

## GLOBAL THEOLOGY CONFERENCE CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

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I am grateful for the privilege of addressing the delegates and sharing my simple thoughts. I truly appreciated the multi-generational character of the conference, evidenced by the presence and role played by younger minds such as I. Moreover, the multi-cultural dimension of the discussions added a memorable atmosphere. While the intellectual stimulation and mutual edification during the conference were splendid, the social interaction among global Nazarenes in formal deliberations and informal dialogs was particularly enriching and encouraging. I am truly blessed to have been a part of the conference.

The conference may have ended, but my mind is still stirred by the insights and questions uttered throughout the event. During the final plenary session, I realized that the conference is dealing with at least three different tensions and delegates are in pendulum swing between two ends of each continuum. First, there was a noticeable tension between the *descriptive* and the *prescriptive* elements of theological reflections. Majority of the papers, including mine, were descriptive, because they sought to articulate biblical-theological themes and define specific historical-contextual realities. Delegates, however, were indubitably more concerned for prescription than mere description. There was a sense of impatience to move beyond intellectualism toward actual missional-ministerial engagement. Even small group discussions lean towards asking the question: “So what now?” Like textbook Evangelicals, Nazarenes are predominantly activists. This is both positive and negative, but as a theologian, I wonder if there will ever be a space where reflection is afforded an integrity in its own right when we meet as a global church, where and when we think together about definitions. We cannot leave theological reflections confined within our institutions, especially because our definitions should reflect both the multi-cultural and multi-generational nature of the church.

The second tension is between *reactive* and *constructive* ways of thinking. Several of the papers and questions were reacting to something, and the approach to definition was to ask how we are different from specific groups or ideologies. Following the way of negation, the procedure is to begin by thinking what we should not be and not do. While there is merit in this tactic, to begin our self-definition with

criteria such as “we are not colonial,” “we are not Pentecostal,” or “we are not Roman Catholics” puts a lot of constraint about what we can say about ourselves. The resulting reflection can be denominationally parochial. Thankfully, there are delegates who are more constructive in their proposals, particularly from the younger generation. Their concern is not to look at the past and what socio-political issues the church is coming from. With tendencies towards historical disconnectedness and circumstantial apathy, the emphasis is not to look at the past but to imagine the future. The proposal is not to spend time in reminiscing the bitter events of the past, but to forgive, forget, and move on. Our efforts, constructivists argue, needs to be spent more beneficially in thinking about the future and how we can get there with grace. Personally, I lean towards this. We need not waste our time anymore in discussing the errors of our Christian predecessors. They just conjure bitter thoughts and open healing wounds. We need to move on and devote more time in how we may respond to the contemporary situation.

Finally, there is tension between *restorationism* and *progressivism*. Our Christological definitions need to be biblically and theologically faithful to the Christian tradition, which means that century-old jargons and categories (such as Christ’s divine-human natures) inevitably emerge in the discussions, but we are also challenged to make our presentations of who Christ is relevant to our own contexts. Our understanding of what it means to imitate and follow Jesus Christ today also needs to balance between what taking up the cross meant in the New Testament times and how it needs be translated and lived out in the contemporary world. Missions, in obedience to Christ’s sending, need to balance between faithful imitation of how Jesus Christ did His and imaginative creativity of how we do ours today. The tension is between what aspects of New Testament Christology, discipleship, and missions can be restored for use today, and what progressive innovations can be employed today which may retain the label “Christian.” We certainly cannot argue that the solution is to return to New Testament Christianity (as some groups throughout history have proposed), but we also cannot abandon apostolic definitions because we think of them as completely irrelevant in our current generation. We need the *via media*. We need to think

together in order to define the criteria and boundaries that accommodate the best of each end, because whether we like it or not, we need to be restorationist and progressivist at the same time.