

22. Go Home Confessing

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An editorial in the Concordia Theological Monthly, September 1969, states that LCMS doctrinal divisions are deep, and it listed three key issues that we have dealt with at this Congress: The Doctrine of the Word, The Nature and the Mission of the People of God, and The Quest for Fellowship. This same editorial recommends a four-point program for the task ahead, as it calls it, regarding these three key issues. First, concerted fraternal endeavor to discover anew and rejoice in our oneness in the Gospel. Secondly, a willingness to recognize a greater variety in theological statements and positions. Thirdly, dedication to the task as spelled out in the Mission Affirmations. And, fourthly, an eagerness to rejoice in the great things which God has done for us in the past, including fellowship with the ALC.

What approach should we adopt? I submit to you in closing what I believe are the three steps which should be our burden at this moment: *Repentance, responsibility, and reaching.*

REPENTANCE

I begin with repentance because I believe that the Denver Convention for us in the Missouri Synod, and in various other situations it has been true for you brethren in the ALC and LCA, have given tears of joy for some victory, or also tears of sorrow because of some defeat. But I believe our tears should be for God to lead us to repentance, and tears of repentance to drive us back to Scripture and to Christ with "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." If we are to help heal the Church and be reconciled, it has to be a call to repentance. If I am to call persons to repentance then I must in all honesty and sincerity repent myself. Not, "God be merciful to the ultra of one kind or another, a sinner." But "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

If we are really going to go home confessing, then we'd better begin at this moment in repentance, asking God to change my heart, to make me new. Repent for not heeding the warning signals, for not recognizing a theological split, for not recognizing the polarization that already exists in the church, for *de facto* toleration of error even though it may not have been our desire, for partaking of other men's sins because we condone it by doing nothing, and for being guilty of what we condemn. At times we condemn lousy methods, politics, power plays, and then we become guilty of doing the same thing. I could go on and on in this list, but I need to repent today of what I condemned. For being at each others throats, for not treating the liberal as a human being. And you liberals who are here today, who are true liberals, take me seriously as I say this. We are guilty and need to repent for being embarrassed into silence, for having attitudes of defeatism. We are guilty for being concerned only about structures rather than principles. Yet the Church is going to be healed. If the house divided against itself is going to have unity, then it must have repentance, starting with me. Then I have the responsibility from my Lord Jesus Christ to call other men to repentance. Then I've got the authority, the power, the love, and the mercy from Christ by which I can call the true liberal to repentance. It is not a matter of dialoguing with him or arguing with him. What heals the visible church is repentance.

You save a marriage when there is dissension not by asking the couple to co-exist producing a synthesis and a synthetic marriage. What saves a marriage is repentance. And what saves the visible church is repentance, and calling the erring to repentance. Healing, therefore, is never a political thing

or a co-existance, or bringing the whole middle together into one, but a change of heart — repentance. Before we go home, we should repent, and then seek to be true servants of the Word.

RESPONSIBILITY

From repentance we go to responsibility. Responsibility begins by being sensitive to the need, and looking at the warning signals. The American Cancer Society warns us to be alert, to be alert to cancer's warning signals. Beloved, we have heard spiritual warning signals. Responsibility in the church for both laity and clergy alike is to act promptly on these warning signals.

The second part of responsibility deals with personal commitment. I've had the feeling in the church that we would like to have the church President alone be our watchdog — or, our leaders should give us all the theological answers. But, you are the one who goes home and confesses, you are the one in your own little tower wherever it is, you are God's spokesmen. You are the one God wants committed. Any organization that wins people over, that brings enthusiasm for the cause is to observe personal commitment on the part of the individual. That's real responsibility. It begins with a person who is solution-oriented rather than problem-oriented. We can't win anyone over by talking about what we're against, or talking about problems. We win them over because of personal commitment to the positive, Jesus Christ and His Holy Scripture and His Truth. We must have a positive testimony if we're going to be really responsible servants for Jesus Christ. And it means more than that, it means I don't have to worry about what the liberals think, or the middle-of-the-roader thinks — only what God thinks. Even though I was harrassed somewhat about coming to this great Congress, I didn't care what *they* think. What I care about is what God thinks. And if we are to go home with personal responsibility, "go home confessing," it means courage and fearlessness in our service to Christ. Take initiative to devise all kinds of means by which you're going to get your Scriptural testimony out to others. Some of you have already had your gears in motion — how you're going to play tapes for a circuit conference, the friends you're going to talk to, sharing it with your pastor, and your pastor sharing it with the laity. Responsibility doesn't allow us to sit back and let somebody else do it. The the initiative to devise the means, to be a positive catalyst for the Gospel.

