

# 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

June 1, 2020

Volume 22 Issue 3

June-July 2020

## I Repent

I repent all those Sundays I didn't look forward to gathering with God's people. I repent of all those times I did something else or nothing else rather than attend Divine Service. I repent of thinking the assembling of ourselves was a burden (Hebrews 10:25). I repent of not making it my custom (Luke 4:16; Acts 17:2) to be in the Lord's House each service day. I repent of taking it for granted that I could decide whenever I wanted to go to hear God's Word and receive His Sacrament. I repent of thinking I was a member of the Body of Christ when in reality I was deciding each Sunday whether or not I actually was. [More on this in another newsletter.]

But can you believe it? Can you believe the Government is telling me in what numbers I can go to church? Can you believe they are telling me how many there can be in this building? Why this is governmental overreach! This is one step away from jackbooted stormtroopers goose-stepping me off to concentration camps! No, this is how it has always been. Trinity has a maximum capacity assigned by the government – as do all buildings where the public gathers – which it cannot exceed. That's called the Maximum Occupancy. You see it posted in bars, theaters, auditoriums. The fire department could post ours. Anytime we exceeded our sanctuary Maximum Capacity, which is 225, be it at a wedding, funeral, or the holiest of all Divine Services, the Holy Communion, the government could come in and stop us under the fire code.

The public health code is not as specific. The government has broad, ill-defined powers when it comes to public health. It has determined that riding in a two-ton motor vehicle everyone must wear a seatbelt for protection, but if you want to ride a 400-pound motorcycle without a helmet have at it. They make you put your children in safety seats that look like the inside of a NASCAR and in helmets when they ride bikes on the street in front of your house. You want to work in a restaurant? You are going to be screened for TB. Not HIV mind you which is more contagious. The government requires you to buy lawnmowers that have automatic cut-off switches; to install in your home ground fault circuit interrupters within 6 feet of water. The government has limits as to how many layers of roofing you may have, the depth of tread on your tires,

and the condition of your windshield wipers all in the name of public safety.

Government is always portrayed as some type of monstrous beast in Scripture. Read Daniel and Revelation. Yet, Paul maintains Christians be subject to the governing authorities and that there is no authority except that which God has established (Romans 13:1-2). And if you think our government is bad, read about Rome's during the time Paul is telling the Romans they must submit to it. Can a government use a pandemic, or spookier still the 'threat' of one, as an excuse to overreach and even intrude on the church? Of course. The governor who mandated that only individually sealed bread and grape juice containers could be used to celebrate 'Holy Communion' is an example. We certainly couldn't do that for it would change our Lord's instituting His Meal with wine not grape juice. I have an even more difficult question of casuistry for you (Go ahead I'll give you time to Google casuistry). ...In the First Gulf War the military issued us chaplains field chaplain kits complete with paraments, sacred vessels, a missal, candle, unleavened bread, and *powdered* wine. The later was because Saudi Arabia wouldn't allow wine in their country. What did I do? I never got orders to go. What should I have done?

Twelve years ago, I regularly listened to the homily of the Mass at the Austin Catholic diocese. One day the priest speaking mentioned he had been in the ministry 25 years. That caught my ear because I was in my 25<sup>th</sup> year as well. He said, "You know when I first became a priest 25 years ago, I thought the majority of people would come to me wanting to know what the Bible said about this or that. It turns out that the majority come to me telling me what they think the Bible says and expect me to agree with them." That has been my experience too, and the more turbulent the issue, the more uncertain the situation, the more this happens. People come to you telling you what has to be done where and when based on their view of God's Word and/or your office. They seem to be unaware that even the pastor of a small church like ours has literally dozens of people with varying situations, fears, facts, questions, and consciences (hence the need to look up the word 'casuistry'). The Words of God certainly apply to all of them. One of us has been called and ordained to feed not just the Lord's sheep, but His lambs, and old goats too.

That's me, not you. One of us is going to have to give an account for each one of your souls; again that's me, not you.

Throughout this 'crisis', whether real or manmade, a cartoon from 30 plus years ago keeps coming to mind. A mom, dad, and son are at the dinner table. The newspaper the man is holding has the headline "Prayer Banned in School." The father pounds the table saying, "My son has a right to pray to God in school." The balloon over the boy's head says, "Who's God?" I think there are bigger and more fundamental issues attacking the Church in our day than how many people can gather at a time. Things like the government reaching into the womb and into marriage. These issues are so generally accepted as to be passé, as they were in Sodom, Gomorrah, and Gibeah.

Finally, once things are normalized, I will thank our Lord Jesus that the only one who can limit my ability to study, to hear God's Word, and to receive His Sacrament is me. And so, as I began, I end: I repent of my poor stewardship of His precious gifts.

