Dear Henry

I am writing you in response to your paper in a personal way, as well as a means to editorialize my thoughts on some of the issues you discussed. I hope this is of some value to you as you continue to refine your own convictions.

First of all, I want to congratulate you for demonstrating such courage. Though you addressed leadership in your paper, it has certainly become a “paper of the people.” It is a bit reminiscent of Martin Luther’s 95 theses nailed to the doors of the Catholic Church in Wittenberg. Even though the oppression of truth is constant in our lives and world, it is certainly also true that a level of truth exists so obvious that when consistently oppressed creates a tidal wave of reaction. It was so in the Protestant Reformation, the French Revolution, the Civil Rights Movement, as well as any historical movement of moral substance. During these moments men and women always seem enabled to break the restraints of relationship co-dependency and experience a genuine freedom and willingness to give their lives to the affirmation of these truths. Jesus said it best when challenged by the Pharisees to rebuke his disciples during the alleged irreverence of the Triumphal Entry; "If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." The stones are apparently crying out. I applaud your boldness and leadership.

I have read and listened to some of the responses to your paper from other elders and evangelists. It is apparent that the real tragedy in the present turmoil is not the crisis, confusion, or the cracking of an illusionary and unbiblical unity, but the defensive response of those responsible. One must ask, what is there to defend or justify when the stones cry out? Would not the planning of a jubilant celebration be more appropriate as we witness Christians throughout the world achieve the courage to stand up against hypocrisy, self-righteousness, and abuse? Should not the fattened calf be prepared? The wayward children shackled in their infantile co-dependency, cowardice, and silence, have come of age and are making their way home to take back their lives and to ensure a future for the church.

In my opinion, the turmoil is evidence that the future is brighter than ever. A revival of convictions in the biblical truths about love, unity, and grace helps secure any future. The duration of this revival depends on the depth of convictions. Sadly, in many churches it is being reported that things are already settling down. How dangerously premature, particularly when the opportunity for lasting change comes so seldom. I certainly agree with the admonishment not to throw out the baby with the bath water. However, this baby is sitting at the bottom of a very deep tub filled with extremely dirty water. It is imperative that our convictions not waver. Urgency is needed to remove the bath water before the baby drowns.
Convictions and subsequent reactions stemming from the teachings of Christ must exist within the architectural blueprint of any group hoping to qualify as part of the body of Christ. If we hope to move closer to a Jesus who reacted against a temple desecrated by hypocrisy and insensitivity, then the turmoil must continue. Though the turmoil caused by Jesus’ reaction seemed inappropriate to most in Jerusalem, to Jesus it was very appropriate. Were not the reactions of Paul similar when he demanded a Gospel of grace be preserved when he challenged the hypocrisy of Peter in Antioch and other prominent leaders in Jerusalem? (Gal 2)

An elder in disagreement with your assessment stated, "I want you to hear that not everyone shares your seat. However, in your letter you speak as if everyone's experience with leadership has been the same. I have been under [a certain world sector leader's] leadership for many years; I have never felt harshness." Though undoubtedly disappointing to the many Christians who will read it, this statement has some value because it will continue to remind us how far we have to go, as well as help us understand the heart of the problem. Is it not an elder's responsibility to sit in the emotional seat of the abused and hurting? Does my lack of experience with physical abuse mean I am free from the obligation to oppose the abuser with the same emotions of the abused? In fact, should not my compassion instill within me more determination? A lamb's capability to defend itself will never be as strong as the shepherd's. Compassion empowers us to defend one another and bear each other's burdens.

In my opinion, this emotional detachment and lack of understanding is at the heart of our crisis. Many leaders have not embraced, as their own, the suffering of the flock. The parable of the Lost Sheep in Luke 15 clearly teaches that the suffering and lost condition of the one takes precedent over the many not in crisis. The incarnation, as mysterious as it is, indicates Christ's willingness to embrace our suffering. "For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, . . " (Heb 2:17) Paul's solution to the Corinthian disunity was an emotional attachment of understanding and experience. "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it;" (1 Cor 12:26) Paul indicates this reality in his life; "Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn"? With this emotional bonding true unity is experienced and a safe refuge is created for all of God's people.

