

## THIS WE BELIEVE

What is happening in the Church of the Nazarene in the Horn of Africa field has striking similarities to the church of the Acts of the Apostles. In October it was my privilege to be in Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia for district assembly. I ordained seven men as elders – our first elders in this field – each of them a truly remarkable story of grace. The Horn of Africa is not a world area that with open arms gladly embraces evangelical Christianity. In spite of that, the Church of the Nazarene has had extraordinary growth in the past five years and is positioned now for perhaps the most explosive growth our denomination has ever known. This growth is directly attributable to those same qualities that marked the early church – total, no-strings-attached commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, prayer, fasting, faith, miracles, courageous witness, suffering, persecution, incorrigible joy and yes, total belief in and faithful proclamation of the biblical doctrine of Christian holiness, particularly as defined in the Articles of Faith in the Manual of the Church of the Nazarene.

Let me illustrate this with one story. His name is Zecharias Morge. There is nothing that would distinguish him physically. He is slight of stature, a face like all men's faces, and about 73 years of age. He is the oldest man I have ordained and frankly, it was one of the most humbling moments of my life. Zecharias came into the Church of the Nazarene in 1998. On the corner of his little farm plot, he literally built the Chano Mille Church of the Nazarene with his own hands. At great personal sacrifice he tinned the roof and wired the lights. This was the first Nazarene church in Southern Ethiopia.

Those early years for Pastor Zecharias and his people were marked by persecution, not just from Muslims or the Orthodox Church. Evangelicals viewed Nazarene teaching as cultish; thus they joined with the Orthodox leaders against the Nazarenes. They threatened to literally destroy the church building. Possessions and equipment were repeatedly stolen. Pastor and people were harassed, cruelly oppressed, and persecuted. Zecharias was falsely accused of many crimes, imprisoned on numerous occasions, and often tortured in efforts to get him to deny his faith.

While all of this was happening the church began to grow throughout Southern Ethiopia. Within five years Pastor Zecharias' ministry launched the Ethiopia Omo district with 13 organized congregations and 40 preaching points. He has mentored 15 ministers from his own congregation. Two of those young men I ordained along with Zecharias. Following the ordination, I appointed both of these men as the first national district superintendents of the districts where they serve. Four others completed the course of study this year.

There is one story that truly captures the essence of our Ethiopian Nazarene brother named Zecharias. Like his Lord, Zecharias often retreats to the hills to fast, pray, and be alone with the Father. One morning as he left the village, two men carrying rifles fell in behind him and started following. The oft-threatened, persecuted, and imprisoned pastor thought that this could be the end. He hastened his pace and soon arrived at his special sacred place of encounter with the Holy One. He dropped to his knees and prayed audibly for some time. Eventually he stood and discovered that the two men with the guns were standing nearby. He walked over to them and asked, "What do you want from me?" They answered,

“We have been watching you. We have come to invite you to come to our village and start the Church of the Nazarene.”

That story represents what has happened to Zecharias and the Southern Ethiopian Nazarenes in the past 6-8 months. Incredibly, persecution has virtually disappeared, death threats have ended, and there have been no more imprisonments. Governments at local, district, and provincial levels have pledged their protection of Nazarenes. Equipment long since taken has been returned. There is now total freedom to show the Jesus film. Other churches are now saying: “These Nazarenes have recaptured some ancient Christian truths which other denominations have lost.” Churches and preaching points are springing up everywhere and they are full and running over. There’s no telling what the Holy Spirit is going to do through the Church of the Nazarene in Southern Ethiopia in the near future.

There’s one last segment of this Zecharias story which must be told to make it relevant to this context today. I have a picture which was taken by Missionary Dr. Dan Miller at a meeting of the Ministerial Credentials Board. Zecharias had just been asked, “Can you give us a scripture which you use in preaching the doctrine of entire sanctification?” Dr. Miller said, “He was not content to answer with one scripture. He went from one to another to another until finally we said, ‘Enough’.” Oh, yes, did I mention that five years ago Zecharias was illiterate. Did I mention that the reason he became a Nazarene was because he heard for the first time the doctrine of Christian holiness and instantly fell in love with this glorious truth. He testifies to being entirely sanctified; he preaches it, teaches it, and is passionate about living it and bringing others into the experience and relationship. His passion is spreading like a prairie fire throughout Southern Ethiopia.