## Losing the History Wars

By Marvin Olasky

As a believer in telling books by their covers, I was hopeful about *Critical Perspectives on Abortion*, edited by Anne Cunningham for Enslow Publishing, which provides books for school and public libraries: The cover had a photo of a blue "Keep Abortion Legal" sign and a red "Stop Abortion Now" sign. Only four of the 22 essays in the book were pro-life, though. A headline typical of the rest read, "Ethicists Generally Agree: The Pro-Life Arguments are Worthless." Author John Messerly concluded, "No doubt much of the anti-abortion rhetoric in American society comes from a punitive, puritanical desire to punish people for having sex."

No doubt. And what of the four pro-life essays? After each essay, the editor listed two questions designed to elicit critical thinking. After a reprinted *National Review* article by Ryan Anderson, the editor asked, "Despite its extreme conservatism, do any of the author's views, such as limited federal government and states' rights to experiment with democracy, have any merit, in your opinion?" The lead question after an article by Clarke Forsythe of Americans United for Life asked, "Can you identify any distortions of fact in this piece? If so, what?"

Questions after articles by abortion proponents were different: "How does evidence in this article contradict some of the claims of abortion-right opponents? ...How does the author make the case that U.S. abortion restrictions specifically target women of color? ...With so many potential risk factors facing

pregnant women, do you think that the legal system has any business regulating the specifics of abortion? Or should that be left to doctors?"  
(*World*, January 18, 2020, p. 46).

## A Letter to Parents of Transgenders

(From a Former Transgender)

DAILY STAND EMAILFRIDAY, MARCH 20, 2020  
@ 10:56 AM

LAURA PERRY FORMER TRANSGENDER AND  
CONTRIBUTING BLOGGERMORE

Dear Parents:

I know this is an incredibly difficult road to walk. There is so much fear surrounding the decisions you have to make regarding a transgender child. But that is what Satan wants: he wants you to live in fear. For the purposes of this letter, I am referring more to adult children who are old enough to make their own decisions. The media, the culture, and everyone around you will tell you that your child might commit suicide if you do not affirm their decision, celebrate it, and use the name and pronouns they have chosen for themselves. But that is not true. Studies have found many more are suicidal even with all the affirmation and even "gender-confirming" therapies such as hormones and surgeries. What they really need is emotional healing, to face the pain and trauma they are running from, and to forgive those who have hurt them.

But as one who has come out of that deception, I can tell you this: affirmation is like a drug, and it is never enough. Change the circumstance for a moment. If your child was a meth addict, would you ever give them meth? How about just a little bit? They would probably "love" you more if you did. They would be happy with you. They might even tell others how wonderful you are. But you know that is only going to help them destroy themselves. Why are LGBT issues the only ones we seem to question whether we should affirm or not? Because we have drunk the Kool-Aid that this is who they are and not a behavior they have chosen.

Affirmation of the transgender identity can mean a variety of things. At the most basic level, it includes the person's chosen name and pronouns, but may also include things such as buying them the clothes of the opposite sex, makeup and jewelry (if they are male), chest binders (if they are female), etc. This affirms their choice and speaks this identity over them. It leads them further into delusion; it thickens the scales over their eyes. It allows them to believe that the Bible is not really as important as they were taught. It makes your faith look weak and impotent. It gives the impression that your faith is just something you've chosen to believe but

that it isn't actually real. Like a child pushing the boundaries when you have said no, an adult child will push your boundaries to see if your faith is real.

If we study Romans 1 there is a clear progression that I have seen played out in the lives of many transgenders. It is just one more confirmation that the Word of God is true and that it has never changed. It begins with suppressing the truth because they don't like it (v. 18), rejecting what they know of God (v. 20), being unthankful and bitter about circumstances (v. 21), making up their own version of God (v. 21), and their hearts become foolish and darkened (v. 21). They profess to have become wise and perhaps "enlightened", but in reality, they have become fools (v. 22). They begin to believe in a God in their own image, rather than allowing God to humble them and to conform them into the image of Jesus (v. 23).

So, God gives them over to their own lusts to dishonor their bodies because they rejected the truth and exchanged it for what they knew to be a lie (v. 24-25). They choose to worship the creature and not the Creator (v. 25). Then God gives them up to vile affections and they become inflamed with lusts for their same-sex (v. 26-27). (Now some may have had those lusts and desires since childhood because of sexual abuse, exposure to pornography, or other factors, but now they have embraced it and willingly acted on it). Verse 27 tells us that they receive the due penalty for their error. Sexual disease is rampant among all that are sexually deviant, but especially among homosexual men. This is the penalty for their decision. They have knowingly acted on something they innately knew to be wrong and vile, but they loved their lusts more than God. There were many other things along my journey that were consequences for the actions I chose, and they were intended to be a warning and a reminder of the truth.

After two judgments that are intended to humble them and cause them to cry out to God, many embrace the lie even more and try to forget God (v. 28). As a result, they are given over to a reprobate mind that will reject all truth (v. 28). This is the point I see many of the LGBT come to where they no longer have any desire for the truth. They heap lies to themselves and relish them eventually convincing themselves they are true. The last verse says they who know "the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same but have pleasure in them that do them. (v. 32)" This is why transgender children (or anyone else embracing and celebrating an LGBT lifestyle) often want nothing to do with a parent who will not affirm their choices. They want to pull you into their darkness, into their delusion. They want you to see the world the way they see it.

