

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.