

Sing It, Shout It, Preach It, Live It

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Not too many months before the Leupp family left the Philippines, I visited the Intramuros district of Manila. It was raining lightly as I walked toward the gate of Intramuros to leave, to find my way back home on the G-Liner bus. Just inside the gate I stood on the fringe of about 150 people, watching. A young woman with a bullhorn was speaking in an agitated and passionate way. People listened. They listened because virtually everyone there had a legitimate complaint against the Shoemart department store chain, for these Filipinos were striking for higher wages.

This was a relatively new thing for me, seeing Filipinos who were protesting. I had long since come to define Filipinos as peace-loving, flexible, reasonably tolerant people. As I traveled by bus and car across the Metro Manila area I recall seeing hostility between Filipinos only once, which is no small accomplishment in a city of ten or more million people packed tightly together. Protesting or agitated Filipinos were almost outside my frame of reference for what Filipinos were capable of doing. The peaceful revolution known as EDSA happened before I reached the country, and the actions chasing Joseph Estrada from office happened soon after we left.

Our time together today invites us to move from the articulation of the doctrine of holiness to its proclamation. The Filipinos who protested against Shoemart inside the Intramuros gate had made this move from articulation to proclamation, from thinking to action, from reflection to praxis.

Articulation assumes time to formulate, theologize, and think. Articulating holiness invites the Holy Spirit to be the chief formulator and speaker. If we believe Romans chapter eight, the most articulate statement of holiness may be in strictly human terms inarticulate, which is to say, Spirit-articulated. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. Karl Barth once suggested that the purest form any Christian theology can take is the sermon and the prayer. If that is true, then we could modify Paul's statement slightly to say, "For we do not know how to theologize as we ought."

It is an old story, often repeated, that for the past several hundred years there has been a fundamental split in Christian theology between the so-called academic, intellectual, or critical theology, on the one hand, and doxological, devotional, and spiritual theology on the other hand. The recent revival of trinitarian theology has gone some distance toward healing this centuries-long rift in the heart of theology.

But, really, this is much more of a Western problem than it is an Eastern problem. Eastern Orthodox theology has never really divided the theological task into the academic and the devotional. For the Orthodox, as I understand them, prayer is thinking and thinking is prayer. Life is prayer and prayer is life.

Randy Maddox and other relatively young Wesleyan theologians have tried to make the case that John Wesley's mature theology is compatible with parts of Eastern Orthodox thinking, more compatible than with some of the themes sounded by the classical Reformation traditions affiliated with Luther and Calvin.

The Asian and Pacific articulation of the doctrine of holiness may therefore want to consider

Orthodox theology more deeply. At the very least this may keep Asian Christians from making the same mistake the West has made, in dividing Christian theology from Christian spiritual formation.

Let me suggest a few ways that some of the themes from Eastern Orthodox theology may benefit the cause of Christian holiness across this region. For one, Orthodox theology does not focus on our guilt before God quite as much as Reformation theology. It focuses instead on sin as sickness, as the sickness unto death. The chief enemies of the soul are sin, death, and the devil. If it is true that the Philippines is not a guilt culture but instead a shame culture, the heavy emphasis Western theology places on our guilt before God may be intimidating and alienating to Filipinos and other Asians. Too much stress on guilt may only lead to fatalism.

Second, the incarnation of Jesus Christ is crucial. There is almost a sense in Orthodox theology that Jesus Christ saves the world from sin simply by being born into the world and sharing the common human lot. There is relatively greater stress on the resurrection than on the crucifixion that precedes it.

In the current Nazarene hymnal there are five or even six times as many hymns devoted to the blood of Jesus Christ and His cross than to the theme of His being raised from the dead by God His Father. Most of us can probably name lots of famous hymns about the blood and the cross, but it will be difficult for us to name even one famous hymn whose primary theme is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That ought to change.

In William Cowper's 1771 hymn one can almost feel the blood being poured over our sins. Yet there is nothing of similar power to express the final resolution of Calvary, namely the resurrection:

*There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains*

In my experience, at least, Filipinos need more emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Filipinos have themselves made this point. Too much stress on the agony of the crucified Christ may only tend to reinforce a worldview where suffering and agony are the only possible reality. The image of Christ the Victor, where the cross is not forgotten, but is also not the final word, needs to take root in the heart of the average Filipino. The image of the suffering and even the entombed Christ is already powerfully present. Whether or not the resurrection of Jesus Christ needs to be stressed more throughout the Asia-Pacific region is something we may want to discuss together.