The problem is, when one embraces a lie, it is as if a switch is flipped. When you reject the truth and knowingly exchange it to believe a lie, it is like putting on glasses that cause you to view everything upside down. Love becomes hate. Hate becomes love. Good becomes evil. Evil becomes good. This is why your kids are screaming at you, telling you that you are being hateful if you don't affirm and celebrate their choices. They are seeing the world, and their relationship with you, the opposite of the way it is in reality. So if you affirm them and call them by their preferred pronoun, yes, they will see it as loving, but in fact, it is hating them.

Think of it this way: each affirmation to a transgender is like a piece that is building a bodysuit out of paper-mâché. This suit is the outward appearance of the identity they want to project to the world. Every reminder of the truth is like punching a hole in it, and they must quickly heap to themselves affirmation to cover the hole.

This is a phenomenon that a psychologist named Dr. Leon Festinger called "cognitive dissonance" many years ago. He discovered this when living among and studying a cult. I will summarize this below from a book called "When Prophecy Fails" that he co-authored with several others who studied this cult in the 1950s. The cult members believed that there was going to be a massive flood that would destroy much of the United States, but that an alien spaceship was going to rescue a select group who devoted their lives to serve them. When the big night that they were to be picked up on came and went without incident, they were faced with a decision: admit that what they had believed was a lie and abandon the cult or reembrace the lie and reinforce it. Most chose to reinforce it. Why? Because they had invested too much to throw it all away. Many had quit their jobs and sold all of their possessions. They had put all of their proverbial eggs in one basket to believe they would be one of the chosen to be rescued. When faced with evidence to the contrary, they were in too deep to admit they had been deceived.

They reinforced the lie in two ways: by justifying the contrary evidence and by proselytizing. For example, they determined the aliens didn't come that night because they were testing their loyalty. The leader of the group communicated with the aliens again (which she did by "free-writing" – it is clear in studying this cult that she was communicating with demonic spirits) and they gave her a new date they would come. Over and over this cycle would repeat, each time they had to find a new reason that the lie was still true. The "aliens" would give her more excuses such as weather conditions or interference from metal on their clothing. In addition, the cult members tried to gather as many people to believe

with them as they possibly could. That is why the LGBT are so desperate to get you to affirm their lifestyle. If they can get you to abandon the truth with them and embrace the lie, it relieves the cognitive dissonance for a while. This gives them a false sense of peace and euphoria. They will likely love you and sing your praises to others. That is, until the next time they are reminded of the truth and they will want you to compromise further because you were a source of relief before.

During the years I lived as transgender, there were many times I was reminded of the truth. But I hated the truth. As Romans 1 tells us, I held the truth in unrighteousness. I knowingly rejected the truth because the truth was painful. In order to do that, I had to do what I was describing above. For example, after I got my first prosthetic genital device that allowed me to use urinals, I realized how fake it was. I began to realize that even though I was looking like a man, I clearly wasn't. But I shrugged it off, believing that it would be real once I had the surgeries. Then after my chest surgery, I realized that I had still not become a man. I remember feeling so stupid for believing it and being tricked. I should have admitted it right then. Instead, I had too much invested. I still wanted it to be true so badly. I was willing to do anything. So, I thought it's because I still have all of the female hormones. Maybe they're competing with the male hormones. So, two years later, I had all of the female organs removed (via hysterectomy and oophorectomy).

It still wasn't real. I was becoming desperate. These were just the major ones. I was having dreams many nights about being exposed or waking up with long hair again and my transition hadn't started or showing up at work without pants. Once in a while, I would be outed (often by children who tend to be more perceptive and less concerned with political correctness). Every time I had to keep reinforcing the lie because I hated the truth. It didn't matter to me anymore whether my family affirmed me or not. Some family members did, and some did not. I no longer wanted to be around those who didn't because their very presence reminded me of the truth that I was trying so hard to forget.

Thankfully, by God's grace, He never gave up on me. You can see my story on this website of how Jesus set me free. He radically set me free from the lies I believed and I have no desire to ever go back. I have fully embraced the truth. I am now thankful for my mother who never gave in to the delusion. She stood firm that she was not going to call me Jake or use male pronouns to refer to me. She and my dad both stood firm in their faith like a lighthouse, always willing to point me home, but never coming into the delusion with me. They weren't perfect, they made mistakes. But God used it all.

We must stop listening to the world and our children to figure out what love is. True love is sacrificial, even when it is not what the person wants. They may even believe that it is the opposite of what they need. Proverbs 27:6 says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." Proverbs 29:5 says "A man who flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his steps." True love often hurts feelings. Some of the most profound things said in my life were things I hated and didn't want to hear. At the time I might have told you that person was being hateful. Looking back, however, I can see it is those people who truly loved me.

