

Trinity Te Deum

The official newsletter for Trinity Lutheran Church

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Retirement

Since November 2020, the Elders and I have been talking about my retirement. Actually, I've been talking, they've been mostly listening, sometimes advising, always supportive. We talked about a hand-off approach where I would stay in office 'till the new pastor was installed being the pastor who worked with the Elders and the Voters on the Call. Some did not like this; even I was uncertain. To do this, I would start drawing my retirement benefits at the beginning of 2024 while getting a modest salary from Trinity. The new pastor would be full salary and benefits. This was my idea, but in the end I thought it unwise. Trinity couldn't realistically pay two pastors, so this would be an irregular Call as would be my position. Irregular Calls, while not wrong, outright almost always end irregularly. So in the end it's going to be the clean brake scenario.

This will begin January 1, 2024. My last Sunday will be December 31st. I know what you're thinking. That's a bad time of year. Why can't I wait 'till the end of this Confirmation Class? Why do you have Confirmation and Lenten services planned through 2024? What's going to happen now?

It is a bad time of year, but like I told Cheryl when she was lamenting how difficult it was for one of our kids because of where he was in the birth order: we didn't choose the when, God did. I can take full retirement for both Social Security and the LCMS at age 66 ½. That's December 26, 2023. That's a function of my birth date and Social Security rules.

Why couldn't I wait till the 3rd year Confirmation kids were done? Because then it would be just one more for my grandkid and then it would always be one more year giving the number of grandkids I have. I wanted to teach my own kids Confirmation. In fact, I stayed in the ministry just to do that. (God uses all sorts of motivations.) I did not want to teach my grandkids for the same reason that only in an emergency ought grandparents raise grandkids.

Why did I go ahead and plan both Confirmation and Lent in 2024? I did this for the sake of the Vacancy Pastor. He will know exactly where I was and where I planned to go in both cases. In the 4 Calls I've taken in my ministry, I never had that. It would have been so much easier if I had. The Vacancy Pastor will have the option of using the laid-out plan or not.

What's going to happen now? I will use the next 5 months to sort through 40 years of files. I will pack books, sort 24 years of paperwork from here, and begin to

disengage. The Elders are the Call Committee per the Constitution and Bylaws. They will find a Vacancy Pastor, a pastor to work with the Call Committee, and a Visitation Pastor. One pastor may do all three or some sort of combination. Ultimately, the Voters will issue the Call.

I have said it before. This is the best, by far, congregation I have ever pastored. The Old People who were here when I got here stuck with me. Never once did they utter, "We never did that before or this way." They followed; I led. They were sheep (some old goats) and I shepherd.

I never dreamed I'd make 40 years. I told the Elders in 2003, my 20th anniversary, that I was like the longshoreman who goes to his doctor with a complaint about his back. The doctor asks him to demonstrate how he lifts his loads. The man does and the doctor says, "No wonder you have a bad back. You've been lifting things all wrong for 20 years." This was true of me in the ministry. Some of the burdens found in every pastor's ministry, I didn't bear rightly. This was no one's fault but my own. And in truth, I think it has been God's grace through Trinity that enabled me to go on for the last 20 years. You pay above the salary scale; you were willing to allow me a sabbatical in 2012 and when I didn't get it, you funded your own. The two Sundays in a row off four times a year have been very helpful. I leave grateful not resentful.

Biblical Custom or Tradition

Without a doubt this has been the hardest 10 Foot Pole Passage to write a sermon for. Yet, without a doubt, this one is needed most for your daily life. Unless I can teach you the relationship between Biblical custom and tradition, you will be at risk in modern society. You will be prone to thinking sins such as homosexuality are nothing more than an outdated Biblical custom and such customs as Sunday Worship are sins if you fail to do them. From these errors, we pray the Lord would deliver us by means of this sermon.

There is a distinction between custom and tradition in the Bible. In modern English there is not. You could say it is our **custom** to open presents on Christmas Eve or it is our **tradition**. Either would be proper. The words custom and tradition are regarded as interchangeable in English.

They aren't in the Greek language, the language the New Testament was originally written in. The word English Bibles often translate "tradition" really means that which is authoritatively passed down. The translation "doctrines" or "teachings" or "ordinances" is much better than "traditions."

Paul says to the Corinthians, "I praise you for thinking of me in every way and for keeping the Christian **teachings** as I delivered (literally "passed them down") to you." Later in this chapter Paul says what he passed down to them he got from the Lord. The Lord is the source of Biblical tradition, doctrine, teaching.

This is not true of Biblical customs. Customs are uses, practices, conventions thought up by men. They are not handed down by God; they are not prescribed by God. They are developed by humans for one reason or the other.

Strictly speaking there are no Biblical customs only customs of Biblical times. There are no customs thought up by men that God holds us too. There are plenty of customs found in Biblical times though. Taking off your sandal to show you relinquish your rights, wearing a ring in your nose, and eating meals while in a reclining position are examples of customs found in Bible times. However, none of these are Biblical doctrines.

While there are no Biblical customs only customs found during Bible times, strictly speaking there are no doctrines only valid for Bible times. But we must be very careful here. God Himself established some Biblical doctrines which were valid only until Christ came. These doctrines pointed, led, brought Israel to Christ; once He had arrived, the need for these special dietary and worship doctrines ceased. God Himself, not man, made the doctrines invalid.

