

Poem after Sunday morning church service in a tent

by [Brian Doyle](#) in the [October 16, 2013](#) issue

In a huge hotel where the concierge told me there had been count them  
*Three* weddings the day before, which is why they erected the epic tent.  
I got there early and watched people file in. The tall guitar player asked  
Me if I was the minister. The minister turned out to be a lady who once  
She got started talking never really stopped except for the music. When  
The songs started everyone except me stood and held hands and swayed.  
I am a Catholic man and we only hold hands with children and we don't  
Sway. I tried for a while to figure out what species of church service this  
Was but you just could not tell. There was swaying, which seemed to  
Be Baptist, and discussion of sacrifice and fasts, which seemed Calvinist,  
And there were tall people with excellent teeth who seemed Mormonish,  
And there was talk of the Spirit and the One and suchlike, which seemed  
Unitarian to me, but then I heard the name *Christos* . . . Greek Orthodox?  
For a minute there I wondered if there would be snake-handling or maybe  
A sudden burst from the Koran, or a pause while we discussed the Torah,  
But the service stayed determinedly undeterminable. In the opening salvo  
Of this service I was amused, thinking that it might be something offered  
By the hotel for its guests, an attractant, some expensive consultant's idea  
For adding value to your stay at the hotel, and I marveled at the marketing  
Brilliance of it—welcoming everyone, offending no one, proffering ritual  
Without trademark, adding bonus usage to the rent of the tent, as well as  
Excellent community relations. But soon I stopped being amused and was  
Moved, despite the endless blather of the minister. People had come to be  
Moved. They had come to hold hands and sing. There were bright ribbons  
On the folding chairs by the aisle to signal the bride's or the groom's side.  
There was a man's green tie knotted to a tent stake. There were tiny babies  
In their mother's arms. There was a man hunched in a wheelchair. Why do  
We ever bother to argue about religion? All religions are the same glorious  
Wine, susceptible to going bad but capable of quiet joyous gentle elevation.  
They're all useful and useless, mesmerized and ruined by power, but always  
Pregnant with the possibility of humility. They are so easy to ignore. You'd

Be wise to sneer, with every reason imaginable for the curl of your knowing  
Lip. Yet here I am, on Sunday morning, in the wedding reception tent, agog;  
Not so much at the earnest idiot of a minister, but at everyone, sweetly, else.