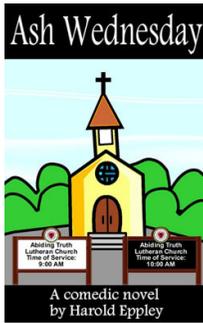


Questions for Book Group Discussion of *Ash Wednesday*

General Questions

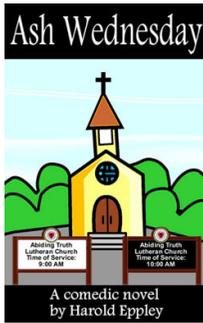
1. Who are your favorite characters in *Ash Wednesday*? Why?
2. How would you describe the relationship between Allan Weiss and Gerald Schwartz?
3. Which turns in the plot of *Ash Wednesday* most surprised you?
4. Which of *Ash Wednesday*'s scenes did you find most entertaining?
5. What role does gossip play in the novel?
6. What is the significance of the two church names—Abiding Truth and NEW CREATION!!!!? In which church would you feel most comfortable?
7. In what ways do each of the main characters change over the course of the novel?
8. How might this novel read differently had it been written from the point of view of different characters, such as Clarence, Dougie, or Dorothy Moyers?
9. Do you think *Ash Wednesday* presents an accurate portrayal of small town life? Why or why not?
10. If you were to give a different title to *Ash Wednesday* what would it be?



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Digging Deeper

1. Allan Weiss supposes “that if people saw him as he actually was rather than the way they imagined him to be, they would dismiss him as a hypocrite.” (page 39) Do you agree with his self-assessment? Why or why not?
2. Sophie tells Betty, “There’s those secrets we keep from ourselves.” (page 183) What secrets do the characters in *Ash Wednesday* keep from themselves and how do those secrets impact the story?
3. The character Vera appears throughout the novel in various incarnations. Who is she? How does she contribute to the story? Have you met Vera? Where? What form did she take?
4. In her encounter with Allan, Vera says, “You have to love someone.” (pgs 224-225) In what ways is her message a recurring theme throughout the novel?
5. In what ways are the characters more likely to see what they believe than to believe what they see?
6. Margaret tells Gerald, “You still see the world in black and white.” (page 52) How does the contrast between somber and more vivid colors throughout *Ash Wednesday* affect the mood of the novel?
7. What do you think of Edna’s efforts to oust Gerald in light of the revelation she makes in chapter 22?

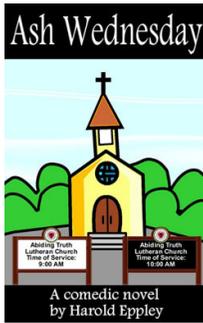


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8. Why do you think each of the following themes are repeated throughout the novel?
 - a. There are no secrets in Dustin.
 - b. You're always an ass to someone.
 - c. You can't win the battle with dust.
 - d. A Mother Always Knows.
9. In what ways does *Ash Wednesday* explore the relationship between sexuality and religion?
10. What is the significance of Allan's dream on page 219? How does it contrast with Gerald's recurring dream?

For Lutheran Theologians Only

1. How is the relationship between law and gospel manifest in *Ash Wednesday*?
2. What role does forgiveness play in the novel?
3. In what ways is the character Kristina Kirch a metaphor for the Christian Church?
4. Do you agree with Allan's statement on page 74 that "people don't go to church to learn anything new . . . they just want the preacher to tell them what they already believe is true"?
5. How would you describe Allan Weiss's sacramental theology?
6. What do you make of Bishop Leroy Mainlaver in chapter 17?
7. What is the significance of Harriet's quote of 1Corinthians 15:51 on page 205?



Questions for Book Group Discussion of *Ash Wednesday*

8. How is Allan Weiss a manifestation of *simul justus et peccator*?
9. Author Harold Eppley states that he loosely based the final scene of the novel on the original ending of the gospel of Mark. Do you see a parallel or do you think the author is just full of crap?
10. Does Jesus love Lutherans more than he loves everyone else? Why or why not?