

Complicity and Co-Responsibility

People are familiar with the expressions “receiving stolen goods” and “aiding and abetting.” Someone who assists in a criminal act is co-responsible. Solomon wrote: “He who is the partner of a thief hates his own life. Even though he hears a curse he will not give evidence” (Prv 20:24). A person whose first concern is not to rat on his mates will not readily volunteer information to the police and will try not to give straight answers in court.

These days Christians all over the world are suffering from a bad reputation that Christians have as a result of sexual abuse by clergy. It went back to the 1960s in the Catholic Church in America, and since then few churches have been untouched by the scandal. A good reputation was one of the criteria for the seven men who were chosen by the church at Jerusalem to take care of the Greek-speaking widows who were being neglected in the distribution of aid (Act 6:3). In the pastoral letters to Timothy and Titus Paul stressed the need for clergy to have a good reputation with those who are outside the church. For example: “He must also have a good reputation with those who are outside, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the Devil” (1 Tm 3:7). Outsiders are often quick to point the finger at Christian people when they are blind to similar things among themselves. There is often a good deal of hypocrisy in putting on a good front out of concern for one’s reputation, but those are different questions. Obviously, the church must insist on high standards, and deal forthrightly with anyone who crosses the line. If it does not deal forthrightly with people who have the reputation of Christians and live immorally, the church is tainted with complicity and co-responsibility. Some of the coins and notes in our pockets and purses have very likely passed through the hands of wicked people. We cannot help that. Paul spoke about this to the Corinthians. If we wanted to avoid all contact with wickedness we would have to get out of the world. “However, now I am writing to you that you should not associate with anyone who calls himself a fellow-Christian and yet is sexually immoral, or greedy, or worships idols, or is a slanderer, or a drunkard, or a swindler. Do not even eat with the person who is like this. For what business is it of mine to judge those who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? God will judge those who are outside. Expel the wicked man from among yourselves” (1 Cor 5:11-13). The church must look after its own nest.

However, the issue of complicity and co-responsibility is far more serious as a result of the modern ecumenical movement. The Scriptures never have a kind word to say about a corrupted Gospel. Paul wrote, “If anyone is preaching any other gospel to you than the one that you have received, let him be anathema!” (Gal 1:9). The apostle John, whose writings are so full of love, did not see it as contradictory to write, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or say a greeting to him! For the person who says a greeting to him shares in his wicked deeds” (2 Jn 10-11). That draws a very definite line against much of the current toleration and non-discrimination.

Positively, this means that Christian congregations that are in fellowship with one another accept full responsibility for everything that is written and said in sister congregations, in sermons, books, and other official printed matter, and whatever is done and tolerated. To say less would mean that Christian churches are not taking their obligations seriously. The church not only has the duty of witnessing to the truth of salvation in Jesus Christ for sinners, but of avoiding a false witness through what it tolerates and fails to reject.

One of the more serious items on the agenda for the coming LCA convention is full membership in the Lutheran World Federation. If a person becomes a member of any organisation, such as a Masonic Lodge, we can only assume that he thinks that he belongs there. Everything depends on the nature of the organisation that one joins. Here we can apply what Premier Joe said on more than one occasion, “If you fly with the crows, do not complain if you get shot at!”

The LWF itself insists that all its member churches must recognise church fellowship with each other. That involves co-responsibility and complicity wherever wrong things are done or tolerated. The LWF officially promotes a wrong policy of “reconciled diversity.” Many individual Lutheran churches are no longer Lutheran in doctrine and practice. The LCMS has publicly made such an assertion about the ELCA in America. The new president of the LWF is Mark Hanson, the head of the ELCA. It is a church that has compromised the real presence in the Lord’s Supper by fellowship arrangements with several Reformed churches. Many Lutherans do not seem to recognise that the battle for the real presence has been lost in large sections of the church that go by the name “Lutheran.” It was signed away in Germany in the Leuenberg Concord. It was signed away in about seven Nordic and Baltic churches across Northern Europe, such as Sweden and Finland, in the Porvoo Declaration. The central teaching of the Scriptures, justification through faith, “the article on which the church stands or falls”, has been compromised in the LWF-sponsored agreements on justification with the Roman

Catholic Church.

In America, the ELCA is in fellowship with the Episcopal Church, The Moravian Church in America, the Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ. In the early days of the Church, apostolic succession of bishops was appealed to as a guarantee of doctrinal orthodoxy. It no longer means that. The ELCA has an agreement with the Episcopal Church, because of the EC's insistence on apostolic succession, that in future bishops of the ELCA will be installed jointly with its bishops. The EC has recently installed an avowed homosexual bishop. The ELCA cannot now avoid complicity with what the Episcopal Church has officially done. The ELCA is itself skirting at the edges of approving single-gender "marriages", and several of its loosely associated congregations have homosexual clergy. Membership in the LWF implies approval of all that others who are in fellowship do and tolerate. Remember that John wrote, "For the person who says a greeting to him shares in his wicked deeds."

Many of the Lutheran churches around of the world that are also full members of the LWF have officially approved women pastors. What does it mean for LCA people if their church becomes a full member of the LWF? It is not only that they might on occasion be offered the sacrament from a woman pastor from another LWF member-church, but it is also the whole question of complicity and co-responsibility. The *Theses of Agreement* say that the apostolic rule that forbids women pastors is "binding on all Christendom." Faithful Christians would refuse to receive the Sacrament from a woman pastor because of disobedience to a command of the Lord. Paul wrote that if persons do not acknowledge this, they are not acknowledged (1 Cor 14:37-38) That means that God does not acknowledge them. What a dreadful risk! What an example, also, to give to other Christians who take their faith seriously! For sanctioning or tolerating that involves complicity and co-responsibility.

In some "Lutheran" churches of Europe it has been seriously proposed that opponents of women pastors should be excluded from the Sacrament as heretics. In Germany, Maria Jepsen, the bishop of Hamburg, who is also a member of the LWF Council, once praised the calling of two lesbian lecturers, Herta Leistner and Renate Jost, to the Evangelical Church in Germany's Centre for Women's Studies and Education. These two have demanded that homosexual/lesbian relationships must be regarded as equal to heterosexual relationships.

Nearer to home in Australia, the issue of women pastors has been kept off the agenda of the coming LCA convention. The more cynical among us might say that the proponents are willing to wait a little longer until more of those who are opposed die out. However, three big issues on the agenda all involve the ecumenical movement. Two major issues come out of the LCA dialogues with the Anglican Church and the Uniting Church. Saying yes to sharing of the Lord's Supper with them would involve co-responsibility for everything officially tolerated and promoted in those two churches. The Uniting Church has officially recognised that its clergy may be homosexual. Even more serious is the fact that the Uniting Church does not accept the real presence in the Lord's Supper. Only the Sydney diocese of the Anglican Church made a public protest against the installation of an Episcopal (read Anglican) homosexual bishop in the USA. It can probably be assumed that the High-Church Anglicans do not object to it. Besides, with Anglicans, one has to distinguish between Low-Church Anglicans, who reject the real presence, and High Church Anglicans, who accept it. Lutheran fellowship with them automatically implies that, like the Anglicans, they would not regard such a difference as church divisive, in spite of *Augsburg Confession* Articles VII and X. To put it another way, the Altered Augsburg Confession of Melancthon will have won the day. For, in spite of what is officially taught, there would be complicity and co-responsibility. It would be a case of: "I cannot hear your words because of the noise of what you tolerate and fail to reject!"