

Response

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“Some Effective Models for Translating Holiness into Life Experience”

Statement

This article attempts to respond to Rev H Vorster’s “Holiness As Transformation For Action”⁷⁹ and hence the choice of this theme, viz.: “Some Effective Models For Translating Holiness Into Life Experience”. I propose to move through this discussion in the following order: Firstly, I will reflect a summary on issues raised by Rev H Vorster without regurgitating them over and/or attempting to paraphrase them out of their context. My views on the same issue(s) will be strongly represented, albeit in a minimal form. Secondly, I will evaluate some delivery systems and/or the means used to communicate the holiness message. Finally, I will conclude this article by attempting to make some brief recommendations concerning the way forward. I may sound out of context of the scope imposed on this paper, but I would like to state that the views represented in this article, as a response to Rev Vorster’s article, are my own and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Central Issue – Disguised Fear, Mutual Rejection and Indifference

In this section, I would like to reflect a summary on the issues raised by Rev Vorster in “Holiness As Transformation For Action”. My initial survey of issues in the article under discussion has led me to believe that a degree of disguised fear, mutual rejection and indifference has come to characterize the Church of the Nazarene in South Africa. To say the least, Rev Vorster’s article is really provocative. Indeed it suggests a programme of action beginning from repentance. I must state from the outset that it is well known that the Church of the Nazarene is serving in an abnormal and unique situation in Africa. Decades of separate race development and centuries of tribalism continue to challenge the credibility if not undermine the doctrine and the life of scriptural holiness. The issue is not that the doctrine of holiness is not known, but that it has hardly been witnessed by

⁷⁹ Vorster, H. “Holiness As Transformation For Action” ANTC Paper, 2003.

life and deeds. As we shall see, scriptural holiness remains a major problem, not so much on the level of doctrine, but on the level of practice. For this reason the denomination is still finding it hard to address questions of democracy on one hand, and latent fear, indifference and mutual rejection between ethnic races and tribes of Africa on the other. Our level of growth and understanding of the subject of holiness, therefore, is still confined to cultural, tribal, and racial norms or values. Our own cultures, norms and values, notwithstanding their validity and historical richness in one way or the other, have all creatively been reduced into effective systems of mutual exclusion. In these contexts repentance, therefore, will only begin when or if we do not conceal but confess and correct reasons for our fears and mutual rejection through dialogue, for we have to be students of peace and holiness. "Peace with all men" (Hebrews 12:14) and "Holiness Unto The Lord" (Zechariah 14:20). Not just holiness - no, but that "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

Once we have gone through the cycle of repentance in full then God will know we are ready for the next one. But for that to happen, it is not simply going to be an easy exercise. The traditional place of the altar in our churches must change. The new place of the altar is before the face of the other. There we must confess our sin, mutual rejection, and indifference. There is the correct spot where our hearts will be circumcised to enable us to love, forgive one another and bring about healing and reconciliation. Reformation, yes, but it is cheap; it is realized by determination and by a political will. Transformation is always costly; it comes not without a price. It is realized by no means except the cross! We are to be judged by history for we are its creators. History is beckoning us toward a turning point in the Church of the Nazarene. The turning point has always begun with full circle of REPENTANCE. Revival began when people did not simply pray on altars built of stones and wood but on altars built of flesh and blood. Love is not simply tears or some sense of rationalized responsibility and guilt. Love is realized by no other way, but self-denial. That is holiness!

Disguised Monasticism, Legalism and Apocalypticism

In this area, Rev Vorster unsympathetically took a hard and critical look on the state of affairs as it stands in the Church of the Nazarene at this point and time in Africa. He describes the passivity of the Church as simply monasticism, legalism and apocalypticism. The church is "PASSIVE"

(Vorster's emphasis not mine), and quite withdrawn refusing to be the salt and the light of the earth (Matthew 5:13-16). Salt loses identity when it comes into contact with the substance it savours, and the light does not shine for itself. The Church must be "awake," says Vorster. Otherwise, why tearfully sing, "I Surrender All" if we know we are preoccupied by fears of losing some elements constituting our identities. "Nations of Africa need us," cries Vorster. But we have refused all biblical challenges to become the salt of the other. From our racial and tribally separate "churches" we cry out to one another, "I do not want to be your salt; and I do not want you to be mine, lest I lose my identity". To be holy is to be the salt and savour the other, and therefore lose your identity. Holiness is never the end in itself, but the means to see the Lord. It is not by chance, or by lack of understanding that some people and some denominations reject holiness — it is costly, very costly and yet very simple. But they are indeed honest with themselves. They are afraid that they would say one thing and do the opposite one. Do we want to be holy?

Again, Rev Vorster charges that we have turned local churches into monasteries. We are good when it comes to shunning all forms of contamination, but not so with sin, no! We are not indifferent to sin; no, sin we do commit anytime, but indifferent to the other. Monasticism has always demoted holiness from active life to the ranks of religion. No religion is better than the other. If Christianity is religion it needs join the others on the table for it is as good or as bad as they are. Biblical Christianity has never been considered a religion, and in fact is not as it is in the Bible.⁸⁰ Holiness is essentially first and foremost unselfish and self-sacrificial.

