

With Roots and Branches

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Introduction (Isaiah 27:6, Mark 4:30-32)

Dr. and Mrs. Porter, Dr. Lambert, Dr. and Mrs. Cobb, Dr. Kim Young Beck, Dr. and Mrs. Nielson, Rev. Walsh and members of the Board of Trustees and the Asia Pacific Nazarene Field Directors, honored guests, including Mayor Jojo Zapanta, and Vice Mayor Jun Cabatic of the Municipality of Taytay, Rizal and D.S. Rev. Radito Fausto, members of APNTS family, and friends in Christ.

Your presence here today indicates the depth, the width, the height and the length of this theological institution called Asia Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary. It goes without saying that I accept this new assignment with deep humility and renewed sense of consecration to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The title of my address on this occasion, "With Roots and Branches", is borrowed and modified from a metaphor used by a Jewish Rabbi by the name of Eugene Levy. Having been asked a question concerning family life in Judaism, he answered in the following manner. "As you bring up your children, you want them to have roots and wings. You want them to feel grounded and secure, to feel connected with things that count. But you also want them to think new thoughts and feel new feelings, to be able to fly in new directions."¹ This metaphor speaks the spirit of what I would like to share with my title "With Roots and Branches." But actually my metaphor comes from the Scripture just read from Isaiah 27:6 and Mark 4:30-32. The former passage says, "In days to come Jacob will take root, Israel will bud and bloom and fill all the world with fruit." In the latter passage, Jesus tells the well-known parable of the mustard seed. He says, "The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade."

Applying these metaphors to our situation, I believe our primary purpose of theological education is to help people become deeply rooted in its traditions and help them branch out with new thoughts and new scope of the concepts of ministry. It should make us deeply rooted in our Christian tradition and at the same time branch out in a creative and innovative manner, neither to the exclusion of the other. With this in mind, I would like to share some thoughts on what my vision is for APNTS.

Historical Perspectives

Back in 1977 the General Board of the Church of the Nazarene approved a plan to establish a graduate Seminary to serve Asia Pacific region of the Church. The particular needs of the Church in this part of the world demanded this.² It was the first master's-level theological institution of the Church of the Nazarene located outside the United States. In 1979, the Church purchased this site in Taytay, Rizal. Formerly an orphanage, this location consisted of ten acres with 22 wooden frame buildings. It is said that the proximity of the location to Manila was a deciding factor, as leaders hoped that the cosmopolitan setting would provide models for evangelism for the other cities in Asia and the Pacific. We must say that our leaders had the gift of foresight, for Metro Manila is now a world class city of over 15 million people and Taytay and Antipolo are the fastest growing areas in the whole country of the Philippines.

Our founding president, Dr. Donald Owens, initiated construction of an administration and classroom building, the ground breaking ceremony of which was held in January, 1983. That building is called the Owens Hall, where most of our seminary community spend time studying and working today. The construction of the Owens Hall was no doubt one of the benchmarks in the history of APNTS. And in July of 2001, Dr. John Nielson initiated another groundbreaking ceremony, the building of which is called Nielson Center for Education and Evangelism. And it is our special joy to celebrate its dedication immediately following this service today. Our Seminary was formally dedicated and the faculty installed on January 15, 1984. We will be celebrating our 20th anniversary next year. Between Dr.

Owens and Dr. Nielson, Dr. E. LeBron Fairbanks served as the second president and laid the foundations and directions of the school in the early years of this institution.

Twenty years is a symbolic age in a person's life in many cultures. It signifies becoming an adult and a beginning of a new chapter of life when a person launches out to try his/her knowledge and skills to discover in what ways he/she can serve the society best. I somehow feel APNTS as an institution has come to an adult age and is now ready to branch out into the wider world to serve the Church, making the best use of its resources and expertise. The dedication of the new building today, I believe, signifies another benchmark in the history of APNTS. It will provide much needed more classrooms, more space for the library and media center, more offices and a multi-purpose auditorium, with a panoramic view of Metro Manila from the top of the building. When students are exhausted from many assignments, they can enjoy the world famous Manila sunset and get refreshed. I sense today the prophecy of Isaiah through whom God said, "Behold, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?" (Isaiah 43:19) I sense, and I believe you do too, that God is going to work through APNTS in a new and fresh way to fulfill its mission in the world. Your presence here today from many parts of the world is one of the many evidences of that fact.

Distinctiveness of APNTS

APNTS has a distinct mission to promote both academic excellence and Christian maturity in order to prepare men and women for Christian ministry in the Asia Pacific region and beyond. All our energies are geared toward this single goal. This is the driving force behind all our efforts. Under this central mission, APNTS has several distinctivenesses that are worth reminding ourselves. First of all, APNTS has a distinctive theological stance which "espouses the Methodistic doctrine of entire sanctification and partakes of the Wesleyan spirit. It also adheres closely to many important biblical and Reformation emphases which are not distinctive of Wesleyanism." Our theological stance is also conservative. "It is conservative not in the sense of closed mindedness, but rather one of open-mindedness. We desire to preserve the truth and values of the past, but our mind is not closed to change if we can be persuaded that the change is for the better." Furthermore, our theological stance is evangelical. It is evangelical in the sense that "we stand solidly with classical Protestantism in asserting that salvation is not only sola Scriptura but also sola gratia, sola fide (by grace alone through faith alone)." Our theology seeks to "preserve the scriptural paradox of divine grace and human freedom." In summary, the Nazarene stance is Wesleyan, conservative and evangelical. In this theological distinctiveness we strive to nurture and prepare men and women for ministry.³

Secondly, APNTS has its distinctiveness in its close institutional relationship with the International Church of the Nazarene. And because our Church is a global church, and because of the Church's historic commitment to education, there is a network of Nazarene institutions around the world. APNTS cooperates together with these institutions to help fulfill the mission of the Church. We hold particularly strong relationship with the Asia Pacific Region, its schools, churches and leaders. Our Seminary strives to serve this region and enhance the work of Christ with the support from these regional constituents.

