins itself, is grossly in conflict with the doctrine of the immediate power of God’s Word and the Holy Sacraments. And this, to an alarming extent, destroys the sinner’s full comfort as it is found in the doctrine of absolution, which is the power to forgive sins, which is given to the whole Christian Church on earth, and hence to each individual in it” (John Humberger, *Absolution; or the Forgiveness of Sins: Established by the Holy Scriptures*, Lutheran Book Concern, 1880; reprint: Mercator Press, 2019, 2).

In the same work of Martin Chemnitz that Mayes cites against the inherent power of the keys, Chemnitz clearly states that not the Word itself, but merely the public use of it is to be limited for the sake of God’s order: “It is true that all Christians have a general call to proclaim the Gospel of God, Rom. 10:9, to speak the Word of God among themselves, Eph. 5:19; to admonish each other from the Word of God, Col. 3:16; to reprove And family heads are enjoined [to do] this with the special command that they give their households the instruction of the Lord, Eph 6:4. But the public ministry of the Word and Sacraments in the church is not entrusted to all Christians in general....” (*Ministry, Word, and Sacraments*, 29). Mayes disregards completely the divinely ordained private use of the Word, making it simply a do-nothing announcement, powerless against real doubt and unbelief. But Christians are not powerless or without real comfort away from church and their pastor. Wherever the word of Christ is, there is Christ, His forgiving Spirit, and the gracious Father putting away sins and opening heaven. Thankfully, Christ did not say, “wherever one, two, or three pastors are gathered together, there I am with you to forgive.” The “ministry is not valid because of the authority of any person but because of the Word handed down by Christ” (Tr 26). Furthermore, Chemnitz explicitly calls “fraternal confession,” conducted between Christian neighbors, true forgiveness, citing Matt. 18:18, because there Christ gives the keys to all believers: “God promises that He will regard this fraternal reconciliation as valid in heaven.” The neighbor who is forgiven in this private use of the keys is “acquitted also in heaven” (Theophylact, *Examen* 2:595). Examples of the public exercise of the keys and historical arguments from

silence cannot gainsay what Christ truly gave His Church: the keys to heaven to be used by all Christians.

Our comfort is not in the office of pastor, but rather the Word. The pastoral office has the duty to exercise the keys publicly, which simply means to speak the Word—to forgive and withhold forgiveness. But the strength of the Keys is Christ and the historical fact that He has died and risen, bringing forth absolution to the world. This forgiveness Christ distributes in the Word at all times. The teaching of objective justification demonstrates that the Word actively gives a real forgiveness, whether it is brought forth by an experienced, faithful pastor or a stuttering seven-year-old. Christ is the one who forgives in all cases. All uses of the Word, whether public or private, fit together—indeed, they are complementary. “Ministry and priesthood are not confused; neither is derived from or reduced to the other, but they exist together as mutually enriching modes of God’s working, different in form but identical in content” (B. A. Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage*, 104). If one doubts and cannot trust the Word of forgiveness at home and from his neighbor when guilt wreaks its havoc, how can he trust it when it is preached and declared publicly? Cursed be the teaching that there is a forgiveness in Christ’s name which does not actually remove sins before God the Father.

The use of the keys, forgiving sinners and withholding forgiveness from the unrepentant, depends solely on Christ, not the insignificant human speaker. This does not mean human order and God’s call to exercise the keys publicly is to be undone. As Luther pinpointed so clearly, the power to remove sins is given to the clergy to exercise publicly. This does not conflict in the least with the fact that by divine right the keys are also given in Matt. 18:18 to every Christian to use in His God-given vocation. The power to open heaven by Christ’s Gospel, and also bar from eternal life by applying God’s damning Law, truly belongs to all the baptized, in every sense. As Christ said: “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 18:17-18). No amount of human words or scholarship can gainsay this divine Word of Christ that explicitly grants that the Word of forgiveness is effective, powerful, and unlimited, in the Spirit, no matter who actually uses it. Amen.

Update on Where to Now

The Elders have been studying how Trinity might establish fellowship with other Lutheran church bodies. We expect this to be a long and ongoing process, so we plan to report regularly to the voters and here in the

newsletter, so the congregation can know what we've been discussing.