There were many times during those years that the relationship with my parents was very strained or even non-existent. I was angry with them and didn't want a relationship with them. It was only by God's grace I was in contact at all. They tried all kinds of things to win my love including taking me out to dinner, buying me clothes, including me in family vacations and more. None of that was what demonstrated true love to me.

But the night I felt the most loved by them was the night I was so angry with them I couldn't see straight. The night I came out to them I knew they were not going to accept my transgender identity. I yelled and screamed and cried and tried everything I could think of to manipulate them into affirming my choice. Instead, they cried and poured out their hearts and I could see the love in their eyes as they begged me not to do this. Instead, they tried desperately to remind me of who I was. They offered to do anything they could to get me real help. But I didn't want it. I recognized they loved me too much to allow me to destroy myself. That night I was angry, and I had wished that they didn't love me. I had wished that they had just done whatever I wanted. I was astonished that they were willing to sacrifice the relationship in order to do what they believed was best for me.

I would have never admitted that then. Satan wants you to believe the lie that love is always going to make people feel good about themselves and that you will always be loved in return. The truth is even Jesus confronted people. He called them out of their sin and never once embraced their sin as being good. Consider this: Jesus loved every single human that ever lived, and most of them hated him in return. While He encouraged people and commended them for their faith, He continually exhorted them and called them to repentance. We must love as He loves, and we can never love with lies.

Ultimately, this is also about you. God is testing you. He is trying your faith by fiery trials (1 Peter 4:12-13). "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I

have tested you in the furnace of affliction.” (Isaiah 48:10). You cannot save your child either way. You cannot affirm them enough or compromise your faith enough to love them back to Jesus. Only God can transform their hearts. He can use you, as He did my parents. But it was not through them telling me how wonderful I was—it was in their continual lifting up of Christ and how faithful and trustworthy He is. You must be like a lighthouse: unwavering and unmoving, steadfast in your faith. That way, when they are wearied by the darkness and the sea of sin that tosses them about, they can always find their way home.

I cannot guarantee anyone any particular outcome. I cannot guarantee your child will not commit suicide any more than I can guarantee they won't take drugs, become an alcoholic, or die in a car accident. Your faith must be in the person of Jesus Christ and in Him alone. Surrender your child into His hands. Like Hannah, give them back to the Lord. They belong to Him. Seek Jesus with all your heart, mind, and soul and allow God to grow your faith during this time. Get your eyes off of your child and the circumstances and onto Jesus. Do the same for your child when given the opportunity. Point their eyes away from themselves and onto Jesus. You must choose Him above all else, even if your child never comes to the truth. I believe they will. There are thousands detransitioning and many former LGBT that have been radically saved and set free.

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.” (Matthew 10:34-39 KJV). ([https://afa.net/the-stand/family/2020/03/a-letter-to-parents-of-transgenders-from-a-former-transgender/#.XneTxUG\\_i6E.email](https://afa.net/the-stand/family/2020/03/a-letter-to-parents-of-transgenders-from-a-former-transgender/#.XneTxUG_i6E.email))

## Believing as Bludgeoning

Posted on April 8, 2020 by [Rev. Paul R. Harris](#)

To anyone who has memories of WW II and certainly those who remember the Depression, what is going on now probably seems like an overreacting at best or a “Chicken-littleing” at worst. People are definitely unnerved, and some are undone. Most people my age are more concerned about the economy and politics than they are with getting sick.

Passages keep running through my head like: “There were they in great fear, where no fear was”

([Psalm 53:5](#)). When the Devil, the World, or our Flesh say, “Fear.” Surely, our Lord says, “Fear thou not.” Another passage is, “If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small” ([Proverbs 24:10](#)). I keep thinking: this isn't even really a day of adversity, at least here. It's the fear of a *possible* day of adversity coming. And if sci-fi teaches us anything, the monster Fear feeds on our fears.

The present situation reminds me of being in New Orleans when a hurricane approached. Everything else went off the air but the latest radar map. I saw two big ones coming in our time there. For one we evacuated; for the other the family evacuated, and I stayed. Hour on end they showed the storm. Would or wouldn't it be a direct hit? How high the winds? How big the storm surge? You didn't know; you couldn't know. So, in the words of Roosevelt, there was nothing to fear but fear itself.

I have titled this blogpost “Believing as Bludgeoning”. “Trusting as Truncheoning” would be more apropos since it keys in on the aspect of faith that is easiest to question, doubt, or attack, i.e. do I trust enough or hard enough. But I had to look ‘truncheoning’ up to spell it and it's verb sense is archaic. (But is it, if I can use it and some know it? I throw this in for the Postmodern enthusiasts who read my blog. Both of them.)

What I am referencing is Spurgeon's “Coach” way to heaven which he identified as [Psalm 56:3](#), “When I am afraid, I will put my trust in Thee.” And his “First Class” way to heaven Which is [Psalm 56:11](#): “In God I have put my trust, I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?”