If articulation should lead to proclamation, how does this happen? Articulation that is thoughtful and redemptive will lead to a fruitful proclamation. This has happened many times in my own life, perhaps most evidently in my choice of education as a life. I became a teacher largely through the examples I saw around me in my family. Both of my parents, especially my mother, were teachers, and two of my three sisters have been or are teachers. Think of all the years the Nielson family has contributed to the Church of the Nazarene around the world. Articulation of the goals, ideas, skills, and talents of the Christian ministry has passed rather directly into proclamation of the gospel.

The doctrine of holiness may also be understood as articulation becoming proclamation. If one studies any period of the history of Christianity, from the very beginnings up until now, the theology of Christian holiness is always there, if stronger in some periods than in others. It may not always be there in the words, phrases, and examples most dear to Nazarene hearts, but it is nonetheless there. There is a rich and deep history of articulation in monks, martyrs, reformers, bishops, theologians, and members of the laity. There is an equally deep history of proclamation by these same people.

Articulation *becomes* proclamation . . . and yet proclamation leads to a better and more truthful articulation, which in turn can produce a more effective and truthful and powerful proclamation. By

definition, both of these tasks can never be completed.

Any successful political candidate or party understands this. Politics is the art of persuasion, sometimes gentle persuasion, sometime persuasion backed up by armies. Politics is also getting the message out. The message, the ideology, the party platform is what the politician seeks to get out, which can be called articulation. But the message and the ideology are only dead letters if the politician cannot put the message across skillfully, forcefully, and persuasively.

Articulation and proclamation need one another in much the same way that form and function, or even law and gospel, need one another. The line between articulation and proclamation should be such that one cannot really tell where one begins and the other ends.

Although I would not describe myself as a theologian of liberation, I think we can learn something from what might be called the praxis model of contextualizing theology. As Stephen Bevans describes this model in his book, *Models of Contextual Theology*, the praxis model depends on the relationship between committed action and reflection. While this model may be most associated with committed action, before that can happen there must be a background of critical reflection. This critical reflection consists of analysis of action and situation and the rereading of the Bible and the tradition of interpreting the Bible. This critical reflection in its turn leads to committed and intelligent action, or praxis, which may lead to further critical reflection.

In the Wesleyan tradition as a whole, the chief means of turning articulation into proclamation is of course love. John Wesley is sometimes given credit for completing the Protestant Reformation through his insistence on the importance of love. Martin Luther had criticized the late medieval Catholic system as producing alienated instead of confident and trusting souls. Whatever we can know about God cannot be contrary to God's written revelation in the Bible, Luther believed. The incarnate revelation in Jesus Christ is more compelling still. The believer's faith in the merits of Jesus Christ is all-sufficient for salvation. The grace of God makes possible our faith. *Sola Scriptura, sola Christus, sola fides, sola gratia*—this is the Reformation theology.

John Wesley accepted all of this, more or less, but emphasized the witness of the Holy Spirit to a degree that Luther had not, the fruit of the Spirit, and the centrality of love. Wesley believed love to be the heaven of heavens so far as Christian faith and witness were concerned. When the believer is in heaven, there might be no need for either faith or hope, because both of these Christian virtues are fully formed and realized in heaven. But not so for love. Love continues to grow, sweeten, and be refined in heaven.

Whereas Martin Luther was inclined to call the Epistle of James a book of straw for its seeming contradiction of Paul's theology of justification by grace through faith alone, Wesley strove to harmonize James and Paul. It is not faith alone that is the Christian life, for this could be too easily cut off from the expectations of the gospel. It is not even love alone, because love unguided by faith may drift into sentiment, emotion, or even sensuality. It is, of course, faith working through love, as Paul wrote to the Galatians.

There is a real sense in which nothing I say after this will amount to more than a feeble commentary on this fragment of Scripture from Galatians chapter five. Proclamation is essentially a combination of pastoral theology, evangelism, and Christian ethics, and on the basic terms that Wesleyan theology sets forth, faith working through love is just about the best thing we can possibly say.

The central Christian symbol is the cross of Jesus Christ, which as we said earlier must always point ahead to the resurrection. The central meaning of the cross is not the crude literalism of blood and gore, but love. Because of this, I believe that love must be crucial in both our articulation and our proclamation of Christian holiness.

Love is an essential part of the everyday landscapes of our lives. We cannot imagine life without love. Love grows and flourishes, or else it dies. Stagnant love is the same as dying love. Love is obviously a universal value that is to be found around the world in every culture. One hermeneutical key to unlocking cultural patterns is to discern how love works in a culture. The image of the family matriarch in the Philippines is an image of love. The image of the salaryman in Korea and Japan may also be an image of love, or perhaps the lack of love.