Conclusion

I now conclude my observations on Rev Vorster's article by recapitulating some elements of the plea he made to the Church. If we are to be holiness disciples and for that matter, identify ourselves as Wesleyans, we should move from a passive to an active life. The Church of the Nazarene must rediscover its mission and, therefore, its saltiness. This should be manifested by responding, with love, to the needs of the other for "the nations of Africa need us!" (Vorster) - not only what we have (sympathy),

⁸⁰ Seamands, J. *Tell It Well: Communicating the Gospel Across Cultures*. Kansas City. Mo., Beacon Hill Press, 1981. P 64ff.

but also what we are (love). As the salt of the earth, we must be savoured into the lives of the other and the King of Kings will know where to find us. "Passivity is nothing other than *non-holiness*" (Vorster italics, not mine). "We desperately need to awake" and "We need to become a Holy Spirit-driven change agent as the Church in Africa, as it was in the days of John Wesley" (Vorster).

Monasticism, apocalypticism, and legalism all have the rightful place in the history of the world. I am not sure if I completely agree with Dr Dunning whom Rev Vorster has quoted; nevertheless, apocalypticism is a danger to the religious community if considered an end in itself (for instance, the Thessalonians). If this be the case, then we would domesticate it into being our own pet. But apocalypticism is designed to help us cope better with present reality. It is not just a mocking mirage in an awful desert.

The Doctrine of Holiness

This section refocuses our attention on the subject matter in question – "Holiness As Transformation For Action". The fact that holiness is the greatest doctrine of Holy Scripture cannot be reasonably denied.⁸¹ Holiness is both the essence and the goal of the gospel - to "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Colossians 1:28). Indeed, in alluding to the fact just mentioned, the fundamental basis of holiness doctrine is the Bible itself.⁸² While the Bible itself is not the doctrine of holiness, it does richly provide the material out of which the doctrine is constructed.⁸³ Therefore to remain true to the message of the Bible, holiness should be at the centre of our lives, teaching and preaching.

The doctrine of holiness received more interest during the 19th century, and theological formulations of holiness also received attention during the same period. The interest in holiness culminated in the Holiness Movement of the 19th century (Pillay 1991), and consequently, the organization of many independent holiness churches,⁸⁴ of which the largest number combined in 1908 and officially organized the Church of the

⁸¹ Bedwell, H K. s.a. *The Greatest Doctrine Of Holy Scripture: Meditation About What the Bible Teaches About Holiness*. Hillary, Natal: The Forward Movement.

⁸² Grider, J K. *Entire Sanctification: The Distinctiveness of Wesleyanism*. Kansas City Mo., Beacon Hill Press, 1980. P 17

⁸³ Ibid

⁸⁴ Smith, T L. *Called Unto Holiness: The Story of the Nazarene, The Formative Years*. Kansas City. Mo., Nazarene Publishing House, 1963. P 21.

Nazarene.⁸⁵ Today the Church of the Nazarene is one of the largest holiness denominations committed "*to spread scriptural holiness throughout the globe*" (italics mine).⁸⁶

In addition to that, the mission statement of the Church of the Nazarene on the Africa Region identifies the denomination as a "Christian Holiness family" committed to "worshipping the Saviour; fellowshiping and serving with the Saints; winning the lost; discipling the won, and deploying the disciplined!"⁸⁷

However, one of the greatest challenges facing the denomination in Africa today is that, in preaching and teaching holiness, more often the doctrine fails to translate into experience and life. This issue was first observed by Dr William Esselstyn in the early 1960's when he said, "There is today little witness to the doctrine and experience of second blessing holiness in South Africa, and even comparatively little effort to bring converts from heathenism into a definite born-again relationship with God".⁸⁸ Sad to say, but that has not changed! Part of the problem is the delivery systems employed to communicate the message of holiness - the matter now to be evaluated in the next section.

Ineffective Delivery Systems

Africa can be saved, and Africa will be saved and sanctified! But the means employed to communicate the message, the current delivery systems, have little capacity to do so. By delivery systems I simply mean existing local churches, pastors, directors, educators, districts and etc. There is an urgent need to revisit our delivery systems at least on the level of their structures. For some time now, Africans have been calling for the indigenisation of the Church of the Nazarene in Africa. That was granted. But in an attempt to indigenise the Church of the Nazarene in Africa, we have heavily borrowed from the apartheid models rather than being content with the New Testament ones. Parker sadly observes that "the government

⁸⁵ Pieraard, R V. "American Holiness Movement", from the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Elwell, Walter A (ed). Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House. 1984. Pp 516-518.

⁸⁶ *Manual 2001-2005 Church of the Nazarene*. Nazarene Publishing House, Kansas City, MO, 2001. p. 39.