I shared this with my sainted friend and mentor Pastor Bryan Sullivan years ago, saying that it could bring guilt down on those in ‘coach.’ He responded the Confessional Lutheran way: “Isn't it glorious that we have a Lord who says both?” [Author's note: When you search a phrase to verify it and your own writing is the first Google hit, that's probably not good. I wrote of this originally October 27, 2008. My rule is that if a blog is older than 10 years you can reuse it; unless it's younger and you want to. I couldn't find this quote in Spurgeon's *Treasury of David*, so perhaps it's apocryphal, or I've misattributed it.]

Whether we go ‘coach’ and are cramped by our fears or ‘first class’ where we breath freely and deeply without the broken rib of fear stabbing us, the important fact is where we are going for Jesus' sake. And in His name, by His grace, through His power, we will get there despite our fear and to spite Fear.

## ***Creedal Christianity is....***

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

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

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

### ***Creedal Christianity is....***

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

## **For Life at the Movies**

by Pastor Michael Salemink

Faith doesn't mean blind belief without any evidence. Rather, faith means particular past experiences influence future expectations. Faith means trust, and trust implies trustworthiness. The Heavenly Father earns and establishes our faith with His history of gracious overtures. Indeed, He has left evidences everywhere of His affection for humankind. As Romans 1:20 proclaims, "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made." And Psalm 19:1a, 2a and 4a affirms, "The heavens declare the glory of God ... Day to day pours out speech ... Their voice goes out through all the earth." Our Lord and God has put His fingerprints and footprints in time and space, most especially by the incarnation of His Son, our Savior Jesus Christ.

His shadow and His signature fall also upon history and story. Any good story only gets its goodness from echoing and reflecting the great story of sin and salvation. Maybe a specific story doesn't explicitly feature God or the Gospel, but its themes, characters, and plotlines parallel those of fall and forgiveness, iniquity and atonement, redemption and restoration. Using narrative to teach eternal truths didn't originate with Jesus, but He did give parables a special place in communicating Christian grace and faith. So movies make a great way to be Gospel-motivated voices For Life. Here are a couple recommendations for experiencing life's sanctity with family or neighbors. What would you add to this list?

1. *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946, PG): George Bailey's life gets repeatedly interrupted by other people's needs. He feels like a failure for never achieving his dreams. When he concludes everybody would be better off if he'd never been born, an unexpected intruder dramatically demonstrates how all human lives are inextricably intertwined.

2. *Horton Hears a Who* (2008, G): A Seussian elephant upsets the social order when he discovers a world of microscopic people living invisibly within a single flower. Though he risks losing everything by trying to help his skeptical friends hear the miracle, nothing takes away his cheerful enthusiasm that "a person's a person, no matter how small!"

3. *The Drop Box* (2015, PG): South Korean pastor Lee Jong-rak has a heart for children with disabilities. He and his wife build a baby-sized compartment into the wall of their home where unwilling parents can anonymously deposit impaired little ones to be cared for rather than abandoned to the streets. This documentary captures how much—believe it or not!—compassion and happiness enter the pastor's home and family through that small opening.

4. *Awakenings* (1990, PG-13): Dr. Sayers works with patients in a mental institution who are mostly unresponsive. Though the facility's staff has become somewhat callous, Dr. Sayers remains caring and persistent. His research leads [www.lutheransforlife](http://www.lutheransforlife) him to a miraculous medication that restores many of the residents to full consciousness and ability, but it soon manifests sinister side effects. Along the

way, everyone involved learns that the worth of humanity can't be limited to their physical or intellectual abilities.

5. *October Baby* (2011, PG-13): A series of medical mishaps sends teenager Hannah delving into her past for answers. The secrets she discovers—including an abortion—leave her feeling utterly unwanted. Little does she know that faith and the love of family will follow her into her grief until reconciliation brings healing.

6. *Bella* (2006, PG-13): Waitress Nina gets fired for arriving late to work. Chef Jose becomes concerned and follows her outside. As he walks and listens, she shares her anxiety about being unexpectedly pregnant, unemployed, and alone. She intends to abort, and he accompanies her to the clinic. Can his generosity and tenderness persuade her toward adoption? Will her needs raise him above his tragic past? Is there anything that the delightfulness of family can't heal?

7. *Arrival* (2016, PG-13): Alien spacecraft descend around the world, and the American government enlists Louise, a linguist, and Ian, a physicist, to investigate. Their optimism contrasts with the skepticism of everyone else and enables them to decipher a powerful technology. Louise and Ian learn that even supernatural forces cannot achieve beauty apart from suffering, but that fleeing from grief also means losing goodness.

8. *Juno* (2007, PG-13): Casual sex results in flippant sixteen-year-old Juno becoming pregnant. Though abortion seems the obvious answer, she finds her experience of the clinic distasteful and begins pursuing adoption. But even that arrangement begins to unravel, and it will take the love of her family, the support of her child's father, a sense of humility, and a lot of humor to keep the situation from turning catastrophic for everybody.