While this hermeneutical key is very important, it is love as displayed in the Bible and in the life of Jesus Christ that is most crucial. Cultural love may on occasion nearly rise to the level of biblical love. But for the most part it will fall far short of the biblical reality.

To follow after the love of God, as C. S. Lewis has expressed it, four loves must be an imitation of God incarnate: our model is the Jesus, not only of Calvary, but of the workshop, the roads, the crowds, the clamorous demands and surly oppositions, the lack of all peace and privacy, the interruptions. For this, so strangely unlike anything we can attribute to the Divine life in itself, is apparently not only like, but is, the Divine life operating under human conditions.

The dramatic contrast Lewis mentions is between the divine life in itself and the divine life under the conditions of humanity. To speak about the divine life in itself can all too soon become a very large theological abstraction that soon drifts away from the concerns of practical theology. Although we cannot with confidence say very much about the divine life in and of itself, we can say that the works of God that we can observe in creation and redemption are an extremely faithful representation of the inner life of God. The Son of God said that we will know human beings by their fruits, and this is all the more true of the Triune God. We can get a truthful, if incomplete, glimpse into the heart of the Triune God through his works. His chief work is of course the work of reconciliation between an angry humanity and a welcoming God who is eager to forgive and to make holy.

I am not sure what each one of us would say today if asked what our true inner life consists in. I am not convinced that I can figure out all that is within me. But I think, following C. S. Lewis and before him the Apostle Paul, each of us needs to empty himself or herself out of everything that would impede the proclamation of Christian holiness. The entire life of Jesus Christ was an extended *kenosis*. Lewis captures this reality in writing of the Jesus of the workshop, the roads, the crowds, the clamorous demands and surly oppositions, the lack of all peace and privacy, the interruptions.

Lewis's phrases remind me of living in the Philippines. Once, in the wood-carving village of Paete, I came across a man who was carving a life-sized crucifix. He was practicing his livelihood, although I am sure he was not growing rich, but was this crucifix any sort of window into his heart? His theology? His smoking a cigarette, in front of a poster advertising Hope cigarettes, was incongruous, but not totally contradictory.

Life at the seminary was often rich and full, if on occasion frustrating. I have spent about fifteen months on a small university campus in the United States, and one ingredient that is definitely missing, if almost impossible to define, is community. I often felt like Stephanie and I were part of much bigger purposes than our own while we both worked at Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, but have not often had this feeling in my current employment.

During my eight years of teaching at the seminary I suppose I must have instructed close to one hundred fifty students. Of course I believe that they taught me much more than I taught them. What are some of the enduring realities I learned from my students? For one thing, endurance in the face of adversity. For another thing, making the most of limited physical and financial resources. For a third thing, maintaining a joyful spirit when studies, lack of money, and family illness threatened to overwhelm all else. For a fourth thing, how to be accepting of the stranger in the midst, and along with that, how to be tolerant and accepting of points of view that are not native to your part of the world,

and therefore not necessarily part of your indigenous perspective.

The reverse of my situation in the Philippines would probably not be tolerated in the USA. What I mean is simply this: take an Asian professor of theology, place him in an American seminary, and have him teach theology that is largely not Western in scope and origin. Have him teach theology that flows out of his own life experiences as an Asian. Those American students would tolerate only so much of this approach, and then would likely rebel and want one of their own kind. But not so for Asians, although as the work of theological contextualization continues, we must expect increasingly fewer Western imports, both books and professors.

I sometimes fretted that my students were watching my life too closely as a Christian example, because on too many occasions I was not allowing the grace of the Lord to work fully and freely in my life. Sometimes, maybe especially on a weekend, I really did not want to see or interact with any students. I wanted some good old-fashioned American privacy, which sometimes seemed to be in very short supply.

But these thoughts did not linger long. I had been accepted and even loved by the students at the seminary, had been treated better than I deserved to be. The sense of being interrupted and exposed left as I considered what my true missionary calling was, which was to educate students in the sort of theology that would enable God's kingdom to grow in purity and presence across this vast region.

Waiting for a bus in Kaytikling, I sometimes thought of this hymn lyric:

*Where cross the crowded ways of life
Where sound the cries of race and clan
Above the noise of selfish strife
We hear Thy voice, O Son of Man!*

*From tender childhood's helplessness
From woman's grief, man's burdened toil
From famished souls, from sorrow's stress
Thy heart has never known recoil.*

*The cup of water giv'n for Thee
Still holds the freshness of Thy grace
Yet long these multitudes to see
The sweet compassion of Thy face.*

*O Master, from the mountainside
Make haste to heal these hearts of pain*

These words of nearly one hundred years ago can still speak today. They diagnose the human situation in the first two verses, call us to Christian action in the third verse, wait with expectation in the fourth verse, and look ahead to the City of God in the final verse.

