

Response

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Before any comments on the subject are presented, it is in order to express appreciation for the question raised and stimulating discussion presented by Rev Chambo. He has posed some key issues that the Church of the Nazarene must deal with in every generation. To me there is no better time or forum than now.

Within the opening paragraphs Chambo expresses a premise that does not fit my experience: “poverty cripples the districts and local churches that we organize.” My experience has been that when God’s people focus on Christ and not their building, then the church will grow and succeed. This success will not be measured with material things, but with the salvation of souls. Such a fellowship will, even though of necessity, have a building that is “so plain that every board will say welcome to the poorest”. I have rejoiced with the congregations who have just completed their mud and stick and thatched building. I have watched these congregations use great effort to maintain such facilities as the ants and wind and rain attack it. They are successful! I have also seen congregations prepare requests for Alabaster funds year after year. With their eyes on a “Patron”, they seem to drift further and further from the Kingdom with each Alabaster proposal.

Yet, I know from the love Christ has placed in my heart, as well as His Word, that I cannot just stand by and watch. If we are brothers and sisters in Christ, if we are an extended family, if the Love of Christ is in us, then we cannot, we must not just watch! So what is the answer?

Chambo suggests that those of us in the Wesleyan tradition can be guided by the expression, “Gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can.” Whether he is the first to use it or not, Wesley has given us this quotable phrase that helps us understand a Christian’s attitude towards money and possession. I am not sure if he is expressing a formula for wealth creation or the alleviation of poverty. For me, the true essence of the Wesleyan method that made such a difference was not his view of money, but as Chambo quotes, “Wesley’s most important contribution in improving the

poor's quality of life lay, neither in these individual projects, nor in his extremely beneficial comprehensive education efforts. Instead, it lay in the challenged consciousness that this now notorious preacher began to engender both among the affected poor and the high strata of English society."

This is the heart of Compassionate Ministry--not that "compassionate ministry is a venue to offer charity from a position of comfort". Compassionate Ministry properly executed is a "challenged consciousness ... engendered both among the affected poor and the high strata."

Much of Wesley's genius in applying his theology was the system of bringing people together. The poor, disadvantaged could enter into leadership and gain not only the life experiences, but more importantly a sense of worth. This is the move from disadvantageousness to equality.

Let us explore an alternative view to the question. But to do so, I would like to pose an alternative question, "How can we order the practices in the Church in such a way that we give testimony with power to the Holiness Message?" In this I propose dropping back from the "economic" issue and moving to what may be the basic issue.

This question will pick up on the issues Chambo raises in his discussion of the Patron-client relationship. (I will avoid the discussion of the extended family sharing without expectation, as I would be as one merely peering through the window.)

Lasting relationships are established through mutual consent and a sense of needs being fulfilled. The Patron-client systems did lead to abuse. Most often this relationship does lead to a permanent underclass and a perversion of a meaningful relationship based on equal partners. However, the poor would still seek a patron to protect them. What then breaks the cycle? In my mind, Wesley was lead (or stumbled) upon it—a "method" that treated persons as equals, even though they are vastly different in the world's eyes. Let me share more.

Pazmiño (1997, p. 44f.) offers an interesting view of sharing "Hope". The church experiences and expresses Love in *Koinonia* (living in community). The community shares and shows Love in *Diakonia* (servicing others). The Faith of community is formed and informed in *Kerygma* (proclaiming the Word). And the Community expresses its Love and Faith to the world,

to itself, and to God in *Leitourgia* (worshipping the Divine). These we do well.

The local churches that do these four things well we label as “successful”. They will pass through our charts, under our lenses as “good” local churches. I would contend that such churches would fit right in line with most of the “mission” or “vision” statements I have seen.

But, according to Pazmiño there is another dimension — Hope. It is this dimension into which I believe Wesley led his people (as well as the four above). Hope is expressed and expanded, becoming the next generation’s inheritance, through *Propheteia* (advocating the Kingdom of God).

There are many and various reasons why the church serves well in “relief”. Helping people survive is not all that hard. I have seen both poor and rich do it (even some good ol’ middle class!). Being an advocate for the Kingship of God, now that is work!

Keeping people physically alive through sharing food and clothing is an action. At its centre advocacy is the change of attitude--change of worldview, if you will. (This is the inheritance that makes the difference; the inheritance that removes the disadvantage condition). Changing attitudes is difficult, long, hard work. I must confess; we do not do it well. Why not?

First, we are not good advocates for the Kingship of God because we do not believe in it. What is the “Kingdom of Heaven” or the “Kingdom of God”? I suspect most consider this to be the returning of Christ. So our “hope” in Christ is His second coming. Yet, we read, “The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” We pray, “Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.”

Hence, our view of the world is often through the eyes of the “fundamentalist”. Many a Nazarene acts as if the world is going to get worse and worse until Christ comes again. Many even believe it MUST get worse so that Christ is permitted to come again! Therefore, I sense that we have forgotten the hope for today when we read 1 Corinthians 15:19: “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men”.

Some Nazarenes would not express their view in this way, but they are still squarely in the camp of the fundamentalist for they believe pre-eminently in the sovereignty of God. This doctrine gets applied in lives as: “He is in control of everything.” “What happens is not my responsibility.” We as Nazarenes, and as Wesleyans, must be able to comprehend our being created in God’s image along side the issue of His sovereignty. That is, what are the implications of the “free will” in expressing “Hope”?

Second, we are not advocates because we accept our cultural view of the world. We do not see the world through the eyes of Christ. In this, Chambo is correct in identifying the Patron-client relationship as a problem. I contend that this relationship is formed around the view that “a poor man cannot”. (This is a colloquialism. Read ‘woman’ also.) When the “haves” hold to the view that “the poor cannot”, they act as patrons. When the “have-nots” hold to the view that “the poor cannot”, they act as clients.

Hence, I contend the question, “How can we order the practices in the Church in such a way that we give testimony with power to the Holiness Message?” is partially examined by how do we avoid the attitude “a poor man cannot.” Hence, we do need to become “social entrepreneurs”. As Chambo states, “Social entrepreneurs are committed to systemic changes and sustainable improvements.”

However, I agree with Dees (1998) rather than Chambo. “Social Entrepreneurs” is NOT an emerging paradigm for the 21st century. Dees notes, “We have always had social entrepreneurs, even if we did not call them that. They built many of the institutions we now take for granted.” The coining of a new phrase is not a new paradigm. Yet, this term does offer some good insights into a very old concept. Let us examine it.

The term “Entrepreneur” originates in French from the 17th and 18th centuries. Dees points out, “It means someone who ‘undertakes,’ ... a significant project or activity.” Dees quotes Drucker, “the entrepreneur always searches for change, responds to it, and exploits it as an opportunity.”

When the word “social” modifies “entrepreneurs”, the concept that emerges is entrepreneurs with an explicit social mission at the heart of all they do. Profit and wealth are tools not purposes. Social entrepreneurs

may function in the market place, but “free” markets can conflict with their social mission.

As I come to the end of my pages, I am now reflecting on this phrase I had not seen until I read Chambos’ work. I wonder. I wonder, “Do we Nazarenes in Africa believe that “a poor man” can be a “Social Entrepreneur”?”

As one African theologian commented, “We sell our coffee, our tea, our gold, and God’s blessings”. For God has said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Dees, J. Gregory, “*The Meaning of Social Entrepreneurship*”, Stanford University (www.gsb.stanford.edu/csi/SE_resources.html), 1998.

Pazmiño, Robert W. *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997.