A similar thing is still true with marriage. It is a Biblical doctrine that husband and wife stay married. But when God ends the marriage by the death of a spouse, the other is not bound by the doctrine of marriage. God has placed them into a new situation.

Biblical doctrines are to be held to in every situation. We have no permission to ever give one up. In our text, the doctrine at issue is the relationship between man and woman. No matter what science, society, feminists, or sexists would ever say, the people of God, could never give up the Biblical doctrines Paul states here: (I Cor. 11: 1-16):

The head of a woman is the man. Man is God's image and glory; woman is man's glory. Man was not made from woman but woman from man. Man was not made for the woman. The woman was made for the man, yet in the Lord man and woman are not meant to be apart at all. Woman was created from and for man, but all men now come into existence through a woman and for the benefit of women.

No man, no woman, no government, no society, no group is free to ignore, set aside, improve or modify a Biblical doctrine. Doctrine has its source in God. Not only does that mean He alone has the right to change or modify it, but He alone has the ability to do it.

Ask yourself: Have you always been here? Do you know all things? Have you never made a mistake? Well, God has always been here, God does know all things, and God has never made a mistake. When God revealed what He did about men and women, it wasn't that He didn't have enough experience, or didn't know what was going to happen in the 1990s, or made an error in evaluating how things would develop.

When God wrote what He did about male and female, God knew all there was to know about human biology, physiology, and psychology. God knew all there was to know about modern society, modern finances, and modern technology. God knew all there was to know about the weaknesses and downright wickedness of men. God was a scientist before there was science; He was a sociologist and psychologist before there was sociology or psychology; He was a champion of the proper treatment, respect, and honor of women before there was a feminist movement to advocate it.

So how dare you or I, in the name of biology, psychology, sociology, modernism, or feminism advocate, condone, or passively accept the setting aside of the Biblical doctrine of male and female? Doctrine is to shape Christians; Christians are not to shape doctrine. Male and female in Christ are to submit to the judgment of doctrine not brazenly sit in judgement of it. We, dear friends in Christ, are to be led to repentance by doctrine, not to lead God to repent of the doctrine He gave us.

If we turn God's doctrine into a custom, a mere dated tradition of man, then we have nothing, absolutely nothing to stand on. If the doctrine of male and female can be outdated, so can the doctrine of the free forgiveness of sins for Jesus' sake: I'm sorry; it was only for the Christians at Rome that a person could be justified by faith without doing good works. You see, people began to abuse that teaching, so now we believe it's a better doctrine to teach that you're saved by faith and good works.

And yes in Bible times it was a doctrine that homosexuality is sinful, but God didn't then know about loving, lifelong sexual relationships between two people of the same sex. God only knew about the violent homosexuality found in Sodom or portrayed in Romans. If God had known about the kind of homosexuality we do which is bright, which is committed, which is gay even, He wouldn't have condemned it.

And you see, God really didn't know just how gifted women were; that's why He prohibited them from teaching or having authority over a man. And God didn't know just how wicked and weak men were, that's why He made man the head instead of having husband and wife share leadership in marriage. And if God had only known how terribly husbands would abuse their authority, never would He have said, "wives submit to your husbands in everything." And, if God had known how unlovable a wife can make herself, he never, ever would have said, "Husbands love your wives as Christ loves the church."

Do you see how weak, how unwise, how ungodly God becomes when we start changing doctrine to suit us? Then the test for doctrine becomes human reason. And where will reason take us? Just how reasonable is it that rather than having you suffer and die eternally in hell for your sins, God became a Man and suffered and died in your place?

Just how reasonable is it that God by words spoken by another sinner can forgive you all your sins? Just how reasonable is it to you that your babies can be sprinkled with water in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost

and be reborn into everlasting life? Just how reasonable is it that Jesus Christ should place Himself on that altar in, with, and under bread and wine so you can eat His body and drink His blood to be strengthened and preserved in faith? Our reason will only take us away from God not to Him.

Biblical doctrines are to be held to always. Customs in and out of the Bible are to be held to sometimes. This is especially true when a custom upholds or supports a Biblical doctrine. This was the case in Corinth with women covering their head.

Corinth was a Greek city. Among the Greeks wearing a covering on your head was a sign that you were under someone else's authority. Wearing a covering in worship was an indication that women were standing under men as God had originally ordered things. It supported the Biblical doctrine of headship of the man and of the proper relationship between men and women.

But wearing a head covering was only a custom; it was not a Biblical doctrine. Paul tells them in verse 15 that they can judge their own situation in order to determine "Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with nothing on her head?" And Paul even closes by pointing out that this is not his custom or that of his other churches: "But if anyone means to argue about this, we do not have such a custom, nor do the churches of God."

Churches that had a Jewish or Roman background had the opposite custom. Men covered their heads in prayer. Why? Because it was a sign of reverence to God and of personal unworthiness before Him. So while among the Greeks a woman who refused to cover herself would be a sign that she rejected the Biblical order of male and female, among the Jews and Romans a man who refused to cover himself would be sign of disrespect and arrogance before God.

If custom supports a Biblical doctrine, like woman wearing head covering in Corinth did, then Christians should willingly uphold the custom. Other times a custom will just be a fad of the times meaning nothing, and we should not attach guilt to violating it.

