

Response

Speaking Love in Truth

by

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I am Nazarene both by heritage and by choice. My father chose to become a Nazarene because he found that the message of holiness spoke to that which was missing from the reality of his Christian experience. I, for myself, was ‘infected and infused’ by the *paradosis* handed on to me by teachers such as Prof. Bassett. I, in turn, seek to affirm and pass on that which is essential to our reason for existence, and to be faithful to our calling. In this I concur with Bassett.

I also share Bassett’s unease with the selective nature of our memory. He graciously prods our memory with regard to four questions. I shall be more blunt, but hope also to be gracious:

- *On taking for granted the Gospel.*

In my opinion, this tendency derives from two factors. First, it derives from a conviction that the gospel is ‘timeless truth’. As such, the message — in our case, that of holiness — is already settled, all we need is to find the right method of getting ‘it’ out there. This is the second factor: The inherent pragmatism of our church. The American (US) ‘can-do’ attitude of ‘if it works, do it’ is energetically applied.

The dangers of these factors are, one, a suspicion of those who ask questions about the received wisdom; and, two, an inexorable pressure to believe that the ends justify the means. The theological task, then, is twofold: one, to make the case that the very questioning is part of the effort to interpret the gospel to our generation; two, to test all means against the gospel.

The statistical records for new members in the US and Europe (at least) indicate that Nazarenes are still good at getting people to come into the church; the statistics of those who leave the church (figures that have to be deduced) indicate that the holiness we live once they become Christians is not as compelling. For this, the task of the theologian is to engage the church in examining the community life of holiness. This task is both more daunting and more difficult than finding the ‘means’ — and infinitely more satisfying!

- *The catholicity of the church.*

That Nazarenes can now use the word ‘catholic’ when speaking of themselves is surely a sign of maturity. Perhaps the ease of world-travel has encouraged a grass-roots awareness of the diversity and unity of the church, and a greater confidence of our place in the greater family of God.

This is a very new confidence, and so it might be too early in our history to emphasise the question, 'How do we express our common remembrance...?', over other questions. We have barely begun to realise the diverse 'empirical histories' of the church outside North America. Until we have heard these, we cannot adequately discover what is the commonality of supreme importance, which we may learn and affirm as our 'catholicity'.

Gatherings such as ours have to be replicated in many places to hear the histories, the testimonies, the confessions, not yet given a voice. It is in such a catholic setting, in a context of commitment to each other, that we will remember the need for confessions of pride, failure and sinfulness, and will seek forgiveness of one another and of our Lord.

In the same way, too, it is time for us to acknowledge the Church catholic, and to be an unashamed part of the whole. For too long we explained ourselves by that which separated us from the rest of Christianity; we have truncated our conception of the Church to the history and boundaries of our own. A simple fact of our history is this pragmatic truth: we have not won the whole world for Christ; we have not turned the whole Church back to holiness. Nor will we, on our own. And one reason for our limited usefulness to the Kingdom in the 20th Century was our isolation from the Body of Christ. It is time for us to remember our place, and to affirm that message which is our portion to tell.

- *Globalisation / Internationalisation*

These terms seem to be used uncritically in our church. However, they tend to be used with distaste and fear in much of the world where I have worked. If by either of these terms we think in corporate business terms (as is our Church's wont) — *a la* General Motors, or McDonalds, or Coca Cola, then some of us may wish to join the anti-globalisation barricades on the streets.

Do such concepts have a memory? It is a fact that the church has at least a presence all over the world, and so is *international*. But, we are so thin on the ground in most of these places that it is somewhat ridiculous to pretend to be *global*. We have not been world players long enough to have much of a memory. But we have an opportunity to decide whether *globalisation* is desirable!

If we embrace globalisation as the term is commonly used, we will want to seek to 'brand' ourselves with a recognisable logo or representation that is easily recognisable — to create an 'identity'. It is the nature of branding to homogenise — to remove local distinctions in favour of a product that is identical no matter where it is found (the hamburger, the soft-drink, the jeans). In the process, local flavours and distinctive contributions disappear, never to be seen again. All that remains is the identity of the brand-owner. And who is that?

As we enter the second century of our existence as a church, we have an opportunity to affirm our common history, and to imagine how we may give witness to the story in our challenging century. Listening to every voice tell the story, we will 'speak the truth in love' to 'grow up in every way into him who is the head—into Christ'.