

A Response to “Holy Persons” by Tom Noble Frank Moore, Respondent

We each reflect on this paper from our particular backgrounds, educations, and life experiences. We're also influenced by our particular ministry assignments. Dr. Middendorf's response comes from the broad perspective of the General Church. He gets to analyze our church often from 35,000 feet (both literally and figuratively). My ministry is divided between 2 very different groups of believers. My Sunday School class members approach life and think from a modern perspective; my college students approach life and think from a post-modern perspective. I might as well commute between 2 separate planets; I couldn't get a more varied experience from the 2 groups. Since I spend most of my time on a college campus, I want to focus my response today through the lens of my students.

First let me say “Thank you, Dr. Noble for this excellent paper and well as your paper on theological method.” You framed the discussion for us well. Your fresh approach with new images and language gives us another path into our subject. It also helps me relate better to my students. You see, I grew up in a culture characterized by rugged individualism. First because I grew up in the United States which is philosophically individualistic by nature. And second,

because my family lived in the country on a farm; for the most part we were self-sufficient. We grew just about everything we ate and bartered for most of the services we needed. My only play mates were my siblings for most of my childhood. My television heroes were the Lone Ranger and Tarzan – both rugged individualists. We attended a Church of the Nazarene weekly where we heard about working out our own salvation. We even had a check list of do's and don'ts for holy living. I could live that kind of religion pretty much on my own, without anyone's help. After all, I was a fairly self-sufficient farm boy.

Years later while in graduate school, I realized I didn't have a very biblical model of salvation or the Church. Even though I was a Protestant and so protested against being able to do anything to earn my salvation, I had a form of works-righteousness in my individualistic view of sanctification. Thankfully, my approach has changed over the years to a paradigm that is much more communal and far less individualistic with regard to growth in grace after personally accepting God's gift of salvation. One of my last books is entitled *Traveling with Friends*. It's about living the life of holiness and growing in grace within the community of faith as opposed to my previous *Lone Ranger* approach. It's a good thing I adjusted my approach or I'd be out of a teaching job. You see, my post-modern students are far more communal and far less individualistic than I fully understand. For example, they date in herds. What's that all about? They

approach all of life this way; they even approach their understanding of faith this way.

That reason alone is enough to keep us talking at this conference. We absolutely must find a way to articulate the foundational truths of our faith (more particularly in this paper -- to articulate the foundational truths of our holiness belief) in language forms the next generation understands and identifies with. To be honest with you, that scares me to death. I'm so afraid something will get lost in translation. But to not do the hard work of making the translation is to lose the next generation to the knowledge of God that we hold so dear.

Theological liberals have a much easier time with this "new generation stuff." They just throw the old beliefs away like a Christmas tree in January and start with a clean slate. We attempt with our dynamic theology to remain faithful to the Bible and our theological tradition while we recast the old message in new paradigms. That's a much harder task. Add to that the complicating difficulty of letting our interpretation of Scripture influence our interpretation of our tradition and vice versa as Dr. Noble references in his final footnote and you have an even more daunting task.

Dr. Noble clearly articulates our Wesleyan understanding of such doctrines as original sin, grace, justification, and sanctification. He suggests the need to expand our thought in ways that will capture the imaginations of our post-modern

listeners. He doesn't do all of the hard work for us, but he points us in directions that are both biblical and culturally relevant. It's not that we said it wrong in the past. Quite the contrary. The Spirit of God has used our previous theological formulations to reach entire generations for Christ. But, the philosophical and cultural ground has shifted under us. It's now our task to craft new ways of expressing God's Good News to the next generation in ways that reach their hearts and engage their minds with the way they process reality.

No doubt in this conference we have heard some new ideas or some new ways of expressing old ideas. Rather than seeing them in opposition to one another, or competing one against the other, we must look for the balance between them. We have far more in common than what we disagree over. We're all trying to capture our indescribable experience with God in broken, human language – a tool that often doesn't serve us well. In some ways, the brokenness of language is a blessing because it keeps us talking to one another and keeps us searching for more accurate ways to express our faith. So, we must continue to talk, and we must continue to learn from one another.

Dr. Noble gives us an excellent example with the development of this paper. You see, I received an earlier version of it. Then after Dr. Noble received critiques and insights from some of his colleagues, he made corrections and sent me an updated version. We all must do the same thing. Talk to one another, correct one

another, and be corrected by one another. The dialogue is as important as the product of our discussion.

Dr. Donald Metz used an illustration in our theology class while I was a student at MidAmerica that profoundly impacted my thinking. He related a story of one particular day in his Doctrine of Holiness class at Bethany Nazarene College when 2 students took opposing sides on a particular position on the doctrine of holiness. As the discussion progressed, the 2 guys grew more and more agitated. Finally, their difference of opinion became so polarized that tensions flared, and they almost broke into a fist fight right there in class. What a sight! Two holiness students fist fighting over a holy relationship with a holy God at a holiness college. While I know that's a ridiculous thought, some of us have been just as guilty of getting agitated with those among us who don't say it just the way we think it ought to be said. That's why we're here this weekend – to frame the subjects and continue the discussion, hopefully long after the conference ends.

In summary, what I hear Dr. Noble's paper saying to me about our holiness theology is this:

1. Keep the dialogue going (between professors within divisions, between professors at all of our schools, between professors and DSs and Boards of Trustees at our schools, between DSs and general church leaders, between all of us right here in this room) The church is depending on us to work it

out. We complain that our laymen are confused about holiness theology.

Maybe they're confused because we've confused them!

2. Look for our common ground
3. Hold to the core values and biblical language of our holiness faith
4. Remember that we agree on a lot more than we disagree
5. Agree to disagree agreeably. Let's agree to say what we need to say to each other and not about each other.
6. Avoid heresy
7. Learn to balance and hold several doctrines in cooperative relationship with one another. Try and see things as "both/and" rather than the "either/or."
8. Maintain relationships both with one another and with our fallen world.
Grace filled relationships may be our best tool in this discussion.
9. Work out our salvation together as we assist one another on the journey but with the awareness that we stand individually in judgment. We will hear more about that this evening.
10. And, most of all, live in close personal communion with God throughout this entire process. Only the communion of and with His Spirit can bind us together as one.

As a player in the current generation of holiness teachers and writers, I personally am committed to doing all of this. There's absolutely no room for

another impasse. Not here; not now. We don't have the luxury of wasting time here.

I pledge before you this afternoon that I will seek to live by these principles. Let me urge you to do the same. We must all ask the Lord to help us to somehow find the means to do all of this in ways that capture the imagination of a post-modern generation who must be authentically presented with the claims of the gospel of full salvation. God is counting on you and me to articulate His truth to our world.