In our November meeting, we began reviewing what points would or would not be divisive of church fellowship. We would not join with congregations that practice the following:

- Denial of the order of creation in the 3 estates (Church, State, and Home)
- Women's suffrage
- Open communion

Additionally, we would like to avoid the following:

- female acolytes
- a stripped-down liturgy
- Geneva gowns
- contemporary worship
- both high church legalism and low church hubris

Most of these are familiar issues, but the point about Geneva gowns raised questions at the Voters Meeting. Our objection isn't aesthetic but rather that these gowns are associated with emphasizing academics over the Divine Service.

We also read a short, helpful book on this topic called *WELS and Other Lutherans*, which provides an overview of the history and doctrinal distinctions of the major Lutheran synods, along with many minor groups (confessional and otherwise) within Lutheranism. While we are unlikely to join any of the existing synods, there are many smaller groups worth learning about, which will take time.

We believe that it is the duty of an orthodox Christian church to pursue fellowship with other churches (Eph. 4:3). As we have taken many years to leave Missouri, we think it wise to proceed carefully. The elders appreciate your prayers for us, the congregation, and Pastor as we study these issues.

--Derek Kurth

Sabbatical Update #2

As I said in the last newsletter, I would discuss my proposal with the voters in the January Voters Assembly. This is what I said in my Pastor's Report: "In the Dec-Jan 2020 Newsletter I proposed a "sabbatical" of 3 weeks extra vacation each year over the next 4 years instead of 12 weeks in a row. Sabbatical monies would pay for the extra weeks of pastoral care, and some monies would be available to me for my use. All monies given to me would be regarded as income. Very little feedback. One, it's up to you. Another said in his work that an extra week meant more work because he was two weeks behind when he got back. That's not how it is in the ministry. There is never the feeling of 'done.' That's why the extra weeks are appealing. Another leaned toward the 12 weeks but could see some merit in the spread out option and in the end wanted me to do what I thought best. But I would like the Voters to discuss and vote it up or down."

Two things were evident in the Assembly: Many had not read the newsletter article on this where I laid out what I proposed to do and why. There is definitely concern that my proposal is not in keeping with the reason monies were solicited for, i.e. a 3-month sabbatical. The matter was directed back to the Elders. In their January meeting they said they fully supported my plan to take 3 extra weeks this year and look to perhaps arranging a 9-week sabbatical in 2021. And in the spirit of rightly using the gifts people so generously gave, they agreed with my proposal that anyone who would like to have the monies returned to them simply notify Thomas Copeland. He will do it and I will never know whom or how much. If they would rather their gift go to some other account at Trinity or even the general fund, all they need do is tell Thomas Copeland. If they are okay with it being spent as I outlined in the December 2019-January 2020 newsletter which you can read at any time on our website <http://www.trinityaustin.com/>, they need say nothing.

Trinity Lutheran Church

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

FEBRUARY 2020

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
			7:15 PM BIBLE CLASS			1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
12:15 PM Adult Class	5:00 PM JR. CONFIRMATION		7:15 PM BIBLE CLASS			2 PM RANGE DAY (SIGN UP)
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
12:30 DOUBLE BABY SHOWER (SIGN UP)	5:00 PM JR. CONFIRMATION		7:15 PM BIBLE CLASS			
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
	5:00 PM JR. CONFIRMATION		7:15 PM BIBLE CLASS			
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
VCS PLANNING MEETING	5:00 PM JR. CONFIRMATION		7:30 PM ASH WEDNESDAY W/COMMUNION			

MARCH 2020

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1:30 PM PRAYER SERVICE FOR LIFE	5:00 PM JR. CONFIRMATION	7:00 PM VOTERS ASSEMBLY	7:30 PM LENTEN VESPERS			
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME BEGINS	5:00 PM JR. CONFIRMATION		7:30 PM LENTEN VESPERS			
	16	17	18	19	20	21
<div style="border: 2px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> CAMPOUT -MCKINNEY  </div>			7:30 PM LENTEN VESPERS			
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
	5:00 PM JR. CONFIRMATION	6:30 PM ELDERS METTING	7:30 PM LENTEN VESPERS			
29	30	31				
	5:00 PM JR. CONFIRMATION					