Responsibility means sacrifice. Congress Vice-chairman Andrew Anderson in the committee meeting before the Congress started, prayed a prayer that God would grant blessings to this Congress — whatever the cost. The cost — are you willing to be responsible no matter what the cost? Go home confessing and get the Word out. It's going to cost if you are derided or labeled. Some people will misunderstand you. It will take time and energy and love and compassion and mercy and understanding. After rhetoric, what? After words, what? Are we just "concerned"? I hope the Holy Spirit grabs us so much that we stop being "just concerned," but go on to real sacrifice.

REACHING

Now consider *reaching*. How do we the pastors and laity, reach the down-hearted, the uninformed, the indifferent, the conservative, the liberal, the un-committed? All over this nation there are redeemed people that need to be reached by us.

The book *Walther and the Church* gives a lesson in Christian polemics and how to reach people with content: "The most effectual defense of truth is plain truth itself. Truth is self-authenticating. When it steps upon the field of battle, unpanoplied with the Goliath armament of human cunning, not varnished with the warpaint of the savage, in the dignity of its innate strength, it is unconquerable, like David with his shepherd's sling. It does not have to engage in wordy harangues like the Homeric warriors before they came to blows. To work up the necessary psychoses of aggressive complexes, it needs simply to state: "This is so, this is not so and the battle is won — let the defeated keep on howling as much and as long as they please. Alas that the

spokesmen for the truth have not always remembered in their warfare for Christianity that the weapon alone which they wielded, not anything that they might contribute to the conflict by their own dexterity, ingenuity, or bravery must achieve the victory." It's communicating the *Truth* that counts. Confess in entirety the clear facts of God's Word and the testimony of the Confessions, including the position of Synod and its Constitution, etc.

Reach people evangelically and winsomely and with love. We present our message with vitality, clearly and unequivocally, not using words or phrases that have dual meanings, or coming to inconclusive decisions. A confessing church has a confession to proclaim. It's not the organization but the organism that counts. Encourage members to become committed members of the Body of Christ. I got involved because the Word of God, Jesus Christ, took hold on me. I did not get involved because of some power structure or polities. Another brother gets involved because you're bringing God's Word in an evangelical way. Go home, identifying yourself with Jesus Christ and Holy Scriptures!

If I say, "It's the real thing," most of you would be able to identify what I'm talking about — not 7-Up, but Coke. And if I say: "You've got a lot to live," you should be able to finish it with "Pepsi." And if I say, "You can take Salem out of the country, but . . ." you know where the identification comes in. That communicating, that's reaching. But when you go home, you don't go home with slogans like we just gave you, but you go home with the *Truth*. You go home with commitment. You go home with repentance and responsibility. You will identify your Confessional stand, and Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour.

A concluding statement from the Ecumenical Declaration of Faith says: "This declaration of faith is being made to the glory and praise of our only Saviour, Jesus Christ, in humble gratitude of the free, unmerited grace He has earned for us by His vicarious sacrifice on the cross and has proffered to us by His Word. It is issued in loving obedience to Him Who demands our confessions." Some Bible passages demand us to "Go Home Confessing": "He who confesses Me before man, him will I confess before My Father Who is in heaven." "Whosoever, therefore, shall be ashamed of Me and of My Words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed when He cometh in the glory of His Father, with the holy angels."

Let's get out of this hotel, let's go home, and let's "Go Home Confessing" with a personal repentance, with a personal responsibility, and with a personal outreach to all men to whom God allows us to witness and edify.