What I have seen in the Horn of Africa has all the markings of becoming a movement – a holiness movement. I believe it will happen. I predict that it will spread like a mighty conflagration throughout this field. The results will be staggering and there will be no question that the God of the book of Acts still lives and uses humble, obedient, Spirit-filled men and women.

What I am witnessing in Africa is not unlike the early days of our denomination when we were characterized as a movement. In those early days here in North America our forebears were utterly passionate about one thing: “to spread scriptural holiness.” That passion ignited a movement. It is my perception that early Nazarenes were not driven to plant churches, do compassionate ministries, and develop educational institutions. These things flowed naturally out of their burning passion to “spread scriptural holiness”.

That was 100 years ago and things happen over time. Passion can cool and priorities can change. Movements can give way to empty ceremony, cold forms, and become institutionalized, remaining only a semblance of their past. Whether or not the Church of the Nazarene in North America has fallen victim to the subtle ravages of drift over the past 100 years is debatable. That we have and are experiencing erosion of what was our primary passion to “spread scriptural holiness” is beyond debate in my judgment. This issue can be approached from several angles. I desire to address it within the context of a theological conference whose purpose is the affirmation of the Articles of Faith. I contend that we are confused and conflicted regarding the all-important Article X. Incidentally, indecisiveness and passion are mutually exclusive, therefore we must resolve the indecision if we have any intention to reignite our passion to “spread scriptural holiness.”

It is not necessary to trace the history that has brought us to state of doctrinal incoherency. We are all indebted to Mark Quanstrom for his work –*A Century of Holiness Theology* - which gives a thorough, scholarly overview of the history and current status of where we are with respect to “our cardinal doctrine”. Before adding the last chapter to the book, Dr. Quanstrom succinctly summarizes our dilemma in these words: “In light of the two divergent and apparently irreconcilable explications of the doctrine of entire sanctification within the denomination itself . . . the question in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was whether or not the Church of the Nazarene had a coherent and cogent doctrine of holiness at all” (p.169). While I resonate with the statement, I am unwilling to accept the notion that these two divergent explications of the doctrine of entire sanctification are “irreconcilable”. If they are, I don’t like the choices regarding the future of the Church of the Nazarene with which this leaves us. If they can be reconciled and I believe they can and must be, then we must do whatever we can now to bring doctrinal reconciliation for the sake of Christ and His Church.

I have been thoughtful and prayerful about this for a long time. I believe there is guidance for us in the primitive church in ancient Corinth. Corinth, as we all know, was a church rife with problems – sexual immorality, marriages ending in divorce, legal disputes, controversy over spiritual gifts, factionalism regarding leaders, etc. There are similarities between problems faced in the ancient church in Corinth and the current Church of the Nazarene. I focus on one issue in particular.

## I. THE CONTENTIOUS DIVISION OVER LEADERS.

I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another, 'I follow Cephas'; still another, 'I follow Christ' (1:10-12).

The Corinthian church was divided into four factions, each having its own unique emphasis, each committed to its own leader, and there were evidently hostile feelings toward those of the other groups. The real cause of the dissension lay in allegiance to individual teachers.

First, there were those who were committed to the Apostle Paul. These people were probably charter members of the church. They were converted through the ministry of the great apostle to the Gentiles himself. Assuming that many of these people were Gentiles, their connection to Paul is obvious and their contention that he is the true leader within the church is understandable.

Secondly, there were those who claimed loyalty to Apollos who was "a Jew from Alexandria, a learned man with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures" (Acts 18:24). He was a man who "vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ" (Acts 18:28). Apollos was eloquent which may have been a real contrast to Paul and additionally, he was from Alexandria where the intellectuals were turning Christianity into a philosophy rather than a religion. Clever, engaging communicators will always attract followers. Thus, Apollos had attracted a following among the Corinthian believers.

