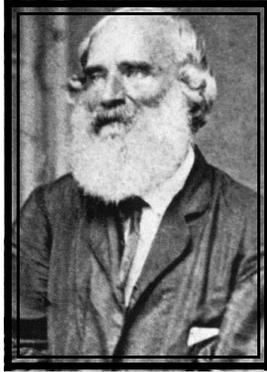


Farewell to the Old World



A Farewell Sermon

Delivered at Kölzow in Mecklenburg-Schwerin on
the 20th Sunday after the Feast of the Holy Trinity 1845
[October 5, 1845]

— by —

ADOLPH FUCHS,

The Pastor there.

The speaker has already emigrated to Texas by way of Bremen. He had planned for a long time to give up his pastorship and move across the sea to the New World. Compare with Fuchs, A., "The New Fatherland." A Song with Annotations. Rostock, 1836.

The clergyman is often tied to the various ideas of his community. Therefore in no way is he to bear the reproach of falsehood if in his official capacity he speaks against popular opinion in accordance with his own views; it will be much easier for him arrogantly to impose only his viewpoint on the community. In such cases following an alien belief without pretending it is one's own is not at all contrary to duty; nevertheless, it must certainly remain very oppressive and unpleasant for a true and publicly-known disposition to administer such an office while yielding to the peculiar belief of publicly sanctioned opinion.

Fries, *Ethics*. § 69.

Translation by Kenneth W. Fuchs, based on the original printed text, reprinted by Ric Tengg, San Antonio, Texas. Copied from the Collections in the Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

Peace be with you all!

It has now been more than ten years, you dear people, since I became your pastor; and today is the last time that I speak to you. — How shall such a day not touch my heart? And for all of you, too, so I believe, it will be no ordinary day.

It was on the second Sunday after Easter 1835 [May 3, 1835] when I was inducted as your pastor; the Gospel of the day was the Gospel of the Good Shepherd! For me that was a moving, beautiful omen; I imagined a delightful life, a glorious reciprocity between the shepherd and his flock. Was it only a dream then? — Oh, this Gospel spoke of a hireling, yes, of the hireling who does not love his sheep, who abandons them and flees when the wolf approaches, the wolf who snatches and scatters the sheep.

Am I such a hireling, a disloyal hireling? That would certainly be an extremely distressing, an embarrassing awareness.

By a hireling, you Christians, is understood a shepherd whose heart lacks love, who is indifferent to the fate of his flock, a person who inquires more about the worldly, the physical than about the divine and the spiritual, more about money and property than that which has true worth, more about the salary of an Evangelical pastor than about Evangelical truth and virtue. Have you come to know me then as such a person? Then forevermore call me a hireling, for I deserve it.

But if you are not such a person, then why do you want to leave us, you are thinking.

My faithful congregation, if I had promised you never to go away from you, then I would not leave you. Now, however, I think it could well be that many a shepherd who does not leave his congregation, yet wants to leave, would in fact be nothing less than a hireling. Shouldn't the opposite of that also be possible?

And further, if I really had reasons to fear that by my abandoning them, an unpleasant fate threatened my flock, or that the wolf, as Christ spoke, would snatch and scatter the flock: oh,

then I would not leave you. But to fear that would indeed be outrageous pride. No, you dear people, I have no fear that you will be well counseled any less by the esteemed man who is designated as my successor than by me — and I ask God that your life with him may become such a beautiful, genuinely Christian one as I ever longed for myself.

But why — why do you want to go away from us, away to an uncertain existence?

To be sure, you are not driving me away from you; much more so do I gladly believe your declaration given to me now and then that you would like to have kept me. Also, we have always lived together in peace — I scarcely believe that I have a single enemy among you — and not only have we lived in peace, you have even always shown love to me. I realize that with a grateful heart.

And yet, you say, you still intend to leave?

Yes, you dear people, I still intend to and will leave you. You could, however, rightfully demand of me that I give you an account — at least the main point — of the reasons which are driving me away from here, and with God's help I intend to do that now.

Accordingly, I choose my text from the Old Testament, namely from the twelfth chapter of Genesis, where the words in the first and second verse read:

“And the Lord spoke to Abraham: Go out of your country and away from all of your friends and from your father's house, into a land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you.”

When we ask about the reasons why the noble patriarch of the Jewish people left his Mesopotamia and moved across the Euphrates into foreign Palestine, admittedly the answer remains a difficult one, and we must be satisfied with the little that the Holy Scriptures tell about them: that in fact in his heart the voice of God which spoke to him was loud: Get yourself ready, go out of your country into a land that I will show you, and I will make

of you a great nation and will bless you. In the details, however, his reasons, as well as his hopes, may have been manifold. He will have taken into account his private and his public reasons; the private ones will perhaps have been of a religious nature; the public ones, however, most probably will have been none other than that adequate space for his flocks and shepherds was lacking in his old country: he was seeking a land where the population would be less dense and there would be greater space.

And now on the whole it is no different with me. I also have my public and my private reasons, or in other words, my baser and my higher, my worldly and my religious ones.

Of the worldly ones first.

