

Part 7: AFFIRMATIONS

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Affirmation on Holiness

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Initial reports have it that this has been an exciting conference. It has been good to be able to dialogue about important issues facing us as a Holiness Church in Africa. The question about what it means to be holy in the African context has many dimensions and it has been enlightening to explore some of them. What we have been able to do here, though, is by no means exhaustive. There are many issues we have only touched on and we suspect that the surface of the question has hardly been scratched. But it was good to talk and reach consensus about the fact that much more talking is needed. Hopefully this will not be the last discourse on Holiness in the African context.

As we have grappled with the question, three important elements have emerged. These are the issue of “tongues”, culture, and polygamy, and they were initiated by the papers and the responses, but no definite answers were given. As the Affirmation Team has worked with the issues and listened to what the small groups have had to say, we have attempted to offer some conclusions. Following are some affirmations that may be helpful in dealing with the issues.

Tongues

In the papers relating to the differences in the understanding of the evidence of the infilling with the Holy Spirit we are left with a clear understanding. However, as was pointed out by a number of small groups, many congregation members are still confused and look to Charismatic movements in search of answers. One contention is that the perceived dullness of worship services in the Church of the Nazarene as opposed to the “...sense of liberty and personal participation” (Balibanga: 3) of the charismatic is driving people to these churches. Another contention is that

the world is not seeing any difference in the lives of evangelicals and is therefore attracted to the alleged outward manifestations of the Spirit as reflected in the Charismatic services. What is the evidence of being filled with the Spirit? What are the immediate signs? The Charismatics claim that it is being slain in the spirit and speaking in tongues. Tongues, in their context, is an unknown, heavenly language understood only by God and the angels. It serves as evidence both to God and man that the work of baptism with the spirit is complete. They believe that the Spirit takes full control of the person's will and mind, causing him or her to do things that they would not normally do.

The Church of the Nazarene does not believe that the evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit is the ability or prompting to speak in an unknown language. We believe, rather, that the evidence is the "...purification of the heart that is made known by the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-25) in the life of the believer ..." (Balibanga: 2). This is not a meeting-to-meeting experience, as is often the case with Charismatics, but a consistent process of devotion, submission, and obedience to God on the part of the believer, that is made possible by the grace and empowerment of the Holy Spirit Himself. In other words, it is God working with and through the believer to bring about a continuous relationship in which the believer is the ultimate beneficiary. In the process the sanctified believer is empowered to be a witness to the world, in life and word, to the power of God to save from sin.

The question is, then: how do we as a holiness church help our people understand and practice the truth relating to this issue? First of all, the Bible (contrary to what may be espoused by some who have different agendas) gives clear instructions. The gift of tongues or languages is for the edification of the Church (1 Corinthians 14:26) only if there is translation, and as an instrument to be used under God's direction for the proclamation of the Gospel (Acts 2:4-11). It is thus of vital importance that we understand the full picture of the significance of the phenomenon which was remarkably absent from the ministry of Jesus and present on a limited basis in the Early Church (Pinheiro: 3-4) and teach it to our constituents. It is important to know what tongues are in the context of New Testament Scripture and also in the context of the Charismatic churches and then teach accordingly, emphasizing the Biblical standard. The Bible teaching on the issue is clear and the Church of the Nazarene

should not be cowering in the face of the confusion reigning in and taught by the Charismatic churches. A word of caution; we should not deny the reality of the phenomenon – even demons speak in tongues.

Should we then be overly concerned with those who continue to insist that holiness people and their services are “dead” because there is no visible manifestation of the presence of the Spirit where they meet? There appears to be consensus that worship services should cater for the movement and reflection of the Holy Spirit in His own way rather than the sensitivity of the individual. We must continually ask ourselves: Are we seeking experiences rather than the Holy Spirit?

Culture

Since all of existence in the eyes of the African is related to religion, it is difficult to know where culture starts or ends or where religion starts or ends. Where is the line supposed to be drawn? Is Christ opposed to culture? Culture is powerful and has the ability to keep some Christians captive, forcing them to do things that God would not approve of. How do we respond to this? No culture in itself is either good or bad. There is not one single culture that is sanctioned in the Bible. However, God’s standards are Christlikeness and holiness within the framework of all cultures.

We must learn to understand the reasons behind certain cultural practices and distinguish between what is good, bad, or neutral as it relates to our cultural contexts. Some practices are based on good moral values and should be affirmed and encouraged. Some other practices, however, must be compared with the standards of the Bible.