For example, some Catholics raised in old Catholic (not Biblical) doctrine consider Sunday a day of holy obligation. Even though Saturday Mass has long been approved by the Pope, I heard Andre Trevene say, "I feel guilty going on Saturday." It is a Biblical doctrine that God's people gather to be taught and fed by God, but it is by custom that the church gathers on Sunday. If you go on Wednesdays or Saturdays instead, you aren't sinning.

What about hair length? Some Pentecostals/Charismatics obligate their women, based on this passage, to have long hair telling them they are sinning if they don't. How about it? Is it a Biblical doctrine that you women with short hair are sinning? Or, for that matter, that you men with long hair are?

We must follow Paul's argument closely and only call doctrine what he does. The doctrine here is that the man is the head of the woman. Paul goes on to show how the Greek custom of women wearing head coverings as a sign of being under authority supports that doctrine. Paul then

goes to the natural realm and talks about hair. Greek women wore their hair long. Greek men wore their hair short. It was a disgrace in Greek culture for a woman to shave her head; the lowest of the low prostitutes did this, and unfaithful wives were also shaved. It was also a disgrace for Greek men to wear their hair long. What they did in the natural realm (hair lengths) illustrated the distinctions God first made at creation.

Is long hair on men or short hair on women considered a disgracing of God's creation today? No, by and large it is readily accepted. There are beautiful, very feminine supermodels who wear their hair short, almost shaved. There are very masculine male athletes who wear their hair in a ponytail. Hair length and style today is a fashion statement not a statement about what makes male and female.

What is to be avoided here is tearing down doctrine by violating custom. In our culture, it would be tearing down doctrine for a man to violate custom and wear a dress; in Scotland it would not. In our culture, it would be tearing down doctrine for a man to violate custom and wear mascara or lipstick.

These are the easy ones. The harder ones in today's culture are those customs dealing with women. While we all know it is a tearing down of doctrine for a woman to "wear the pants in the family," is it tearing down doctrine for a woman to violate custom and smoke a big fat cigar? Is it tearing down doctrine for a girl to violate custom and play high school football? Is it tearing down doctrine for women to work in construction?

To me, these things are at best a blurring of doctrine. But I will leave it to you to wrestle with these and other situations yourself. As St. Paul told the Corinthians so I must tell you: "Judge your own situation." Decide for yourself which of our customs support and serve God's doctrine.

But I beg you to remember what St. Paul called on them to remember. Remember the angels are looking on. We don't make decisions about custom in a vacuum. It's not only about my rights or what I want. The angels of God who have been bound by doctrine for all time and will be for all eternity, the angels who serve God's doctrine happily and willingly are looking on. They call us to support God's doctrine by our customs because doctrine serves the Gospel which saves sinners. Amen

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.

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Are We Following Luther or Arminius?

I am increasingly of the opinion that American Lutherans are Arminians at heart. According to Jacob Arminius, a Dutch theologian active around 1600, salvation works like this: Way back in the mists of eternity, God

looked ahead to see which of His fallen creatures would, if they had free will, turn to Him and be saved. Based on this foreknowledge, God then marked, or predestined, these people for salvation through Christ. The teaching was current in various guises even before Arminius, and some 16th century Lutherans thought it sounded pretty good. Philip Melancthon, Luther's closest colleague, came close to asserting it. Luther, on the other hand, wouldn't touch it. He said that if our salvation depended on anything we do or might do, even deciding to believe in Christ, then it is no longer a free gift of God, but rather something we earn. Faith then becomes a good work, something we do to merit God's favor. It is Luther's view and not that of Arminius that became enshrined in the Lutheran Confessions. But Luther's view has not held up well in today's church. The pitch goes something like this:

Evangelism guru: "Would you give up your life to save your grandson from drowning?"

Grandpa: "You bet."

Evangelism guru: "Then would you give up your music to save your grandson from going to hell?"

Grandpa: "Well, I ... uh ..."

The assumption here is that God is not fully responsible for a person's salvation. If He were, then He would find a way to save the grandson regardless of what style of music Grandpa's church employed. If the kind of music really makes a difference in who is ultimately saved, then salvation depends on our actions, and what we do or fail to do can affect not only our own salvation, but someone else's as well. That is flat-out Arminianism, and it is a terrible burden on the Church.

It is not the first time the Missouri Synod has been confronted with this. It happened in the 19th century when revivalists such as Charles Grandison Finney were trying to light a fire under people so they would turn from their sluggish depravity and obey God. Finney believed that if the Church just did things in the right way, in a way calculated to excite people, then the natural and inevitable result would be that people would turn to God in great numbers. For Finney, the mark of the Church's success was how many people came to know Christ. While

Finney was best known for his "anxious bench," later revivalists such as Dwight L. Moody and Billy Sunday would make extensive use of music to draw people in and convince them to accept Christ.

In 1890 Missouri Synod president H.C. Schwan took aim squarely at the revivalists when he wrote that the danger in moving to English as the language of worship was the American spirit, "that shallow, slick, indifferent, business-tainted spirit in which also spiritual matters are handled in this country; that sentiment which ... seeks salvation in sweet sensations and in a much busied workery of all kinds."

We see something similar a century earlier in German Lutheranism. In the 16th and 17th centuries, church music was considered good if it glorified God and carried an appropriate text. But in the 18th century, writers began to assign a more significant role to it: "to edify the audience,

to arouse them to devotion, in order to awaken in them a quiet and holy fear toward the Divine Essence," in the words of Johann Adolph Scheibe, chapel master to the King of Denmark. Writer after writer presented similar ideas; namely, that the purpose of church music is to manipulate emotions in order to move people closer to God. As with the revivalists, the more people it brings to Christ, then the better the music.