There are people enough who still do not want to believe that in our German fatherland, as once in Mesopotamia, there are too many people, or that we, as people tend to call it, suffer from overpopulation. And indeed, probably many more of us could live in our homeland, that is to say, if many things were different here, if for example, the property of this world, and namely the land, were not divided so unequally. There is however no other way, and — it is difficult to do things differently than they have been for centuries; it is difficult, I say, to achieve that in a just way. And in an unjust way? — through agitation and the shedding of blood? — Oh, may Heaven protect my fatherland from the horrors of revolution!

No, my beloved people, unless it is denied that it becomes more difficult from day to day for the inhabitants of our fatherland, and namely the fathers of large families, to get themselves and their families honorably through life, that is to say because the rush for every sort of earnings increases outrageously from day to day — and that just the sign of overpopulation; unless it is further denied that in this way more and more poverty and bad morals must take the upper hand; then it is a question of adopting suitable ways to remedy these sufferings; and one of these ways is that of creating space, that one person makes room

for another, and therefore gives him the opportunity to earn his bread. Our people have also known this for a long time; for that reason every year many thousands move from our overpopulated country to such lands where there are few people, but much fertile land. — Yes, indeed, how would things be in our German fatherland, if for centuries so many millions had not been leaving their old homeland? Why do you want to blame me then if I do it?

But perhaps you think: Are you then not the one who so often proclaimed to us, “Do not worry! Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them.” And “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin, and yet even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” — Why then to a distant land? Is not the earth everywhere the Lord’s? And is that your submission, your humility? — Yes, I have indeed often proclaimed to you, and with a sincere heart, “Do not worry! Behold the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field,” but I have never said let your hands rest idly in your laps, just let everything slide as it will, and wait until the Lord will take care of you. Much more so have I often reminded you how it is the Lord’s Will that man earns his bread by the sweat of his brow. And why to a distant land, you wonder; isn’t the earth everywhere the Lord’s? Well, just because it is everywhere the Lord’s, on the other side of the sea as well as on this side; yes, because the same sun shines everywhere on the earth, and the same Heavenly Father blesses those who fear Him. Thus it cannot depend on the where or on how far or how near. Finally, you want to warn me about submission to God’s Will, about humility? Oh, you dear people, it is certainly not God’s Will to have us languish in an overpopulated land while the richest lands of the earth are still empty of people. And, if the Christian with joyfully devout courage and fresh daring has confidence in his God, that is also called being humble.

Of course whether or not the Lord will really be with me now

— therefore, whether or not the Lord’s Word to Abraham “And I will bless you” will really hold good for me too, well, that rests in God’s Hand. Perhaps you doubt it, but at least I know that your blessings will go with me and my family, and I — I hope and pray it is so. But my hopes are also not directed at great riches; wealth has never been my suit, and it never will be. If my motto now is “Hope and pray!”, then in the future it will be “work and pray!” Yes, you dear Christians, in the future I would rather earn my daily bread by the sweat of my brow than be kept here for the sake of God by the excess of the rich and by the bitterly earned money of the poor.

Do you call that an exaggerated striving for freedom or independence? A false ambition? Wrong-headed pride? Then I confess to you that I am not ashamed of such pride and such striving for freedom.

And thus I get to the point of telling you the private reasons also which persuade me to leave you.

You dear people, if I just said I would rather be dependent on God than on men for the physical, earthly things, then being dependent on spiritual and also religious and churchly things would hold true for me even much more so. Now this, however, is my opinion, although not just my own but that of many thousands of Christians of today: that our public religious, that is, our church life in its entire institution is in a bad state; that it is vastly different from the Church which Christ came to establish; and that it has scarcely a trace of the freedom which, as He said, shall come through the Truth. The freedom of the Church has perished in man’s laws, in man’s laws, moreover, which have not once derived from the will of the entire Church, that is, of all believers, but only from individual powers within it who as priests or kings acted as guardians of the religious life of all the others. A genuinely Christian Church, however, can only exist where there is no kind of restraint of conscience and intolerance; where the community, that is, the whole of all believers, entirely free, regulate their public religious life

according to their best insight through their duly elected representatives. The first Christian Church with its elders or leaders possessed such religious freedom, indeed not outwardly, but in its own internal organization; and if we do not return to it, then our church life will surely decline more and more, and the participation of Christians in Christianity will disappear more and more!

Oh, verily, in that matter it has already come far enough!

