

12th of December, 2022

Open Letter to the College of Bishops of the LCA.

Dear Bishops of the LCA, Brothers in Christ,

It is difficult to speak up against those who bear the office of parents, especially if the words that I am about to write are heavy. As is my heart as I prepare this letter. I need to begin with a confession, that I have not been as truthful and courageous as I should. For that I am sorry and ask you to forgive me.

In February 2023 it will be 10 years since I have been privileged to be a member of the LCA. With every passing year I have noticed clearer and clearer that we often interact like playing a game, where we have a set of parameters within which we need to act. We know that it is only a game, but we have agreed to elevate the rules of this game above what is true and real.

For example, we keep using certain phrases like “all the members of the LCA uphold the authority of the Scripture” even as with every year we witness more and more openly manifested rejections of the authority of the Bible. Nevertheless, we keep playing the game.

We use words like “pastoral” and “for the sake of mission” to describe our actions, and as soon as we employ these code words, they are like trump cards that beat everything else, including clear teachings of the Bible, our Confessions and our LCA Constitution.

I am sorry that I have been too weak and too cowardly to call out this game more vocally when I have seen it played. And see where this has led us. How are we different from the Roman Catholic church of the 16th century?

They did not care about the Biblical teaching. They only cared about keeping their institutional church undivided. Rejecting such perverted practice our forefathers in faith defined the Church not as an institution, but as “the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.” (AC VII)

We have abandoned this Confession, neglected the right teaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the Sacraments, instead pouring our energy into maintaining at all costs the external institutional unity. How are we different in this respect?

Dear Bishops, you have neglected your sacred vows given before God and this church that you will teach His teaching to His Church and will oversee that the Gospel is taught and the Sacraments are administered rightly. I personally have repeatedly urged you to take on this task and to teach our church on how we understand the office of public ministry and why our teaching is true and beautiful and in harmony with God’s will and good for the mission of the Church. (See my letters to the CoB from 31st of October, 2020 and 13th of July, 2021.)

During these 10 years serving God’s saints in the LCA I have not witnessed you moving even a little finger to do this, while you have not hesitated to put the weight of your office behind worldly ideologies masquerading under the slogans of equality and fairness, enabling them to run amok. I have not witnessed you taking a stand against secular social justice ideas being brought into the church right now, as the anti-Christian juggernaut, that aims to redefine who we are as human beings and why we are here, keeps adding new letters to the ever-expanding acronym of “winning love” and as our institutions are falling in line with its demands.

How long do you think we can flirt with the world before we become consumed by the world? How long can we keep playing with the fire of false teachings before our house burns down? What do you think, who did Jesus and the apostles had in mind when they spoke these warnings? Could they be referring to us?

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’” (Matthew 7:21-23)

How dreadful a thought that some Christians may say on that day: “Jesus, didn’t we fight for equality and justice and mission in your name!” Only to hear the damning answer: “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness!”

God’s judgment begins with God’s house (1 Peter 4:17). God brings His judgment upon us by giving us over to the idols of our hearts, when we choose to fear, love and trust something else more than the true God (Rom 1:24-25). It is the Triune God Himself who eventually sends “a strong delusion, so that people may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12) Can this be written about us, to awaken us, to save us?

Peter the apostle warned that there will be false teachers among us, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies (2 Peter 2:1), and the apostle Paul foretold that there will be those who will have the appearance of godliness, but will deny its power, they will be always learning, never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. (2 Timothy 3:5, 7) Can that be about us?

Our God is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” (Exodus 34:6) “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:8-9)

After what I have witnessed during these 10 years in the LCA, and especially during the last several months, I don’t even know what I should hope to achieve by sending this letter. I want to plead to you to uphold your sacred vows, to submit to the authority of God’s Word, to be the bishops of the Church in words and actions and not by the name only, for there are so many faithful Christians who trustingly look up to you for godly and courageous leadership.

As I lament our situation the verses from Ezekiel keep appearing in my mind. “If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.” (Ezekiel 33:8-9)

I pray that our gracious and merciful God who has blessed you so richly would grant you abundantly His Spirit of truth and the discernment of spirits, the Spirit of wisdom and of courage so that you would fear, love and trust our Triune God above all things, so that everything you think, decide or do would be pleasing for Him.

“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” Not to the rulers and authorities of this world, not to the cosmic powers over this present darkness, not to the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Gal 5:1, Eph 6:12)

Praying that you would stand firm, your brother in Christ and under your pastoral care,

Rev. Guntars Baikovs

Cc: Dr Nigel Lang, Secretary of the Lutheran Church of Australia