In truth, music does not bring people to Christ. God does. God may use music as His vehicle; but we must not think that music, by itself, has the power to save souls, nor that individuals moved by music are able to choose to be saved. That is all God's doing, working through His appointed means of grace. I am reminded of the U. S. senator who visited Mother Teresa's clinic and home for the dying in Calcutta. On seeing all the illness and poverty there, the senator asked her how she could possibly cope, how her work could possibly be successful. She replied, "I am not called to be successful; I am called to be faithful."

We too are called to be faithful. Do we select our music in church to be successful in moving people, in reaching them for Christ, in convincing them to become Christians? If so, welcome to Arminianism and the Law. Or do we choose music that glorifies God and conveys as well as possible through its texts and associations the fullness of Christian teaching? If so, welcome to Luther and the Gospel.

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Theses on Justification

A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (Continued: X-XI)

X. Justification and Renewal

54. Although the term justification may be used interchangeably with regeneration (the bestowal of faith), since faith given in regeneration is the faith through which the sinner is justified (Gal. 3:26-27; Titus 3:3-7; Ap IV, 72, 78, 117; FC SD III, 18-19), the term must never be confused or use interchangeably with renewal (sanctification, love, the keeping of the law), which always follows faith. (Acts 13:38-39; Rom. 3:28; 11:6; Ga. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-10; FC Ep III, 7-8; FC SD III, 30)

It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That we are justified, or forgiven, by virtue of our "mystical union" with Christ, rather than by God's verdict or pronouncement of forgiveness in the means of grace; That since faith involves our union with Christ, this union with Christ becomes the basis for our justification before God.

55. Faith, which is worked by the Holy Spirit in the sinner solely through the Gospel, must not be confused with contrition, that is, terror of conscience and fear of God's wrath, which is worked by the Holy Spirit in the sinner solely through the law. (Ps. 32:3-5; 130:1-8; Rom.

3:19–28; Gal. 3:12; Ap XII, 53–54; SA III, iii, 2; FC SD III, 22)

It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That true faith can exist in the heart without contrition.

56. Good works and renewal are the result of faith, or the fruit of faith, in the sense that the Holy Spirit, who has quickened us and made us new creatures in Christ, works the fruits of faith in and through us. (Ps. 110:3; Jer. 31:31–34; John 15:1–11; Rom. 12:1; 2 Cor. 5:17; 8:3–4; Gal. 5:22–24; AC VI, 1; XII, 6; XX, 29; Ap II, 35; IV 45, 125, 250, 275; SA III, xiii, 2; LC II, 2, 69)

It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That good works in the Christian life are to be motivated by the law; That good works are not a necessary result of an individual's justification.

57. Faith, which alone receives and obtains grace and forgiveness, must not be confused with good works, which are pleasing to God only because of faith in Christ. (John 15:1–11; Acts 13:38–39; Rom. 3:28; 11:6; 14:23; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8–10; AC VI, 1–3; Ap XII, 67; FC SD III, 27–28)

It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That man is saved by faith and works; That good works are pleasing to God for their own sake or because they justify; That is possible for a person to desire to grow spiritually without having already been justified through faith; That challenging Christians to do good works can cause faith to grow.

XI. Certainty of Salvation

58. Every justified and regenerated sinner can and should be certain of his salvation. (John 10:28; Rom. 8:37–39; Phil. 1:6; 2 Tim. 1:12; 1 Peter 1:3–5; 5:10; 1 John 3:2; 5:10–13; AC XII, 5; XX, 15; Ap IV, 85, 314–315, 382, XI, 2; XX, 8; LC III, 92, 96–97; FC SD XI, 90)

59. The justified sinner's certainty of salvation should not be sought in his experience, good works, feelings, or faith, but rest only in the once and for all obedience of Christ's life and death and resurrection. (1 John 5:9–10; Rom. 8:32–34; 10:6–8; 1 Cor. 1:29–30; 4:1–5; Gal. 6:14–15; AC XX, 15; Ap IV, 58, 285, 313–315; XX, 8; LC III, 96; FC SD II, 56)

It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That no one can be certain of forgiveness or justification before God unless he also perceives in his life the "spiritual gifts" imparted by the Holy Spirit; That Christians can only be assured of their justification before God when they are able to identify the evidence of, and the presence of, good works in their own life.

60. The justified sinner's certainty of salvation is mediated only by the Gospel, to which alone he clings for certainty. (2 Cor. 1:19–20; 1 John 5:9–10; AC XX, 15; XXV, 4; Ap IV, 2, 58–60, 85, 285, 313–315, 382; XI, 2; XX, 8; LC III, 92; FC SD XI, 25–31, 65–70)

It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That we are not to rely solely upon Christ and the Gospel promise in the means of grace for the certainty of our salvation, but that we must also be able to "see" in our own

life the evidence of "spiritual gifts" in order to be certain that we have been justified before God.

What To Say When You're Approached About 'Their' Pronouns

Patrick Madrid is Roman Catholic radio host on Relevant Radio. That's 970 on your AM dial. He hosts a program named after him. In the 9 O'clock hour on Tuesday, May 23, he offered this suggestion of how to respond. I will not say it as well as he did, but I think I can convey it well enough for you to use.