Then there was Cephas (Peter's Aramaic name) who might have won followers because of his Jewishness and his Jerusalem connections. These people may have been looking for a Christianity which was more sympathetic to their Jewish heritage than was being expressed by either Paul or Apollos.

The final group – the “Jesus group” - claimed some special relationship to Jesus or at least emphasized something unique about Jesus which the other parties did not understand or had neglected.

Thus, the first century church at Corinth was a divided church.

I contend that the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church of the Nazarene is a church divided theologically. During the past 30-40 years a doctrinal breach has occurred, bringing us to place where echoes of the Corinthian church can be heard in our midst: “I follow Wesley” – “I follow Wiley”; “I follow Wyncoop” – “I follow Taylor/Metz”; “I follow Dunning” – “I follow Grider”. We are not engaged in an all-out civil war. We are still being civil with each other though there have been some “friendly fire” wounds and casualties. It may be likened to a “lover’s quarrel” (though I believe it is much more serious than that). Thus, polarization over different interpretations of the doctrine has occurred and slowly, subtly, we have become divided over the doctrine which brought us into being. Polarization creates tension because those who gather around whichever pole give every impression that “We are the Jesus party” - “We are the ones who have it right”. Such an environment can be intimidating and confusing, leaving one in a state of quandary where it becomes easy to rationalize, “I am not certain which tradition is right; therefore I will choose neither.” I fear that there are not a few who have made this choice – and it is a choice one can easily

justify (particularly pastors) when researchers are telling us that post-moderns eschew anything doctrinal.

Incidentally, does that mean that because post-moderns have distaste for doctrine that we should not preach or teach it? Question - Have we been preaching holiness for 100 years because people wanted to hear it or because we believed they needed to hear it? I am profoundly convicted about the holiness message because I believe it speaks to the deepest need of the human heart and every person in this world has the right to hear this liberating message. The fact that people do not want to hear the holiness message only complicates our missional task – it means that we must discover new, fresh metaphors and constructs to more effectively communicate this truth.

Thus, my friends, our plight is complex but begs for redemptive address. I believe that we are in a struggle for the very soul of our denomination. We have a serious theological identity crisis. Much of our current dilemma came into focus in the late 70's and early 80's during the debate regarding utilizing Pentecostal language in relation to the experience of entire sanctification. Amid this discussion Dr. H. Ray Dunning wrote a paper entitled: "On Saving the Scholar for the Church or Vice Versa." He began by describing our quandary in this manner:

The question of the use of Pentecostal language in referring to the work of sanctification has become a 'warm' issue among us and threatens to be a divisive one. The sides are clearly drawn. If it does in fact separate the persons involved into schisms, it will invalidate the reality of the experience to which both groups are profoundly committed and sabotage the

truth to which we all adhere, as well as threaten the integrity of the church we love.

The end result of this rather contentious debate was a ruling by the Board of General Superintendents which in essence put the church's blessing on understanding Article X either in the historic Wesley way or the modern holiness movement way. I do not second guess the wisdom of that ruling. However, we now have 20+ years of history with that ruling. Maybe it is time to revisit it and either reaffirm it or take a different tact. I am willing to reaffirm it but only if an all-out effort to bring consensus on this all-important issue fails. Is it possible to reach a unified position on entire sanctification so that again we as one can say, "THIS WE BELIEVE!" Can the theology of Christian holiness "sing again" among the people called Nazarenes? I hope and pray that it can; if it can, it might reignite a movement; if it cannot, then we will probably lose our identity to a more generic Christianity.