9. *The Nativity Story* (2006, PG): This faithful dramatization presents the experiences of Mary and Joseph as they face her unplanned pregnancy. Though they encounter many more dangers and inconveniences than most, they receive parenthood as a holy calling. Herod's attempts to use death as a solution also wreak more havoc, but through it all the miracle of new life is worth it.

(*LifeDate*, Spring 2020, pp. 6-7)

(<https://www.lutheransforlife.org/media/lifedate/>)

## 'Unbelievers' Review: Fearful, Faithless

*It wasn't the books of Hobbes and Spinoza that shook the faith of the people. Rather, the people's weakening religious certainty cleared the ground for godless philosophers.*

By Jeffrey Collins

Updated Feb. 28, 2020 6:18 pm ET

Of these-called New Atheist writers who have churned out popular books in recent years, none has enjoyed more oracular authority among devotees than the sociobiologist Richard Dawkins. Mr. Dawkins deploys his expertise in evolutionary theory to cudgel the feeblest sparring partners that he can find: usually unnamed biblical literalists and fundamentalists. The technique is inevitably more condescending than edifying. Indeed, Mr. Dawkins's signature polemical move is to infantilize his opponents. Reasoned

natural science, he dubiously insists, can all but disprove theism. Only a stubbornness born of mental immaturity, superstition or fear can explain the atavism of religious belief. The task, as the supercilious title of his recent "beginners guide" to atheism has it, is to "outgrow God."

There is a long tradition of psychologizing believers in this manner, which conveniently removes the need to answer religion theologically or philosophically. From Thomas Hobbes to Bertrand Russell, atheists have presented theism as a projection of terror and ignorance, a fantasy produced by the desperate desire to find purpose in a pitiless universe of brute matter. It is the ingenious strategy of Alec Ryrie's "Unbelievers" to reverse this mode of analysis. "It is not only religious belief which is chosen for such instinctive, inarticulate, intuitive reasons," he writes. "So is unbelief." He has thus produced an "emotional history of doubt."

Mr. Ryrie, a distinguished historian at Durham University in Britain and an avowed Christian, is fairer to atheists than they often are to believers. "In writing an emotional history of atheism," he writes, "I am not arguing that atheism is irrational. I am arguing that human beings are irrational; or rather, that we are not calculating machines." Our belief or disbelief is often intuitive and felt. Particular intuited or emotion-laden beliefs, he argues, may in fact be true or false. This even-handed approach should go without saying, but it is rare in the contentious public debates over the veracity of religion. It therefore works to rebuke atheistic polemicists such as Mr. Dawkins, Daniel Dennett and Sam Harris, who inevitably claim for their own convictions a unique capacity for detached rationality.

Mr. Ryrie further investigates the lineage of today's atheism and finds that the emotional "reasons" for it are "deeply rooted in religion itself." The gradual waxing of atheism in the Western world is something of a global anomaly. Outside of Communist China, most of the world espouses forms of theism. Atheism is not some natural implication of human progress but a contingency of a particular history. Modern atheism in the West can have an assertive and even angry quality in part because the emotions that animate it—namely, anxiety and anger—were responses to the particular European religious upheavals of the 16th and 17th centuries. Modern Christianity and modern atheism grew like Jacob and Esau, as twins struggling in the womb.

"Unbelievers" devotes itself to the watershed period between Martin Luther in the 1520s and Baruch Spinoza in the 1670s. To anyone reared on the myth that the culture of European Christendom was chiefly subverted by "reason" and "science," Mr. Ryrie's account will be bracingly unfamiliar. The Scientific Revolution plays no role in his book, for the excellent reason that virtually all of the pioneering natural scientists of the era were devoutly religious. Robert Boyle, Isaac Newton and their colleagues would have viewed the New Atheists as bombastic provocateurs. They certainly did not consider belief in God, the soul and the afterlife to be puerile delusions.

Instead of science, Mr. Ryrie emphasizes the dissolvent effects of the Renaissance and, still more, the Reformation. The former revived certain unorthodox views of the ancient pagans, such as Machiavelli's opinion that religion was a noble lie useful only for governing the vulgar.

Renaissance humanists also brought sharper critical methods to bear on ancient texts. When applied to the Bible, these methods revealed the Scriptures as historical artifacts composed by all-too-human authors across time. Such awareness didn't generally nourish formal atheism, but it could unsettle orthodox scriptural interpretation.

Renaissance culture, however, remained an elite milieu and barely rippled broader society. Far more disruptive, as Mr. Rylie shows, were the Reformation schism and the cataclysmic religious wars that followed.

As Catholics and Protestants divided, they deployed philosophical skepticism against the theological claims of their opponents. This intellectual trench warfare stirred up a miasma of religious doubt. "The Reformation," writes Mr. Rylie, "by choosing scepticism as its key religious weapon, in effect required believers to transition to a different kind of post-sceptical faith." Protestants in particular were encouraged to search the Scriptures on their own, seeking personal theological understanding without clerical guidance. Some found the pressure of justifying their own beliefs too much to bear. In this context, Mr. Rylie identifies two emotions of the age that began to corrode religious certainty: anxiety about the instability of one's own beliefs; and anger at the churches for failing to guide and unify believers.

