

DATE: November 3, 1968

SUBJECT: EVER REFORMING

"Communion Meditation"

On October 31, 1517, an Augustinian Monk strode out to the gate of Wittenburg Church and there he attached to the door certain grievances that he had against the church. Now this act within itself was not unusual. Scholars confronted one another with fresh and new ideas in this way. Premises were attached to the door of the church that were to be debated and this was the sole purpose of Martin Luther attaching his grievances to the door of the Wittenburg Church. Though this act itself was not unusual, the response was. The time was right, to set into being the fires of the reformation. The response was immediate. There were those who had wrestled with theological premises for some time. Trying to understand their interpretation within the institutional church. Martin Luther was one of these who said that there was a divergence at the point of the theological belief and its expression in the life of the people was in the church. And this had caused him a great spiritual turmoil. It was this that he was bound to resolve. Other minds, equally fertile, lay hold upon these new ideas and the protestant reformation came into being. But like all things that are worthy within itself, there were overtones that tarnished this new life.

There's something in us that wants to see an outward expression of our rumblings and discontent. Those who were unable to face the great ideas and give them light in their own thinking and in their own lives, turned upon the church in another way. They rose up in mass. They rushed into the churches and they ripped off the altar, they scattered the icons, they overturned the statuary. They climbed to the steeple and they ripped off the cross that was there. They reduced the magnificent artistry of the cathedral to a plain meeting house. And the extremes of the protestant revolution found its keenest life in the plainness of a meeting house.

For four and a half centuries the protestant church has been the lifeline of this relevance of religion to life. Now four and a half centuries later, we are caught up in a new reformation. Its not as clearly apparent in the protestant church as it is within the Roman Catholic Church. It began with Pope John in the Roman Catholic church as they began to take a new look at the essentials of their faith and their church. And the progress that has been made there toward the restructuring of a new and vital life is overwhelming. Yet we within the protestant church have not been apart from this great upheaval. For we have discovered something happening within our own church, we too are living in spiritually revolutionary times. And its high time, that reformation did take place. For in this period of time, we have developed a spiritual apathy. We have become content with the status quo of the church. We have watched all of the area of mans interest thrust out into a new dimension and we have been reluctant to let the church leave its primitive mooring and become relevant in this new day and this new age. We are beginning to pay the price for this apathy.

A recent survey was made to determine what people thought about the relevance of the church. We make many pronouncements. Many times there are individual attitudes and opinions. But if we are really to discover what this church means to people, the way to do it is to get out into the individual hearts and insights of people and see. And this was what was done in this survey. The question was asked, "Is the church losing its hold upon people?" Well for those above the age of forty there was not such a lessening of that hold. And this is easy to see. For those above forty had their childhood years at a time when the church was a social center of the community. It was a place that people went naturally, if not out of a compulsion. The roots were set deep at this period in their lives. They were related from their earliest years to something that when they became older there would not be a loosening, for it had found its place. And so those above the age of forty living in this revolutionary age, find the answer to the spiritual problem as a reverting back to the time in which they found their spiritual maturity. And how I wish that were the answer. Simply the recapturing of a glorious age.

But the facts deny that this is the solution. Those above the age of forty saw little lessening of the spiritual hold of the church. Those under thirty, 77% said the church is losing ground. And then they were asked why. Here were the four reasons given for the fact that the church is diminishing as an influence in the American community. The first of these is that young people are founding their allegiance outside a formal religion. We who have struggled with this problem are not going to question this answer that they gave. Young people must be committed to something during their growing years, for maturation does not take place unless someone is rooted in something that is meaningful, that is putting intellectual energy into their lives. And somehow the church has failed to be that core, to be that authentic voice. And as a result, all over America the church schools are struggling to hold ground with the minds and interest of those under 30.

The second reason that was given was because of the mass growth of immorality, violence and crime in America. Losing faith in the fact that the church has not been able to temper a climate in which men grow better and better every day, but which shows a lessening of spiritual interest and commitment in the American life. Many times we look across at the statistics that show that we are going under. When nations on other places of the world have a stricter morality than we, yet who are not democratic in their political insight. These are disturbing factors and people who are thinking are beginning to ask why. It was pointed out in the "so called" Bible Belt of America in which we live, prejudices are stronger, and brotherly attitudes are keener, reluctance to change for the good is greatest and people are beginning to ask "why."

The third reason given was because of materialistic considerations, which were preferable to spiritual considerations. It is simply to say that we are living in a materialistic age when we would much rather pad our pockets with dollars than amass treasures that will not remain with us beyond this life. Than to instill eternal gains and measures for which we live. And the fourth reason that was given by those that were surveyed was the church is out-of-step with

the times. I'm loved to make this confession on behalf of the church. And yet I must confess that too many times that the church is in the weight of movements rather than the prow opening up the way. The church too often given its stamp of approval upon what others have done, rather than have become unique and creative in its own development in the kind life that we ought to have in America. Here is where revolution is beginning to take place. To create, to obtain a relevancy in this day and yet once again we see the very \_\_\_\_\_ that took place in the sixteenth century ~~reformation~~ reformation rearing its ugly head now. Those who would relate in a new and unique way are beginning to attack the surface things, ripping out the altars, toppling the pedestals, scratching out the literages and wrenching out the steeple crosses. They are saying, do away with the establishment and put the church, disperse it out into the world to individuals and keep away from the cloistered community within the establishment itself. My friends the church is the bride of Christ. We cannot destroy the church without destroying Christ. Its not to erase the church, but it is to address the church to serve the present age. And not to live in the hoary greed and complacency of the past.

The time is right for reformation in the church. God grant that men equal will rise and lead, so that we can turn back the trend that's growing and re-establish the church as man's greatest guide and hope and life, in a darkest and ever increasing darkening world.

Continue to think on these thoughts as we worship God in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.