Holiness will conflict with certain practices but Christ is the transformer of culture. Cultural expectations and rituals vary but God’s expectations do not. If we are going to confront culture and tell people not to participate in certain rituals, we must be clear in our own understanding that they are not in the will of God and provide wholesome alternatives. In this instance we must be proactive rather than reactive. The idea here is that we live with and know the rituals that are diametrically opposed to what the Bible teaches as normative for Christians. So we should teach about the Bible all of the time. In our endeavours to confront culture, we must conform to the image of Jesus who did not reject His own culture (neither was He a slave to it) but in that culture live a life pleasing to God.

Polygamy

The practice of polygamy is real in Africa and the Church would do well not to ignore it. The question posed by the writers is aimed at opening the door to discussions on the issue. Is it right, is it holy, to exclude those who convert to Christianity while in polygamist marriages from membership in the Church? Since the Church of the Nazarene has no definite stand on the issue the current practice is that the converted husband should divorce the wives following the first one before he is allowed into membership. The question is: is this what God is really requiring from His Church? Do we have the right to decide to separate those who in good conscience have considered themselves married according to their cultural traditions? Do not the ones who divorce and remarry break God's standards for marriage?

Although we recognise that the initial standard at creation and in the New Testament was for one man to be married to one woman for life, we acknowledge that the hardness of mankind's heart has led many people into situations that fall short of God's ideal. Any solution is painful and the situation needs to be handled with extreme care. However, we cannot take a stand for legalism on the one hand while ignoring the sensitivity of the realities on the other. Also, we do not want to be lax in our standards.

The simple divorcing of second and third wives does not seem to answer all of the questions. Instead, it raises more. There appears to be consensus among the conference participants that the Church should study the practice and all its implications thoroughly. This will result in sensitivity towards those who are involved in it and shed light on ways to deal with those who accept the Lord while in these marriages. *The Affirmation Team suggests that the Regional Advisory Council appoint a Commission comprised of both men and women, as well as laypersons and clergy, to undertake this study and formulate an official stand. This commission should be representative of all the Fields on the Africa Region. For now the suggestion offered by the majority is that those who want to become members of the Church of the Nazarene after they had married more than one wife should be accepted only as associate members and be served the sacrament of Holy Communion.* However, the person must abstain from taking any more wives. We should also have a clear definition of marriage. When is a person married in the eyes of God? Is it when the husband-to-be has paid the bride price and is deemed by the community to be "married", after they have been married in a court of law, or are they married only

after they have gone through a Christian ceremony?

We thank the Lord for this opportunity to reason together and pray that we will leave here fully convinced that only Africans, with God's help, can solve the problems of Africa.

Nkosi Sikelele iAfrika.

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Affirmation on Hope

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The problems of Africa are many. They include civil war, strife, drought, floods, the AIDS pandemic, poverty, and death. This has brought about untold misery and suffering for the people of Africa. Where is hope for Africa in the midst of all this if we are to ask? The Church in Africa is not isolated from the rest of society and is equally affected by these challenges. Many people look to the Church for answers to their problems so this is a big challenge which the Church must face and deal with. The Church must be the agent through which hope reaches to the people.

Let us look at the issue of poverty, for example. Poverty is real and is a major problem causing suffering among our people. There are several crutches that have been used to justify its presence among the people. Blame has been put on colonialism, bad governance, superstition, witchcraft, and corruption. There may be some truth in some of these crutches but it is not the whole truth. Poverty is a complex problem which requires us to look at different factors which propagate it. Each community needs to take time to analyse the root cause of poverty among them. As a way forward, it would be better to put behind whatever reason is given for the root cause and presence of poverty and suffering. Instead concentrate on strategic planning that is geared toward the eradication of poverty. The question to ask is: What can the Church do to bring hope to the people who are suffering from poverty?

We propose a solution that demands a holistic approach that views man as a unified whole. First, there is need for the Church to empower our local people with knowledge, competencies, and technical skills that help them to find ways of helping themselves. Education is the key to accomplishing this task. Empowerment must cover all levels of the church structure that is from the General Church down to the local church. We do appreciate the fact that the Church of the Nazarene has invested quite a lot of resources in

ministerial education. But there is a general feeling from this conference that education in the church should be expanded to include the provision of skills and competencies both in the formal and informal sectors. There needs to be a balance so that both needs are addressed and given equal attention. Empowerment of our people with skills and knowledge will help develop self-confidence on how best they can improve themselves without necessarily depending on others.