Before they actually ask you to use their pronouns say, "I really would like to make sure we're on the same page before you go any further."

"Do you believe in being tolerant? I certainly do and I want to be sure we're on the same page in regard to toleration?" They will say that they are.

"Do you believe in diversity? I certainly do. America is the Land of Diversity, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, the right to pursue life, liberty, and happiness, and I want to make sure we both accept and value diversity." They will because that's one of their cornerstone premises.

"Finally, I want to be sure you don't think anyone else has the right to tell you that you must think, speak, or act contrary to your core beliefs because I certainly don't. That's the stuff of Nazism, Communism, the KKK, and brainwashing." They will agree.

If they don't get the point, they will ask you to use pronouns that don't reflect biological reality, but in doing this they are not being tolerant, not valuing diversity, and they are telling you to think, speak, and act contrary to your beliefs.

Patrick Madrid said it better and clearer than I, and I have added some things which I think improve the argument/presentation. In this I'm probably wrong, but I couldn't help myself. If Mr. Madrid responds to my email, he usually doesn't but that might be because I'm pointing out an inaccuracy about Lutheranism, I will try to get a transcript of what he said exactly.

Danger – Close

Posted on [June 26, 2023](#) by [Rev. Paul R. Harris](#)
(This is sermon I wrote in 1994. I had the secretary retype it in this format because if I did it, I would edit as I go. And I wanted you to hear it as I wrote it almost 30 years ago. The sermon is based on [Ephesians 4:17-21](#). In a May 1, 2023 blog I published a letter I had written to WORLD magazine in regard to an article that said pornography would not be dealt with till after the Baby Boomers had gone. I mentioned that almost 30 years ago this Boomer had addressed this issue from the pulpit. Here's the original sermon.)

If you're on the battlefield and need to call in artillery fire real close to your position, after you give the grid coordinates where you want the artillery, you say "Danger – Close." And that's what I have to say about pornography this morning – "Danger – Close."

There is no place where we're not close to it. Pornography is not limited anymore to a few men's magazines, French postcards, or smut books. Pornography is found in popular novels where sexual acts, which add nothing to the plot, are described in titillating detail.

Pornography is not limited anymore to X-rated movie theaters. Most neighborhood video stores have a section for "Adults only," which contains as raunchy material as any Adult Bookstore ever did. It's almost funny. People who would be up in arms if an Adult Bookstore moved into their neighborhood are happy to have a video store close by.

Pornography is not limited anymore to X-rated movie theaters you have to sneak into or magazines you have to sneak home. Pornography can now be transmitted directly into your home through cable or satellite. You can enjoy all the pornographic material you want and no one will be the wiser. As one cable TV executive said, "You probably can't get your wife to go to a porno film, but you can show her one at home."

Pornography is not just limited to X-rated movie theaters anymore nor is it even limited to the adult section of your video store. There is a whole new genre of movies being made for the mainstream public. They're called erotic thrillers. The thrill doesn't just come from the suspense, mystery, adventure, or drama, it comes from graphic and usually perverted sex. Another pornographic offering made for the general public are videos trying to disguise themselves as helps for marriage. But folks, turning to a Playboy video for your marriage problem makes as much sense as turning to a casino for your money problem.

Pornography is not just found in living rooms, bedrooms, or adult rooms in video stores; it's found in classrooms. In the '70's, one college I went to had an elective on sex. The main resource for the class was pornographic movies. At another college, one of the textbooks for a required freshman sociology course was *Human Sexuality: Contemporary Perspectives*. The textbook defended homosexuality, lesbianism, premarital sex, masturbation, pornography, and abortion, and described sexual technique in great detail.

There's no place that we're not close to pornography. Even if it's not in our homes, it's more than likely in the homes of some of our children's friends. My first exposure to hard core pornography came when I was 12 or 13. I was at my friend's house. We went to the same Lutheran grade school and church. His dad came downstairs while we were shooting pool and tossed us a small paperback filled with explicit, perverted black and white pictures. All he said was, "Enjoy yourselves."

Pornography: Danger – Close. It's all around us and its impact is close to home. If pornography is in your marriage, whether you're the man who brings it in or the woman who tolerates it, you're explicitly doing what Hebrews 13 says don't do. "Don't defile the marriage bed." Pornography brings filth into the marriage bed. It introduces an ungodly, self-centered mindset that works against married love. Pornography encourages the lustful

passion that St. Paul says is found among believers, but is not to be among believers.

Even if pornography is not in your marriage bed, it still impacts you. Pornography leads to crime. The common interest among serial killers is pornography. 1983 statistics show that those states with the highest sales of pornography also have the highest number of rapes. And there has never been a child molester who has not been found to be a habitual user of pornography.

Pornography impacts us all. It degrades the image of God in man. The 1986 U.S. attorney general's study of pornography found that today's pornography doesn't merely show naked people or even ordinary sex acts. "The MAINSTREAM of explicit material... focuses on rape, incest, defecation, urination, mutilation, bestiality, vomiting, enemas, homosexuality, and sado-masochistic activity." Friends, pornography is not the equivalent of Renaissance nude paintings and sculptures which depict the beauty of the male and female body. Pornography depicts the filthy, disgusting things sinful man does to the beautiful body.