Responses to this fragmented and fraught context varied. Some humanists reduced religion to its ethical teachings, stripped of theological mystery. Other contemporaries recast their belief as a felt allegiance or faith, "reasons of the heart," as Pascal put it, rather than purely rational assent to theological creeds. The stoic Montaigne, enduring the post-Reformation Wars of Religion that tore France apart, urged believers to retreat to a private, contemplative realm. A decision to withdraw faith "reverently from the brutal public turmoil" of the age, Mr. Rylie says, did seem to provide believers an honorable "cloister." But it also ensured that God was "newly absent from the everyday world." To some contemporaries, this was but another form of "atheism": an absence of God.

Alongside figures counseling patience or retreat, a growing minority began to voice radical doubts about Christianity itself. Mr. Rylie eschews the hunt for formal, philosophical atheism and instead delves into trial records, diaries and passing rumors about the state of popular belief. He is interested in the "social, political, and emotional" history of atheism, not its intellectual history. He unearths some striking cases: a lapsed Genevan Catholic with a manuscript denying God stashed in his attic; a dying Parisian lawyer who scandalized his priest by avowing that "when we die, everything is dead for us"; 17th-century diaries agonizing over "risings of Atheistic thoughts" within their own minds; the skeptical men and women who flaunted their disdain for God by dancing, playing cards and indulging in feasts, drunken revels and sex.

The very definition of "atheism" evolved across Mr. Rylie's period. The word entered English usage only in the 16th century and then usually denoted not the formal denial of God but heresies, such as the rejection of Christ's divinity or the afterlife. Speculative atheism—a formal, philosophical rejection of divinity—was unheard of in these decades, but "practical" atheism was perceived everywhere. The practical

atheist might mouth orthodox theism but nevertheless lived as if God did not exist. Thus it was that the playwright Christopher Marlowe was condemned as an atheist for his love of "tobacco and boys," as was Queen Elizabeth I for her tendency toward Machiavellian statecraft.

Early moderns psychologized atheists as libertines and degenerates. They were, one contemporary wrote, "ambitious to be like the beasts that perish . . . well content to be annihilated." As Mr. Rylie observes, "practical" atheists—that is, atheists defined as heretical or immoral—didn't really challenge the coherence of religion. Practical atheism "did not threaten the moral economy of Christendom," he writes. "Instead it reinforced it, by lining unbelief up with intolerable antisocial depravity."

But in an era of religious disagreement, and with the authority of competing churches increasingly resented, more brazen atheism began to appear. In Mr. Rylie's account it wasn't the formal philosophical atheism of Thomas Hobbes and Spinoza that shook the faith of the people. Rather, the weakening religious certainty of the people cleared the ground for the books and arguments of godless philosophers.

The entire process, furthermore, did not simply follow from detached "reason," as the New Atheist narrative likes to insist, but was also, and with greater effect, an emotional response to Christianity's traumatic internal strife. The central figure in Mr. Rylie's account isn't some bald-faced speculative atheist reveling in godlessness like an early-modern prefiguring of Nietzsche. Rather, it is an unwillingly tormented skeptic: the atheist "who could think of little else but God, and who feared he did not exist." Radical Protestants were "trained not to ignore or suppress their doubts, but lean into them in the hope and expectation that this was the road to a firmer, more mature, post-atheistic religion." Many indeed did solidify their faith, but a growing number cracked under the strain.

"Unbelievers" is an elegant and canny book. Fixed within the era of the Renaissance and Reformation, its commentary has a distinctly modern relevance. It offers a salutary reminder that most of us adopt many beliefs out of intuition, habit or deference to our social environment. It is common nowadays to dismiss religious belief as conventional in this manner, but atheism itself is often just as surely produced by a lifeless and unreasoned conformity. It is disconcerting to recognize that our dearest beliefs can be (at least partly) rationalizations of our feelings and desires.

Mr. Rylie doesn't intend this point to justify a chaotic relativism but to suggest that our own ideas, and not just those of our ideological opposites, can be more visceral than rational. "In early modern times," he writes, "atheism and unbelief were active stances. They required some commitment, given that custom, habit, society and law all made a quiet religious conformity the path of least resistance." In modern times, it increasingly appears that the opposite conditions prevail, and that religiosity is now a dogged counterculture in a world of disbelief and indifferentism. In particular historical circumstances, either of these two perspectives might appear "intuitively obvious," but neither really is. Nor is religious belief or disbelief likely to evaporate entirely under the withering sun of pure reason.



In an intelligent conclusion, Mr. Ryrie observes that the “humanist-materialist argument against Christianity” has arguably weakened over the past century. In 1900, an educated European might have believed that “the universe is infinitely old and entirely deterministic, that humanity’s ‘races’ are fundamentally different from one another; that the process of evolution is governed by some sort of progressive life force.” But scientific breakthroughs, such as the Big Bang and the tracing of common human ancestry, might be taken to accord with allegorical readings of Genesis.