⁸⁷ 2003 Calendar of the Church of the Nazarene - Africa Region.

⁸⁸ Esselstyn, W C. *Mission In South Africa*. Discovery, Transvaal, 1951

of the Republic of South Africa has been creating a number of self-governing Black states within the republic...*the Church of the Nazarene has structured the administration of its work largely along the lines of these tribal groupings*" (italics mine).⁸⁹ In so doing, the Church has effectively facilitated estrangement between races and tribes. Today, we inherit separate local churches, separate district activities all on the basis of race or tribe. Consequently, members of local churches in the same denomination are not unconditionally welcomed in another local church. We still refuse to affirm God's image in each other. Now the government of South Africa has changed that policy. Some architects of the policy have approached the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to say they were sorry about that and have acknowledge that it was a gross violation of human rights. But the Church of the Nazarene is still preserving them as a better model of indigenisation.

Despite the fact that calls were made during the tenure of Dr Richard Zanner for interracial districts, this is still not being welcomed with enthusiasm in some circles. Despite the call to "go and make disciples of all nations," pastors of one race or tribe serve only the needs of their own race or tribe. District and Local Church activities are still held separately. Like the Corinthians we always edify our own and not another people. We do this under the label of "being realistic: you must know the culture of your people in order to serve them effectively". Some have come to believe that "it will take time, if at all, for generations to be able to serve people who are not your own, and thus reaffirm God's image to them". Are we conservative sociologists? Why are politicians not worried about these things? Are we servants of Culture or Christ? By no means am I implying that holiness is just to serve cross-culturally, no, but serving people, no matter who they may be.

- **Is Entire Sanctification Still A Distinctiveness of the Nazarenes in Africa?**

The form of the question as it is above demands an honest answer. Indeed, it is worrying that for some time the voice of these testifying or publicly professing to the experience of heart cleansing holiness **is quiet** in many of our churches in South Africa today. This does not mean people are no

⁸⁹ Parker, J F. *Mission To The World: A History of Missions in the Church of the Nazarene*. Kansas City, MO., Nazarene Publishing House. 1988. P 170.

longer testifying in our churches. On the contrary! They do - and more so. But in their testimonies people would **very seldom** profess the experience of heart cleansing through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We might also add that those that dare to testify about it, more often sound unsure of what they are talking about. This is in spite of the fact that holiness doctrine is one of the chief cornerstones and the distinctiveness of the Church of the Nazarene (Grider 1980), and that "only persons who profess the experience of entire sanctification" may be elected as church officers (*Manual* 2001-2005). It is even a matter of concern that seekers after the experience are not seen coming forward to our altars to declare their need and pray. Our congregations are, for lack of a better word, hungry for holiness, but scores of people coming forward to pray at our altars today are those whose concerns range from poverty and unemployment, diseases, discouragement, family concerns, etc. They are hurting inside but have not come to realise the malady of sin.

- **Do Nazarenes Still Need Do More On Social Gospel?**

Social gospel, yes, and emphatically so – but it is not the answer to Africa's problem! For instance, what more could reasonably be said or done in Africa? Thousands of Non Governmental Organizations including some religious organizations, have poured and are pouring billions of dollars/Rands and some material aid into Africa in an attempt to alleviate the "plight of the poor", "but have done not nearly enough" (Mandela's speech at World Conference on AIDS). Social gospel - yes, but Africa needs the salt of the earth. It needs to be savoured to be saved. The question demanding an urgent answer is, who is ready to be the salt of Africa, willing to savour it with their own lives, losing identity? Does the Church of the Nazarene with its current delivery systems have the capacity to be the salt, not of the earth, but of Africa? The answer is, yes, but only if we rid ourselves from "every kind of evil" (I Thessalonians 5:22).

A Commission on Holiness Proposed

In conclusion I would like to suggest a way forward, and this is urgent. But just before doing that, remember that in the year 2010 there will probably be a million Nazarenes in Africa, 12000 churches, and 12000 pastors. We all welcome this, and we all are committed to see that happen. This does not simply mean we in Africa are too optimistic about that. On the contrary. But are we here to say that we want to reach out for a million

Nazarenes in order to reclassify them into existing delivery systems which have not been transformed for them? By no means! But time is running out for continuing to preserve these delivery systems within the Church of the Nazarene untransformed.

Having said this; it is hereby proposed for the establishment of a Commission on Holiness whose investigative terms, tenure and personnel should be determined by this Conference. Part of the Commission's task would be to help facilitate democracy throughout the region. To help Districts and Fields organize holiness symposiums; publish a holiness newsletter which may be translated into ethnic languages; and convene an annual meeting part of which is to equip pastors, district superintendents, lay ministers, college teachers on the subject of holiness. It must be remembered that the Church of the Nazarene is modelled on the lines of apartheid and tribal authority. In conclusion, I would invite you to view Rev Vorster's contribution in this light. Our thanks go to both the organizers of the Africa Nazarene Theological Conference as well as to the Office of the Regional Education Coordinator.