The impact of pornography is always negative and it's always progressive. Jeremiah says of a civilization on the brink of destruction, "They were not ashamed and they did not know how to blush." Doesn't that describe us? Pornography leads us to this point. A 1980's study found that "exposure to pornography desensitizes and addicts the viewer. This is true whether the pornography is 'hard-core' depictions of graphic sexual violence or 'soft-core' depictions of consensual sex or 'neutral' sex education materials."

Pornography: Danger – Close. There is nowhere you're not close to it. Its impact is close to home and its origins are close to home. Eighty percent of pornography is produced in Los Angeles County, but that's not its origins. Playboys' headquarters is in Chicago, but pornography doesn't originate there. Bourbon Street is close to home and it's pornographic, but pornography doesn't originate there either.

Pornography starts within us. Jesus says, Out of the heart comes evil thoughts and sexual sins. Pornography doesn't leap off that video tape or magazine page into your heart. No, it starts in fallen human hearts and oozes out into books, magazines, and movies. James 1:14 says that each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by HIS OWN LUSTS. Pornography doesn't create something in the heart that wasn't there before. It intensifies the lusts that's there to begin with.

So we can't blame Hugh Hefner, cable TV, or our local video store. Even if these would all be gone, pornography would still be in our hearts. This is the truth David proclaims in Psalm 51. He blames his adultery with Bathsheba, not on the fact that she drove him to do it by bathing seductively outside beneath the roof of his castle, no he blames it on his sinful conception.

The origin of pornography is our sinful heart. St. Paul calls it the Old Self or Old Adam. Jesus calls it the Flesh. Whatever you call it, it's clear what the Old Sinful Self does. St. Paul lists among its deeds sexual immorality,

impurity, and sensuality. In our text Paul says that our Old Self is corrupted by “deceitful desires.” The Old Self thinks it can be satisfied by pornography, but it’s deceived. The Old Self needs more perverse, more lewd, more demonic depictions of sexual activity to get the same feeling of satisfaction and even then the Old Self isn’t satisfied. It always wants more.

St. Paul in our text shows us the insatiable nature of the Old Self and tells us that if we don’t deal with it when it’s still close to home, at its roots, it will continue to branch out. He points to unbelievers to show us the pattern: First the understanding becomes darkened. What’s the harm in pornography? What’s wrong with using it, especially if I use it with my spouse? But just like you develop callouses over what makes you frightened if you watch horror movies, so you become calloused if you use pornography. The same old things won’t turn on the Old Self anymore. So the use of pornography escalates either more, or more perverse, material is used. Finally, says St. Paul, the person is given over completely to sensuality. Then every kind of impurity with greediness is practiced. Sex becomes a totally sensual thing, a totally self-centered thing. It loses all spiritual dimensions. Sex ceases to be what God intended it to be, a physical picture of a spiritual reality. In other words, the relationship between husband and wife, in time, no longer reflects the relationship between the Church and Christ, the heavenly Bride and Groom, in eternity.

Friends, you Old Self is always going to want pornography. There’s never going to come a point in your Christian life where you’ll not be drawn to pornography. How can I be so sure? Because St. Paul tells us in Romans 8 that the Old Self is not subject to the Law of God and it’s not able to be. You can’t reform, modify, change the Old Self. The forbidden fruit of pornography is always going to look delicious and even beneficial to the Old Self.

The cause of pornography is close to home. But thanks be to Jesus that the cure for pornography is also close. It’s in those waters over there in the Baptismal font.

Water applied in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit brings to you the One able to defeat pornography, the perfect God-Man, Jesus. Jesus never lusted after pornography. He never had lewd obscene thoughts. Although He was tempted in the exact same way we are – even worse – He never sinned. This perfect Man who is also God comes to you through Baptism. St. Paul says in Galatians 3, “As many of you who have been Baptized, have put on Christ.” That means you’re covered through Baptism by the perfect life of Jesus. God doesn’t see you lustily sitting in front of that video. God doesn’t see you secretly reading that magazine. God doesn’t see your perverse heart greedily devouring that pornography; He sees Jesus.

When these waters touch you, more than just water washes over you, so does Jesus’ blood. Revelation describes people in heaven as those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. Baptism is the washing of water with the Word of God. Here, the blood that Jesus

shed on Calvary is poured over guilty, lewd, obscene souls and makes them pure as the driven snow. It’s as if you never had soiled your heart, your mind, or your marriage bed with the filth of pornography.

These waters are the cure for pornography because right here is where that Old Self from which pornographic desires flow is drowned, or if you prefer St. Paul’s language, crucified. He writes in Romans 6, “Therefore, we have been buried with Christ through Baptism into death...Our Old Self was crucified with Him that our body of sin might be done away with.” The next time pornographic thoughts attack or tempt, remember, that part of you is dead. Dead men don’t lust. Dead men don’t look at filthy videos. Dead men don’t read porno books. You’ve been buried with Christ. That part of your life is over with.

And a new life has begun. These waters give birth to the New Self. In your Baptism you have been born again by water and the Spirit, says Jesus. In your Baptism, you have experienced the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, says St. Paul. This New Self of yours has been created in righteousness and holiness. This New Self of yours gets no joy in pornography. It gets no thrill from it. Why? Because it is holy and pure. It’s true; your Old Self really enjoyed pornography, but after Baptism, your Old Self doesn’t live with you anymore. You’re a new creation, a New Man, a New Woman.

