

AMBS Service of Lament, Confession and Commitment, March 22, 2015
Sara Wenger Shenk, President
Confession and Apology

Time has its way. As does the Spirit.

When it first dawned on me, a couple years ago, that I may need to confess on behalf of AMBS, I resisted. How can I confess to what happened on someone else's watch? How can I presume any prerogative or right to hold my renowned predecessors, intellectual giants of the past, responsible for the sin that still weighs so heavily on us?

But today, by the authority given me by the AMBS Board of Directors, and I believe by the Holy Spirit, and by everything I know to be true about the Gospel, I name the violation of body, mind and spirit that happened on the watch of this seminary, as evil; and I renounce it.

I do this, not because I am without fault, or presume any kind of superiority over those who've gone before. I acknowledge that I have the benefit of hindsight, of good counselors, of lessons learned, of a very different historical context. Many among us believe that if former leaders of the seminary could see what we see, they too would be here today, in sackcloth and ashes.

As AMBS's current president, and on behalf of this wonderful and flawed institution, I confess that this seminary failed in our use of the power entrusted to us.

Whether out of institutional hubris or with every intention for good, we gave pride of place to intellectual prowess, to the powers of the mind, with too little regard for how they can be twisted in self-serving, evil ways.

We allowed ourselves to be held captive by intellectual argumentation and theological constructs that used biblical language to intimidate, and to justify sexual deviancy and immoral behavior.

Along with so many others, we fell prey to our desire for a hero. Enamored by the brilliance that put our treasured peace theology on the world stage, we failed to truly listen to those whose bodies, minds and spirits were being crushed.

There is no excuse: not the historical time period in which this abuse occurred; not the pervasive confusion sowed by a so-called sexual revolution; not the fact that sexual harassment and abuse were not yet publicly or legally defined in policies....

There is no excuse when a theological school that is dedicated to teach what is good and true and beautiful about the Gospel, fails in a most egregious way to comfort those who mourn, to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, and proclaim liberty to the captives.

Whether through misnaming, or negligence, or avoidance, or fear of scandal, we failed the sacred trust of the church. We failed what we know to be most true about the Gospel. We failed you.

On behalf of AMBS, I express my profound remorse especially to each of you who were wounded in body, mind and spirit.

I am sorry. I am sorry that trusted leaders injured, disregarded and devalued you.

I am sorry that we neglected to genuinely listen to your reports of violation; and that even after hearing your warnings, we failed to raise the alarm.

I am sorry that by choosing to remain silent about your violation, we isolated you, only deepening your sense of betrayal.

I am sorry that in our exhaustion and desire for closure, we didn't listen to those of you who said, this is not finished; the full truth of what happened has not yet been named.

Above all, I am sorry that we failed to exercise the moral authority that was our sacred responsibility.

What was done to you, whether sinful acts of commission or omission, was grievously wrong. It should never have been allowed to happen. We failed you. We failed the church. We failed the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Yet we are not left without hope. We long for your restored trust; even on some distant day, for your forgiveness. Kyrie eleison.