It is rather clear to me – we have a problem! We are in a theological muddle. I am aware that there are some who believe that we have no problem. I wrote a little paper for the Global Theology Conference in Guatemala. I very intentionally entitled it, "What About the 'Secondness' of Entire Sanctification?" I desired only to get the matter on the table, hoping for vigorous debate. Such did not happen! I heard indirectly that some were saying that "secondness" is a non-issue today. That can be taken in either of two ways: 1) we are emphasizing "secondness" in our teaching and preaching so there is no need to be concerned or, 2) we have already moved beyond "secondness", meaning that it is a dead issue; therefore, no reason for discussion. I fear that the latter is what was intended. I confess

that I am concerned about those who believe that we have nothing to be concerned about. **We have a problem!**

At issue for us is how do we address this situation? I believe we can go to school on the Apostle Paul's handling of the Corinthian situation. As you know, Paul brings up the problem in chapter one, then deals with it at length in chapter three. Here is a profound lesson we can learn from Paul:

II. RESOLUTION OF OUR ISSUE BEGINS WITH THE WAY WE VIEW EACH OTHER RELATIONALLY.

We are a very diverse group – clergy and lay, pastors and professors, presidents of educational institutions and graduate students, D. S.'s and G. S.'s

I am a General Superintendent. I did not ask for this job nor did I seek it. I was very fulfilled in my role as a college administrator. God and the church jerked me out of the college setting and extruded me into this responsibility. I believe that is true of each of my colleagues as well. I have enormous respect for this office; the duties and powers which accompany this office are sobering. For example, here are two duties given to the Board of General Superintendents by the Manual: 1) “To provide supervision for the international church” (317.1) which this is an ineffable responsibility, and 2) to be the “authority for the interpretation of the law and doctrine of the Church of the Nazarene” (318) which gives immense power to the Board of General Superintendents in doctrinal matters. Of course, the General Assembly is the final authority in all matters.

Let me assure you that the Board of General Superintendents does not take lightly its responsibility when our theological identity as defined in the Articles of Faith is being threatened. We take seriously our charge to keep the church true to its theology and mission. Nonetheless, our board is wise

enough to know that this issue cannot be resolved by edict nor are we inclined to engage our “bully pulpit” (the authority of the office on doctrinal matters) to resolve this matter. Incidentally, it may be true that the Board of General Superintendents has a “bully pulpit” but you who are teachers and pastors, models and mentors, have a much more significant role pragmatically in the making of Nazarene ministers than the Board of General Superintendents. There is no more powerful position in the church than those who are responsible for the training, education, theological shaping, and credentialing of ministers – and this all-important process is in your hands more than General Superintendents. Is it the “Board of General Superintendent bully pulpit” or the classroom lectern that has the greatest impact on the church?

Incidentally, it is our perception that when one has met the requirements for ordination, this means that the candidate knows, understands, believes in, has experienced and is experiencing, is passionate about and can effectively communicate the doctrines of our church as summarized in the Articles of Faith – and that includes Article X. Here’s the point I want to make: each of us has a vital role to play in the life of the Church. We must respect each other’s role. Away with “friendly fire”. Let’s create a climate of mutual trust predicated on relationships which go much deeper than roles or titles. Paul reminds us of this in the way he addresses the Corinthians.

#### A. WE ARE FINITE HUMAN BEINGS.

In their disputes about human leaders, Paul tells them that they are acting like “mere men” (3:4). With respect to the leaders themselves (Paul, Apollos, and Peter), Paul says “No more boasting about men” (3:21). Let’s face it – we are all just finite beings. As mere mortals, being used by the

infinite God in bringing in His Kingdom in the world, we must rely totally upon God for everything in the life and work of the Church. The good news is that all of the limitless resources of God are available to us for Kingdom work, even for things like bringing resolution to tough theological issues. We must engage some of our best minds, people who are theologically astute from both the academic and grass roots sides, people who have great affection for our denomination, and of supreme importance, humble people who will fall on their knees before God and seek His guidance. Oh, my friends, we need God's help to be our guiding light if we experience the future God has designed for us.

Denominationally we are facing several crucially important matters. In my judgment no issue is as critical to us and to our future together as resolving our theological ambiguity. I am well aware that there are some, including many of you here today, who believe that the two differing theological views can peacefully coexist within our denomination. I was intrigued in reading Dr. Quanstrom's book regarding the controversy surrounding the publication of Dr. Dunning's book, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*, as the "official" theology of the church. Dr. Purkiser was a member of the editorial board and it was he who made the suggestion of a compromise that it be published as a "representative" theology. Until reading Dr. Quanstrom's book, I was not aware of Dr. Purkiser's letter to my former colleague, Dr. John Knight, in which he expressed some of his concerns with the book and then concluded by writing:

I want to raise one question that this committee cannot really answer. That is whether or not we have outgrown the need for and the possibility of an 'official theology'. I doubt seriously that anyone can do now what H. Orton Wiley did 45 years ago.