In your community, too, you dear Christians? It is not for me to judge how religious life stands in the heart of the individual among you, here least of all; why, you yourselves will know how you stand with your God and your Savior. But that public religious life among you enjoys no great participation I painfully experienced on the day of my inaugural sermon, which found no more than fourteen members in the audience. When, however, the number of those who later worshiped God here was often not greater, but much more frequently even fewer, was I myself then perhaps not to blame for it? Yes, I indeed confess openly that from time to time I was lacking in cheerful courage and holy zeal while preparing for Sunday, when I had to expect to preach again in an empty house of God. Or was I not to blame for it perhaps for another reason? Perhaps what I gave you here as my opinion could not and dared not please you because it — yes, because it was not that which you understood in true Christianity? No, in that I am not to blame. For it was impossible for me give you any other opinion than what I, I myself hold as true Christianity, or as the main point of the Gospel! Shouldn’t that have pleased you? Perhaps that I always placed a higher worth on the resurrection from sleep and on the transformation in a new life than on the Resurrection of the Savior? A higher worth on the changes in the heavens than on His Heavenly Ascension? Or that His pure life and His Divine Inspiration were always much more important to me than all the miracles that occurred with Him and through Him? That to me the Word “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” was more important than that of the

Lamb that bears the Sin of the World? The Word of Love more important than that of Faith and Hope? — Would you have been of another opinion in these things? Well, as I mentioned, if I was not at fault, then it was impossible for me to give you anything else known by me as Truth other than what I considered as Truth.

Therefore, that does not disturb me.

But something else has disturbed me, grieved me, tormented me a thousand times over, and now drives me away from here. You see, even though I have always honestly given you as my opinion only that which was my true opinion; yes, even though I have never lied to you, then upon thousands and thousands of occasions I had to conceal from you my innermost conviction; had to do so for mere reasons of shrewdness concerning you as well as me; I could no longer endure that! You Christians, if the pure honest truth, that is, what man, the speaking person, recognizes as the pure honest truth, is never and may never be valid in religion, in the house of worship, then where? Will we ever in life be done with falsehood? Or shall and must every pastor perhaps agree in his religious opinions with every individual in his community? To achieve that is impossible as well. People's religious opinions will always remain different, even though they are united publicly as one flock, yes, even though they once again become one shepherd and one flock everywhere on earth. It cannot be otherwise, so of course, the shaping of minds and the destinies of individual people will always remain different.

But just for that reason one should leave their faith, their conscience, and their form of worshiping God to each individual, and to each community, and to each side — that is religious freedom! — and should not think the minds of all people would have to be united to the letter — that is bondage! — and that gives birth only to persecution and hypocrisy.

And just for that reason not every pastor is suitable for every community, at least not for the majority, who of course always have to decide. You dear people, you could use neither a

Reformed pastor, nor a Catholic one, nor a German-Catholic one, nor — me. It must be a pastor who as much as possible agrees exactly in his religious views with the majority among you. And such a one, that is my hope, you have elected in my successor. Oh, may God bless your venerable association with him!

But even if there now might be no one among you who misinterpreted these my public confessions, and their motives, no one in particular who believed that, because I am resigning my present position, I despise the profession of the Christian pastor, or even, that I do not revere Christianity itself, that I am ashamed of the Gospel — therefore that I am not really serious — or much more so, that there is nothing to all my teachings and exhortations up until now — it all means nothing!

Oh, may God protect you from such misinterpretation! It could do great, incalculable harm to many a soul among you, for in the end it could contribute to making a heart entirely indifferent to not only all our religious life, but also to all Christian faith and all Christian virtue. Of course it could also just occur with that shallow, half-way education which, as it is, already believes in little or nothing and has been ashamed of the Gospel for a long time.

So hear then: I have never been ashamed of the Gospel and will never be ashamed of it, for I really and truly believe that in it is contained a power of God to make blessed all who believe in it, that is, all who understand it, to remove the living seed from the dead shell of the law; and for that reason I also revere Christianity and respect the Christian pastor's profession. Yes, if such an assurance is necessary, although I am now giving up this profession, I will not cease to preach the Truth and to work for the Kingdom of God on Earth on the other side of the sea also, as much as I am able.

And do you hope, so you are probably thinking, that God will bless you there in physical goods, as well as in these utmost goods? You probably even hope that He will make of you, like Abraham, a great nation, and not only a numerous, but also an

intellectually great, educated, pious, just nation? — Yes, I really do hope that. And if I did not hope it, was not allowed to hope it, then verily I would not leave my old fatherland.

Look, I also hope that over there, where no longer will the office and the robes, but only the person be regarded in me; I hope, so certain that God lives everywhere in the hearts of men, and not just in temples which are made by the hands of men; I hope, I say, that over there, where is to be found as a matter of fact that which we do not know, religious freedom, in the course of years a community will take shape which is worthy of being compared with the beautiful prototype of the Christian Church.

That is what I hope!

And yet, you loved ones, departing from you becomes difficult for me. Leaving hurts! — It would be different, if I didn't love you and you me.

Oh, don't condemn me! I cannot do otherwise!

Keep your love for me which you have always shown me. I too will not stop remembering you lovingly, even from far away.

In farewell, I wish you all the best. To the little ones who received holy christening from me, I wish that they prosper for the joy of their parents and for the glory of God! To the youths and maidens who here in my hand pledged eternal loyalty to their God and Savior, that they never faithlessly break their vow! To the married couples whose union I blessed, that they preserve their love for and fidelity to one another. To those who sought comfort and strength here at the Lord's Table, that they may have found and may further find them! To the fortunate and the rich among you I wish humility, to the unfortunate and the poor, cheerful courage! To all of you, men and women, old and young, I wish peace and joy and a blessed end one day, through Jesus Christ!

A m e n