Another criticism came as a result of you allegedly not taking advantage of the proper communicative channels or getting enough input from other elders. Though I am unaware of what channels you used or how much input you solicited, my question is simply, what are these proper channels? Or what would have more input accomplished to your paper? It would seem to me that more input might have weakened it and contributed to an already prolonged minimization of the issues. Also, have not these "proper" channels been ineffective for some time now?
A rigid system and proper channels for effective change are considered mutually exclusive, particularly by those unwilling to be systematized. Inherent to the identity of rigidity is its defensive posture. It must defend in order to exist. Also, common definitions become obscured. What is "proper," as defined by the abusers is worlds away from the definition of the abused. I'm sure that the peasants igniting the French Revolution felt quite confident that their storming of the Bastille was the proper channel of communication. I wonder how proper was John the Baptist's channel? Or the statements of Paul regarding the leadership in Jerusalem; "As for those who seemed to be important-whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not judge by external appearance-these men added nothing to my message." (Gal 2:6) The channels chosen by these men seemed to have worked quite well. I would suggest to everyone that we not be as concerned with what is "proper" as we are with the truth of the communication.

Our greatest mistake has been the abuse of the weak in order to concentrate on the strong. Our spiritual categories desperately need biblical reassessment. Was it not the faith and love of the sinful woman (Luke 7), the Canaanite woman (Matt 15), the paralytic (Mark 2), and the blind man (John 9) that Jesus used as examples to define his kingdom? The life experiences of these people played a key role in Jesus' renunciation of a long standing and spiritually dangerous emphasis on position and ascension. Jesus used the contrast to point to the life-giving path of descent and spiritual deconstruction.

The road down is where the solutions to any spiritual turmoil are found. Jesus became "nothing" for a reason. (Phil 2) The journey of descent is a life journey—there is nothing temporary about it. Any attempt to use it as a manipulative tactic to advertise our humility and spirituality, or to keep one's job will only keep us on the broad road to destruction. During the present storm many leaders, in fear for their support and position, are scrambling to convince others of their intentions to get on this narrow road. Yet, the passing of the storm will only make the wide road more appealing. The only road in this life is down. The road in the afterlife is up. If we consume ourselves with the former, God will take care of the latter. The confusion of the two is at the root of our problems.

The present obsession with worldly talent, attainment of religious position, and legalistic accomplishment has done nothing but leave us with our faces veiled (2 Cor 3:15), and powerless in the achievement of a godly and biblical unity. By driving the "weak" from our fellowships we lose sight of our need to descend into our own weakness and humanity. This, in turn, fuels an arrogance and the legalistic categorization of people as "struggling" "not doing well," and "critical."

These categories are destined to emerge in any rigidly systemized church. They certainly existed during the time of Jesus, and the feelings behind them were ultimately the reason for his crucifixion. However, to Jesus everyone is in the same category. ("No one is good except God alone" John 10:18) How can someone criticize the critical and consider himself in a separate category? Those who label others as "struggling," by so doing, put the label on themselves. There is no greater struggle than the struggle with self-righteousness. Paul said, "I am
the worst of sinners." A reality appropriately stated in the present tense. He also stated, "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-and the things that are not-to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him." (1 Cor 2:27-29) This irony is too threatening and painful for the legalist to embrace. As a result, he chooses the easier road of delusion in a hopeless search for "greatness."

I say let the stones cry out! Let the descent into our weakness and humanity begin. This is the hope and guiding light for our children and the world, rather than the arrogant concern and defense of our "greatness." Paul said "Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Cor 12:9) God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him." (1 Cor 1:27-28)

I appreciate your patience in reading this reply. I pray our paths cross again soon. I will be praying for your ministry there in London.

Keep preaching the word

Your brother,

Marty Wooten