Our church is getting more and more pluralistic all the time, and we are able to tolerate different points of view on non-essential matters. Perhaps there is room for more than one theology in the church.

My question is this – if a church can tolerate more than one theology, then how many more? Two, three, four, five? ? ? Where do you stop and say “enough”? We must get a grip on this all important matter! It seems to me to be missionally important for a denomination to be able to say: “THIS WE BELIEVE.” Why?

For at least two reasons: 1) I do not perceive that our debate regarding entire sanctification is an issue in the non-English speaking international church; 2) the two theological streams have a common meeting point – the local church. As we all know, this is where our theology is “played out” and here conflict of the two positions often occurs. Imagine a church pastured by a person who is purely “Wesley” being followed by a pastor who is purely “modern holiness movement.” Conflict ultimately ensues and the end result is confused laypeople who are unsure about what the church does believe regarding its holiness message. Trust me, this is happening! Ask anyone who has been a District Superintendent for at least a couple of years. It may seem a non-issue among academics, but it is a huge problem in the local church in my perception. In fact, this is at the heart of my reasons for believing this issue must be resolved.

A great leader once said: “Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand” (Matthew 12:25). If I may paraphrase: “A church divided against itself as to what it believes theologically negates its missional potential.” Call me “naïve” if you will. I think I am basically aware of the issues involved.

Please don't tell me that this issue is insoluble. Maybe so if we just want to bang heads against each other but reconciliation of our differences is more than a matter of the head – it's acknowledging that we are mere mortals dependent upon the Lord of the Church. We must be willing to fall before Him in prayer and seek His guidance. Surely He can help us find our way out of the morass.

#### B. WE ARE BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN THE LORD.

I appeal to you, my brothers (sisters) in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (1:10). Because of the Lord Jesus Christ, we share a commonality that runs deeper than theological opinion or even blood. We come to this conference, having different roles in the church. Let's be honest – in our different roles, we are somewhat wary of each other. This is illustrated by the fact that educators are seen as the expert knowledgeable theologians of the church with no political “clout” – they are just pure theologians - and people in my role, for example, are seen as having the political clout but limited theological savvy.

I want to address this by quoting from a lecture by Dr. Donald Hagner when he was installed as George Eldon Ladd Professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary in 1993. He concluded his provocative message with the following insightful statement:

Evangelical New Testament scholars see their call to scholarship as a call to service of Christ and His Church . . .

While my colleagues and I in the biblical division may occasionally be interested in knowledge for the sake of knowledge, that is not what we are really about. We are about knowledge that helps the church more effectively to be what God has called it to be, and that helps it

accomplish God's mission for it in the world. We are of course interested in a more effective understanding of the scriptures and of the gospel – but not for the sake of a head trip. Our concern is for right understanding that bears fruit in the lives of Christians. We are interested in strengthening the Church by our work, not weakening it . . . .

Ministry and theology, indeed, belong together: neither can live without the other.

I think it was with this understanding the Church of the Nazarene set in place its educational system – its bible colleges, universities, and graduate seminary. We take great pride in our educational system and for the most part it has served the church very well. Let me remind us that the issue before us today, though it is now being played out in the local churches, was initiated by our scholars. From the scholar's side, you can say very simply, "We are just doing our work as scholars and this is where our scholarship has led us." I understand and respect that! But I ask you scholars to try to understand this doctrinal matter from my side as a General Superintendent. We on the "political" side have been charged by the church to hold the church true to its theology as stated in the Articles of Faith. If you feel tension on your side, trust me, we do too! But this is alright – there is some tension present in all relationships; we can live with this.