Friends, water destroys all forms of pornography. Magazines, video tapes, VCR’s, TV’s and books are all ruined by water. But ordinary water can only destroy the forms, not the source, of pornography. Only the waters of Baptism can drown the Old Self that produces and longs to wallow in pornography. But thanks be to Jesus! The waters of Baptism do destroy the source as sure as ordinary water destroys the forms of pornography. Danger – Close! Take cover in your Baptism! Amen.

Rev. Paul R. Harris
Christ our Savior Lutheran Church
Harvey, LA, July 17 1994
Ten Foot Pole Sunday

“YouTube’s pre-eminent ‘Father Figure’

Posted on March 20, 2023 by Rev. Paul R. Harris

That’s what the dustjacket for Jordan Peterson’s 2018 bestseller, *12 Rules For Life*, refers to him as. And if this really “is the voice of reason a generation has been longing to hear” better to be deaf.

I know. Here I go again. Too strident, stringent, acerbic, and indelicate. Peterson first came on my radar when another Confessional Lutheran pastor sent me a clip of what Peterson had to say about marriage. It’s what Bible and Church has always said about it, but coming from someone who doesn’t claim to be Christian, it was powerful in the ears of the unchurched. I asked that pastor if he had read any of his books. He said he had read parts but mainly accessed him on YouTube. I asked which one would he recommend I read. He said, *12 Rules for Life*.

If James Dobson married Dr. Laura (Look her up.), they would produce Jordan Peterson. Like Dobson, he speaks to family issues. Like Dr. Laura, he speaks of noble pagan law. And why is it that society puts forth Dobson who has one child, Dr. Laura who has one, and Peterson who has two as authorities on child-rearing? It took 3 before I vaguely knew enough to recommend anything to anyone, and before the Lord gave no more on this side of heaven, I had barely scratched the surface. Unless you've raised more than 2 kids, you shouldn't be considered an authority on child-rearing.

I mentioned Jordan Peterson in Sunday Bible Class and most knew of him once again showing me how out of touch I am. The best anyone could say about him was that he "destroyed liberals," meaning their reasoning and logic. Only two people, both in their 50s, saw him for the danger I believe him to be.

In a nutshell, perhaps more like the size of a clamshell, here's my problem. When I read the collected fiction of Argentinian writer Juan Louis Borges I couldn't tell if I was reading accurate history, idyllic history, or pure fiction. I couldn't tell when Borges is really in a story, just telling one as himself, or as a character. Often it seemed like an admixture. With Peterson, I can't tell when he's speaking religion, psychology, or Christian. It's an admixture, so that his conclusions can sound very Christian, very religious, but in reality they are just psychobabble that sounds profound.

Let me offset this with some of the good things that I think cause people to resonate to him. While not referencing homeschooling as I did in the 90s, Jordan says, "...peers are the primary source of socialization after the age of four" (135). With my kids, I taught them to refer to schools as 'socialization centers.' The best thing I can say about this book is that he does a remarkable job of showing how things like the Green movement, climate change crowd, and the population controllers lead to a hatred of humanity which at core is what every serial killer is (148). He points out how "the data" supports a traditional understanding of gender not the LGBTQ's agenda (298). And he makes points about male and female that I made in my book 21 years before. "When softness and harmlessness become the only consciously acceptable virtues, then hardness and dominance will start to exert an unconscious fascination. Partly what this means for the future is that if men are pushed too hard to feminize, they will become more and more interested in harsh, fascist political ideology. *Fight Club*, perhaps the most fascist popular film made in recent years by Hollywood... provides a perfect example of such inevitable attraction. ... And if you think tough men are dangerous, wait until you see what weak men are capable of" (330, 332).

I like this and I suspect things like this are what other Christians gravitate toward. The Reformed and Evangelicals are drawn by his *12 Rules* because they are the *Purpose Driven Life* without Christian trappings. He calls Nietzsche, "the great nineteenth-century German philosopher" and says he "so brilliantly noted, 'He whose life has a why [i.e. a purpose] can bear almost any how'"

(63). But should the Christian be drawn to the guy who says of God "whatever and whoever He may be" (356). Should we think one who equates Christian faith with wishful thinking and speaks of being converted to the religion of evolution worthy of following? "I had outgrown the shallow Christianity of my youth by the time I could understand the fundamentals of Darwinian theory. After that, I could not distinguish the basic elements of Christian belief from wishful thinking" (196). Aside from his lack of Christianity, is the following deep wisdom to you? "A few years later, when I was having teenage trouble with my dad, my mom said, 'If it was too good at home, you'd never leave'" (326).

More dangerous still, he operates with a doable Law which abnegates the need for the Gospel: "If you pay attention to what you do and say, you can learn to feel a state of internal division and weakness when you are misbehaving and misspeaking" (224) and change your behavior appropriately. And while he doesn't say dreams are from the Spirit, he puts as much stock in them as the now besmirched Freud did: "I have learned to pay attention to dreams, not least because my training as a clinical psychologist. Dreams shed light on the dim places where reason itself has yet to voyage" (xxxii). Finally, doesn't the following strike you as funky? Speaking of his friend Chris; "Maybe I picked up some change in scent that night, when death hung in the air. Chris had a very bitter odour. He showered frequently, but the towels and the sheets picked up the smell. It was impossible to get them clean. It was the product of a psyche and a body that did not operate harmoniously. A social worker I knew, who also knew Chris, told me of her familiarity with that odour. Everyone at her workplace knew of it, although they only discussed it in hushed tones. They called it the smell of the unemployable" (294).