It is thus not really the case that a slow accumulation of scientific discovery is inexorably crushing the life out of theism. And if modern atheism is not simply the triumph of the scientific mind, perhaps, like its early-modern cousin, it springs partly from emotions such as anxiety and anger. Our ancestors doubted and despaired in the face of moral disagreement and institutional failure. There is no reason that we moderns shouldn’t react similarly to the same conditions. In these respects, the New Atheism may not be so new.

—Mr. Collins is a professor of history at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario.

([https://www.wsj.com/articles/unbelievers-review-fearful-faithless-11582904695?shareToken=sta8c26436891f475e99c61107e12cbad3&reflink=article\\_email\\_share](https://www.wsj.com/articles/unbelievers-review-fearful-faithless-11582904695?shareToken=sta8c26436891f475e99c61107e12cbad3&reflink=article_email_share))

Copyright ©2019 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

## Notes from the Elders

Here are a few notes from our last two elders meetings, on March 25 and May 12, 2020.

### **Fellowship Matters:**

Both the Church of the Lutheran Confessions and the Evangelical Lutheran Dioceses of North America (ELDoNA) have been contacting Pastor to invite him to their conferences. He is not planning to attend either one. He told them he would pass the invitation along to the elders, and we declined to go, as well.

Pastor asked the elders to watch a service from April 19 from a church in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). Pastor chose this church for no particular reason, picking the first one listed alphabetically on the ELS website. His purpose was to see what a real ELS service is like, and he asked the elders to watch it and give our reactions as well. We can share a link to the service if anyone would like to see it for themselves. Here are some of the elders' comments about the service (paraphrased):

This could easily be a service at Riverbend or Shoreline (non-denominational churches). There was a projector screen hanging directly over the altar, and two of the three songs were contemporary praise and worship songs.

The sermon topic was the "better resurrection" from Hebrews 11. But the emphasis was on a better life now, not on eternal life in Christ.

The sermon was informational and educational in nature. It included helpful facts about the coronavirus, but it failed to proclaim the Gospel. This looks and sounds Calvinist/Reformed.

### **Sundays:**

With the elders' support, Pastor has decided to resume full Sunday services beginning on May 24, including Sunday morning Bible class and kids' Sunday School. Our website will continue to say that we are not having a public service, however; we have enough room to accommodate our members but are not open more broadly yet.

We discussed rotating Sunday School teachers more regularly, in 6-month cycles, to avoid the problem of having "lifetime Sunday School teachers." This would give everyone the opportunity to be in Bible class regularly.

We discussed what we would do if an elder needs to lead the service while Pastor is on vacation (for example, if the guest pastor has to cancel unexpectedly). If that should happen, Pastor recommends that we use the page 5 service or possibly Matins (with a modified benediction). We would play or read one of Pastor's old sermons.

### **Elder responsibilities:**

Pastor reiterated that the elders must attend church dinners if possible, and if they can't, they should tell him. Similarly, elders should be in Divine Service, even when he is on vacation, or tell him if we won't be for some reason. He asked us to report this so that you would know, if you don't see an elder at a church service, it's not because we are playing hooky!

We discussed how the elders could best handle changes to Pastor's compensation if the church were to have financial difficulties.

According to the constitution, the elders are responsible to "staff, train, schedule, and supervise the ushers and acolytes." Caleb has written an excellent document with guidelines for training ushers. We are reviewing this now for formal approval at our next meeting in July. It may involve some improvements to how usher duties are handled.

--Derek Kurth, Secretary of the Elders

## JUNE 2020

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<b>PASTOR ON VACATION 2<sup>nd</sup> -18<sup>th</sup></b>					
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
<b>PASTOR ON VACATION 2<sup>nd</sup> -18<sup>th</sup></b>						
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
<b>PASTOR ON VACATION 2<sup>nd</sup> -18<sup>th</sup></b>						
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
			7:15 PM BIBLE STUDY			
28	29	30				
		7 PM VOTERS MEETING				

## JULY 2020

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
			1	2	3	4
			7:15 PM BIBLE STUDY			
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
INSTALLATION OF OFFICERS			7:15 PM BIBLE STUDY			7 AM-1 PM GARAGE SALE
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
		6:30 PM ELDERS MEETING	7:15 PM BIBLE STUDY			
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
<b>YOUTH GROUP TRIP 20<sup>TH</sup> - 23<sup>RD</sup></b>						
26	27	28	29	30	31	
<b>VACATION CHATECHETICAL SCHOOL 27<sup>TH</sup> - 30<sup>TH</sup></b>						

Trinity Lutheran Church  
 1207 West 45<sup>th</sup> Street, Austin, TX 78756 ~ 512.453.3835 ~ [www.trinityaustin.com](http://www.trinityaustin.com)  
 Trinity Te Deum is published bi-monthly.  
**Deadline for all articles is the 15<sup>th</sup> of the odd months.**  
 All articles must be approved by Rev. Paul R. Harris. Articles with no author are written by him.