At issue is how do we handle the tension? Most importantly, where do we go from here in seeking theological unity? I have a suggestion – we cannot evade the responsibilities of our respective roles but maybe the urgency of this matter requires us to take off our professional hats and come to the table as brothers and sisters in the faith. Perhaps the time has come for us to lay aside our positions of "authority" whether it be power of office

or the power of influence or the power of scholarship and be willing to sit together as brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ in resolution of our common dilemma.

### C. WE ARE ALL SERVANTS OF CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH.

“What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task” (3:5). The incomparable apostle Paul, the greatest credential of Christianity since Christ Himself, says simply, we are “only servants”. Servants are people who have no rights of their own. Servants submit to the authority of another. Servants of Jesus Christ have yielded to His Lordship. We are servants of Christ and His church. Therefore, in the spirit of the servant, we must broach this issue with a willingness to sacrifice personal bias in favor of the common good for the church without regard to who among us receives the credit. This is the servant attitude which each of us must bring to the table if we discover a Christ-honoring resolution to our impasse. Thus, Paul sets before us the noble goal which we must together pursue.

### III. OUR ULTIMATE GOAL IS MUTUAL AGREEMENT REGARDING ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION

The task before us is to “agree with one another” and be “perfectly united in mind and thought” (1:10). This is our goal! Granted, it is lofty and perhaps idealistic but nonetheless worthy of our relentless pursuit.

I have been thinking lately about that word in Isaiah’s prophecy (43:18, 19) “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing. . .” among us. I am attracted to the idea that God may desire to do a “new thing” among us. It is my understanding that theology is not cast in concrete. It is not frozen in time. It is dynamic though its essence does not change. Dr. Noble has reminded us that “the Church must

always have room for its creative thinkers who can deepen our understanding and contextualize our theology for new cultures and classes for each new generation in new metaphors and new categories.” Obviously, we have much to overcome to be “united in mind and thought.” Let me suggest a logical beginning point.

If God desires to do “a new thing” among us theologically, there is no way we will ever “agree with one another” or be “perfectly united in mind and thought” if we bring to the table attitudes that are singularly Wesley or singularly American Holiness movement. There must be some compromise on both sides if we reach consensus about a theology which can be articulated clearly and capture a new generation of Nazarenes at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. To reconcile the two traditions may be impossible. I reiterate – I may be naïve to suggest it but it is worth the effort. I am heartened by Dr. Tom Noble’s reminder that the two traditions have much more that unites than divides them. We must focus on these commonalities rather than the differences. For example, surely some common ground can be found between “subsequentness” and “secondness” upon which we can all agree. Herein lays our hope.

#### CONCLUSION

I enjoy theology conferences. They also frustrate me in that they become an end within themselves. We say the last “amen”, embrace each other, and return to our respective responsibilities and the discussion ends. **WE DARE NOT LET THAT HAPPEN THIS TIME.**

Many of you are writing about holiness, keeping the issue before us. Each writer has her/his perception of where we are and where we need to go. Our issue is how to gain consensus. The Board of General Superintendents by the nature of its office with its attendant duties must be involved and will

be! Please be assured we will guide the process through the newly established “BGS Thought Partners.” This will involve people from all strata and sectors of the church as we seek to “agree with one another” on the theology we believe and proclaim. It is my prayer and hope that we will once again be able to say, “THIS WE BELIEVE.”

## A PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, We are your servants. We submit to you as Lord – Lord of our lives and Lord of the Church. We submit any authority we have in the Church to your Lordship. We only want your highest desire and design for the Church of the Nazarene. Purge our motives. Cleanse us of any and every inclination to have our own way in this delicate, difficult issue before us. Anoint us with that wisdom which You have so graciously promised. Unite us in mind and heart as we seek Your answer. May that answer come in such an utterly divine way that all glory will be given to Christ in His Church. Unite us in our message and mission. Ignite within us a passion to spread scriptural holiness across these lands and around the world. To this end we covenant together as brothers and sisters in the Lord and servants of the God revealed in Jesus Christ in whose name we offer our prayer.

Jim L. Bond

Theology Conference

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