I think Christians of all stripes are drawn to Peterson for the same reason my young kids were drawn in 1991 to Brooks and Dunn. In their song "Brand New Man" they sang, "I've been baptized." The song is totally secular, not remotely Christian, and the baptism they spoke of was not ours. But my kids knew about Baptism and on the radio was someone saying that word. Likewise, Petersen, on secular college campuses uses Christian phrasing, references, and a worldview, but in reality it is not Christian. It is dangerous not to realize this.

The United Lutheran Mission Association

I attended ULMA's spring meeting and learned a lot about what this organization is and what it is capable of doing. Pastor Harris asked me to put together something of a "report" on what I thought about it and what my impressions were, which I have distilled into five key takeaways:

1) Post-Synodicalism

Some people, me included, were a bit wary about joining a synod. Before joining, I found myself asking, "We just got out of bad relationship with a synod; do we

really need be getting ourselves into another?" I won't speak for others, but I know that despite my initial hesitation, I wanted us to find the fellowship I knew exists and considered that if this wasn't it, would we find it at all? So, I voted to apply for membership. I wasn't wrong. This is it. These guys are all just as disillusioned with "synodism" as we are. The congregations of ULMA don't want to tell anybody what to do and they don't want to be told what to do. There are a wide range of practices among the various congregations and nobody tries to make majors out of minors. I think this epitomizes St. Paul's admonition to "live at peace with one another" and is in strict accordance with Article X ("Church Rites — Which are commonly called Adiaphora") of the Formula of Concord. Comparing this with other small groups of former LCMS congregations, such as the OLCC (Orthodox Lutheran Confessional Conference) and COELC (Confessional Orthodox Evangelical Lutheran Communion), this is a breath of fresh air. It is not confessional to declare unity in human traditions as requisite for fellowship, and groups who do this, regardless of how pious they may seem, make the post-synodical future we face dimmer. Practicing tolerance in adiaphora is essential to the search for fellowship now and ULMA is a shining example of this.

2) Walther Theological Seminary

How are new pastors trained when we can no longer trust that even Ft. Wayne is producing confessional pastors? We make our own. WTS appears to have a much stronger program than what is available at the LCMS seminaries. From what I came to understand, the course work is thorough and intense, and I get the impression the instructors would not allow it to become the sort of "rubber-stamp" process that churns out new LCMS pastors. Additionally, the students do a kind of vicarage at Pilgrim throughout their time in seminary, giving them more real-world experience than the one-year vicarage LCMS pastors complete. I am confident that the pastors coming out of this program will be among the most solidly confessional pastors in the world, and I recommend the voters of Trinity approve missions money to help support it.

3) Missionary-at-Large

This is a cool concept. Outlining it briefly, a graduate from Seminary could become a Missionary-at-large. Trinity could call this missionary to establish a plant and he would be expected to work to turn that plant into a self-sustaining congregation. While he does this, ULMA supports him and

his family. Once the congregation gets large enough, they can formally call that missionary to become their pastor, or call another pastor and Trinity can send the missionary to plant another congregation. This concept allows us not only to start new confessional congregations, but also to provide pastors to the sheep of confessional LCMS congregations who are without a pastor and not big enough to attract attention from the LCMS (if that congregation was willing leave the LCMS, of course).

4) Concerns over Waltherianism

The elders discussed early in talks of joining ULMA about concerns that the member congregations might have something of a low view of the office of the Holy Ministry. We want to avoid the Waltherian error that a pastor is only a pastor when he is called to serve a congregation and that he is really not any different from a trained layperson who has been selected to preach and administer the Sacraments. While pastors may not vote in meetings of ULMA, the lay delegates present showed much deference to their authority and it was obvious to me these fears were unfounded. I had the opportunity to ask another pastor there about this concern and he assured me the group has a right view of the office and that the member congregations agree such a low view must be avoided.

5) Dealing with Error

ULMA has already shown resiliency in dealing with some challenging situations with both a missionary and a member congregation going off the rails — and the ability to handle these problems bodes well for the long-term sustainability of the organization. It is encouraging to see a group of congregations actually drive out error from their midst and it makes me think that we won't find ourselves in a situation like we were in the LCMS — making a public confession of fellowship where fellowship does not exist. Of course, ULMA is a voluntary organization and we could leave if we chose to, but seeing it handle these sorts of challenges makes me think we won't have to. Here, both the will and the ability to remove congregations and missionaries from the organization exists. That much cannot be said about the LCMS.

One would be right to consider this a glowing review of the organization. I am excited to be a part of it and I think we made a great decision in applying for membership. I look forward to the meeting this November and I encourage all members of Trinity to try to attend as much of it as the ULMA constitution allows.

~Brandon Pelton-Cox, Delegate

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August 2023

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2 HEBREWS BIBLE STUDY 7:15 PM	3	4	5
6	7	8	9 HEBREWS BIBLE STUDY 7:15 PM	10	11	12
13 CONFIRMATION MEMORY PRE-TEST	14	15	16 HEBREWS BIBLE STUDY 7:15 PM	17	18	19
20	21	22	23 HEBREWS BIBLE STUDY 7:15 PM	24	25	26
27	28	29	30 HEBREWS BIBLE STUDY 7:15 PM	31		

September 2023

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