

## Response

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In my opinion the writer has precisely identified an important aspect of the Great Commission which has sadly gone largely, if not completely, neglected by the Church of the Nazarene in her quest to fulfil the great commission. True yes, the gospel is calling men and women to turn from their sins to God, but the call to repentance also calls men to create a just and equitable society. Any proclamation of the gospel that calls individuals to repentance and then falls short of addressing the earthly sinful socio-political conditions of the saved person is tantamount to raising Lazarus from the dead but leaving him to live in society still bound with strips of linen with which he was buried. While this Lazarus will indeed be living and walking about, his freedom will be limited, and secondly those he ministers to will not get a good view of him and thus be hindered to fully understand and appreciate the relevance and liberating power of his message.

The writer rightly points out that the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene encourages its members to promote racial understanding and harmony by working for a just, equitable order. However, this largely remains a written statement or position that does not find any significant practical advocacy and application

Indeed when it came to challenging the evils of apartheid in South Africa, which evils greatly undermined the Great Commission, many members of the Church of the Nazarene including this respondent, looked for leadership and guidance outside of the denomination. The likes of Archbishop Desmond Tutu of the Anglican Church and Dr Beyers Naude of the Dutch Reformed Church and others became the guiding lights.

It is important for us in the Church of the Nazarene to know that repentance from personal sins and the challenging of socio political injustices are complementary. The gospel cannot go very far without losing credibility if it does not openly address inequalities and injustices.

I wish to re-emphasise what the writer has already pointed out: Firstly the denomination must abandon its position of neutrality. If you keep quiet when people are being hurt and suffering, you send wrong signals: one, people may think that you see the problem but are afraid of the challenge which would then imply weakness on your part. Two, you may risk being perceived as condoning the position of the oppressor and therefore insensitive to suffering and as such holding an un-holistic view of sin and God. One philosopher said the man in the middle makes the worst of the two options. Maintaining neutrality in the face of structural socio-economic and political evils under the pretext of giving safe passage to the gospel into the lives of people without troubling the waters that trouble them may greatly hinder the sufferers from accepting a gospel which does not care about their problems. Keeping quiet when duty demands that we speak is tantamount to betrayal of the Great Commission.

The neutral position of the denomination has made us fail to prepare people who could meaningfully participate in socio-political transformation of the country. This failure further compounds the problem in that as a denomination we have not been able to develop the necessary critical skills and confidence to deal with socio-political transformation issues. In other words we do not have the reputation that we can competently counsel with or play an advisory role to people involved in socio-political change. This limits our witness as a church because influential politicians and other agents of socio-political change remain largely inaccessible to us and are thereby deprived of the positive influence that our message would have on their character.

Furthermore this non-vocal stand of the denomination, especially in South Africa, delayed the break of racial and ethnic divide within the Nazarene family which would have given the necessary impetus and momentum to both the message of holiness and the Great Commission.

I must admit that this situation has made me and other Nazarenes feel like strangers in our own country. Anybody who cannot make a public statement to address genuine social concerns in his own country becomes a stranger to his own people. He cannot be silent and not hurt himself and

his people. Exercising the right to be silent when duty demands that we speak is cowardice and failure to give leadership.

It is therefore necessary that we urgently set up a denominational programme to promote participation in socio-economic and political transformation thereby widening the scope of the Great Commission. As much as we are setting up structures and availing opportunities of involvement in ministry, involvement in social issues must become a priority. Nazarenes must understand that there are certain problems that affect our spirituality that will not go away until their environmental causes are dealt with.

Secondly, it is important that when necessity calls from time to time, the church should have a spokesperson who would make statements putting forward or clarifying the position of the church on certain social issues of national concern on print and electronic media. If this is not done by the Regional Director there should be a designated competent national in each country who would do this job.

Thirdly, it will also help us if our current leaders and theological students would now and then be exposed to socio-political issues.

However, it is important that in balancing the message of the Great Commission by tackling socio-political issues we should not go to the other extreme by neglecting preaching personal repentance and holiness; it is changed people who change the world, and real change starts from within and flows out to our life situations.

It is time for the Church of the Nazarene to balance her proclamation of the Great Commission. The time is now.