Part of the proclamation of Christian holiness is to anticipate the City of God. Our efforts at spreading the gospel of holiness should work toward creating anticipations, intimations, foreshadowings, and pointers to the City of God.

A technique that worked for John Wesley, and which I believe will work across the Asia-Pacific region, is to employ with sensitivity the class system Wesley used among the early Methodists in Great

Britain. Some detractors of early Methodism have seen it as falling prey to a works-righteousness approach to the Christian life. For these critics, the Methodist class system would be in a sense the incarnation of works-righteousness, because it obligated people to meet together, to be held accountable for their sins of the past week, to give money to the poor, to perform acts of charity.

Richard Heitzenrater, who is perhaps the world's leading authority on Oxford Methodism, doubts this analysis. He says that from the late 1720s, or precisely when Oxford Methodism arose, Wesley believed that true happiness came from an inward holiness. Heitzenrater sees Wesley and these early Methodists not as being bound to works-righteousness, but rather as practicing an inward religion, the fruit of which had to be divinely instilled virtues. Heitzenrater sees the Oxford Methodist ethic as one of virtue, not one of obligation. In different contexts, to various audiences, in diverse circumstances, John Wesley's view was remarkably stable and similar. It was to please God, and to improve in holiness, in the love of God and thy neighbor.

Meeting in a Wesley band is one of the best ways I know to practice what Wesley suggested, to improve in holiness and grow in the love of God and neighbor alike. As Wesley envisioned the network of Methodist classes, there was an appropriate place for everyone, regardless of his or her place along the road of Christian perfection. The particular forms, structures, and techniques Wesley used are not holy in themselves—they can easily be adapted to be appropriate for your time and your place. Remember what George Whitefield once said that Wesley's ability to organize the early Methodists was what set Wesley apart from Whitefield. Whitefield lamented that his followers were only a rope of sand, whereas Wesley's followers had powerful continuity on their side.

The Christian ethic of Saint Augustine has sometimes been summarized as teaching us to love God, and do as you please. For of course if one truly does love God, then this consuming love of God will surely shape decisively all that one does or thinks of doing.

I think this basic sentiment will work for the doctrine of holiness, with minor adjustments. Love God, articulate holiness truly, and then proclaim as you please. I really believe that. The core beliefs of the doctrine of holiness—God's grace made conveniently available to us, our continual receiving of the merits of Jesus Christ for our sins, the cleansing and hovering reality of the Holy Spirit in every aspect of our lives—are not to be negotiated. They can surely be contextualized and adapted, which is obviously part of articulation, yet I do not think they can be improved upon.

Proclamation must be faithful to articulation. Proclamation that is not faithful to articulation will ultimately fail. One thing that Floyd Cunningham once said has stayed with me. He said that since the Church of the Nazarene aims to be a truly international church, in some ways it is like the Roman Catholic Church. I believe he was talking mainly about the form the Church of the Nazarene takes, and the centrality of how it is governed, considering its Board of General Superintendents. While the Roman communion has not been consciously imitated by the Church of the Nazarene, there are yet some similar patterns shared by both churches.

I would like to suggest that the catholicity of the Roman communion is equally important, as Dr. Cunningham no doubt implied. The Roman church stretches around the world, as increasingly does the Church of the Nazarene. The Roman communion tends toward the conservative in its theology, at least in its official theology. Although in many important ways Nazarene theology is at odds with Roman Catholic perspectives, the same conservative spirit is found in the Nazarene theology of heart holiness. The doctrine of entire sanctification proposes nothing at all that is remotely contrary to Scripture, although draws out from Scripture some themes that most everyone else has either ignored, or else interpreted differently. The secondness of entire sanctification is a good example of this, or the Nazarene belief in two definite, if related, works of grace. What some have called the optimism of grace instead of the pessimism of nature is probably an even better example.

To me, at least, catholicity implies a reverence for tradition, and yet an openness to try new things that are in the spirit of what has gone before. By new things I mean both new techniques and methodologies, as well as new ideas, although to my way of thinking we must exercise caution in not straying from the three or four basic non-negotiable truths of the doctrine of entire sanctification.

The Wesleyan understanding of Christian perfection is a beautiful and blessed truth. The Holy Spirit is infinitely resourceful in helping us as we endeavor to be faithful to what the title of my address proclaims: *SING IT, SHOUT IT, PREACH IT, LIVE IT!! Holiness Unto the Lord, Now and Forever!*