Areas of skills training would encompass but not be restricted to the following; child care, income generating programmes and activities, sewing, tailoring, health and hygiene, food and nutrition, better farming, livestock development, water catchments, community development projects, and social entrepreneurship that are relevant to each community. This would also help create employment for the people. For a long time the church has emphasised the spiritual aspect of people while neglecting the physical and social aspects.

Second, the church needs to instil a sense of ownership and responsibility in the minds and hearts of our people. Our people need to change their perception of the church from “theirs” to “ours”. They need to know that it is their church and they are responsible to take care of it. Our perception of the church should start with the local church. The word ‘church’ should not be synonymous with the word ‘Kansas City’ as has been the case. To achieve this change of attitude, there is need to intensify teaching on stewardship. People need to be taught the value of giving and sharing. The criterion that has been used to describe poverty in relation to giving is not correct. This is to say that people are poor so they cannot give. Poverty to some extent is a paradigm problem. Our people must change in their mind and thinking. Even in poverty people have something to meet their needs and therefore, they can give something. Our teaching on stewardship should include how they can use and manage resources. Money is not there just to be spent but to be wisely used and managed for the glory of God and for the benefit of others in society and the church. Even if our people need outside help they should see it not as a perpetual thing but as a short term help as they look for means to help themselves.

The International Church has done a remarkable job in providing financial assistance but this has tended to create a spirit of dependence among our people. Such assistance is good and needed where necessary but our

people should always be asking themselves what they can do and give to help themselves. Again, if the International Church would like to assist, they need to ask people at the grass roots level for their input and decisions on what needs to be done. It was felt that the International Church took long before they started giving decision-making power to national leaders, a fact which has contributed to the dependence syndrome among our people.

Third, there is a need for the church to partner and network with other reputable NGOs that share our values and ideals in seeking ways on how best to empower our people.

In all these endeavours, we affirm that God has ordained the Church to be the instrument for bringing hope to the people. The local church must be the hope to the community. It is the task of the church to show people in the community that it is in Jesus Christ alone in whom they need to hope. Jesus Christ, the hope of glory should be the message of the Church to the people. It is the message of holiness that changes people's attitudes, their thoughts, and actions. The mission and message of the church is the source of this glorious hope, hope that will enable our people to face the challenges and difficulties of our society. "Though the mountains be shaken and the hills removed yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed says the Lord, who has compassion on you" (Isaiah 54:10).

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Affirmation on the Great Commission

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We the participants of the Church of the Nazarene in Africa to the Theology Conference met at the Good News Convention Centre in Gauteng Province and discussed theological issues pertaining to the Great Commission and do hereby affirm the following:

1. We must use the local Church for personal evangelism beginning with families, relatives, and friends. We must use all available resources for evangelism to win the lost. Follow-up should be organized by the pastor of the local Church. And we must work with evangelists to win the lost.
2. The local Church should train evangelists with effective skills for evangelism.
3. The local Church is to teach Church members to be witnesses in personal evangelism using methods used in both Ethiopia and Mozambique.
4. Churches should be made aware of their social responsibilities and be trained on how to express themselves motivated by the love of Christ.
5. The JESUS Film must work hand in hand with the local Church.
6. Compassionate Ministries should work with local Churches and must be under the Church of the Nazarene in Africa.
7. There should be strong emphasis on “holiness evangelism” for this is Jesus’ ministry.
8. Gifts should be practiced through and confirmed by the local Church.
9. There should be a new emphasis on teaching and practicing baptism.

10. Christians must be motivated by their love for Christ and seek to win Muslims. We need Muslims specialists in this area.
11. The Church is not a political movement but Christians ought to address social injustices motivated by the love of God, always striving for reconciliation.
12. We plead for a strong follow-up method using materials like “Following Jesus”.
13. There should be strong emphasis on teaching the two “Works of Grace”.
14. There must be an ongoing teaching on discipleship and growing in Christlikeness.
15. We need a new focus on the office of the evangelist and prophet.
16. We need to network with other Christian bodies in letting our voices be heard on social-political matters.
17. Africa will be won by Africans and must be great commission driven, not by Africanism.
18. The JESUS Film is reaching rural areas, but we must find ways to reach cities.
19. There is need for African Theologies written by Africans more especially on eschatology, atonement, and deliverance.
20. We must keep the focus on new church plants.
21. We need to remind ourselves that the Church/body of Christ is commissioned to evangelize and disciple within the people’s, cultures, and context.