APNTS also cherishes its friendly ties with affiliated denominations, particularly with denominations of Wesleyan persuasion as well as a host of other denominations. APNTS is also a partner in the Asia Graduate School of Theology, Philippines, which offers post masteral degrees in theological education. It goes without saying that because of its geographical location, APNTS attempts to work closely with churches in Metro Manila District as well as with the wider community in this country. In these global, regional and local networks of educational and ecclesiastical institutions, APNTS strives for excellence in ministerial preparation.

Thirdly, APNTS has its distinctiveness in its cultural diversity. Graduates of APNTS have come from over twenty countries and an average classroom is consisted of students from various nationalities and ethnicities. This cultural diversity on campus enhances the breadth of education for each student and faculty. We learn immensely about other cultures and peoples by daily studying and fellowshiping together. And understanding other cultures by directly becoming friends with each other takes away much of our prejudice, ethnocentrism and xenophobia. Instead, we cultivate cultural sensitivities and begin to appreciate mutual differences. This kind of educational environment has a latent function of enhancing an international network for ministry and broadening one's understanding of the scope of Christian ministry. This richness in cultural diversity also propels us to seek the universal and essential truths about the gospel of Jesus

Christ. Students at APNTS often make a remark that by coming to APNTS they feel like they are living in various countries. In this kind of rich cultural milieu APNTS attempts to fulfill its institutional goal. In the light of these theological, institutional and cultural distinctivenesses of APNTS, I now would like to touch on the direction I expect the Seminary to go in the next few years and beyond.

The Direction of APNTS in the Near Future and Beyond

The direction of APNTS I envision is basically threefold. First of all, I would like to endeavor as a faith community to put deep roots down in spirituality. It is my strong belief that every creative activity emerges out of our hearts. As the writer of Proverbs says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." (Proverbs 4:23) Our hearts are so easily pulled away by many burdens and cares of our daily lives. So in order to guard our hearts, I would be emphasizing "quiet time with the Lord" every morning. It involves listening to the Word of God through the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit illuminates the Scripture into our hearts as we read it prayerfully and attentively. We want to cultivate our genuine spirituality through the reading of the inspired Word of God and prayerful communion with the living Christ. Every morning may we experience a fresh awareness of God's justifying grace which is our only hope. Every morning may we have a fresh experience of the Lordship of Christ. Every morning may we experience a fresh reception of the Holy Spirit. And every day may we immerse ourselves in the work of the Spirit of Christ who is serious about transforming us into his likeness with ever-increasing glory (Phil. 3:18). If we lose that which our Lord described as 'only one thing that is needed' (Luke 10:41), we lose everything and our institution becomes meaningless. So this will be the emphasis and the central direction which we dare not lose sight of.

Secondly, the direction of APNTS in the next few years is to reinforce our commitment to solid, well-balanced theological education. When the whole world is craving for something quick and fast, we want to emphasize that anything truly valuable are acquired only through hard and long toil. Instant, fast food type of education does not go very far. The real problems of the world are getting increasingly complex and the Christian ministers of today and tomorrow have to be ready to deal with tough issues of the world today. And in order to meet the challenge of our world today, our theological education cannot be satisfied except by putting our roots deep in the biblical, historical, systematic and practical theologies along with auxiliary disciplines. The conviction comes from my belief that only a well balanced, solid theological education can sustain a long life of fruitful ministry for an individual servant of the Lord. It is often said, 'there is no royal road to learning,' or 'Rome is not built in one day.' The Bible says, 'A person reaps what he/she sows' (Gal. 6:7). Our theological education has to press our students to face the toughest theological issues, avoiding shallow answers to life's questions. A haphazard instant education would do more harm than good. So I will be emphasizing establishing a theological foundation firm in its depth and scope.

And thirdly, I expect APNTS to go into the direction of further collaborative work with our sister schools around the region and the world for mutual enhancement of the quality of ministerial education. The distinctiveness of APNTS, which I just described, offers an ideal environment not only for ministerial preparation but also an ideal training ground for missionary candidates. By well prepared collaborative work with sister schools, we can attain a degree of excellence which no school can achieve singlehandedly. We are already seeing the burgeoning of such collaborative works now. We hope to bring it to fruition in the near future so that together we can serve the Church and the world. So these are the directions and emphases I expect APNTS to go in the near future and beyond.

Now let me briefly touch on the philosophy of my leadership. My goal in terms of leadership is a democratic, dialogical, servant type of leadership. Decisions will be made in the Spirit of Christ prayerfully and hopefully unanimously. I will avoid a repressive type of leadership. I cherish a spirit of team work, for an institution of this size is no one person's job. Everyone and anyone's voice is heard and respected and responded to as sincerely as possible. And please forgive me if I inadvertently neglect anyone's voice or concern. My deepest desire is to build a trusting redemptive relationship at all levels of this institution, so that everyone would feel welcomed, accepted, needed, and invited to participate, and we grow together as a family of God.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to share an episode about an apple farmer who lived in the northern part of Japan. He was known as a farmer who produced beautiful delicious apples from his farm. There were visitors from time to time to see his apple farm and taste his delicious apples. Once a visitor came to his farm and asked this farmer what kind of fertilizer he used to produce such delicious beautiful apples. The farmer answered him in saying, "My fertilizer is footprints. You see those footprints around the apple trees there? Those are my footprints. I come out here everyday and walk around these trees to see whether or not the trees are looking healthy, whether or not worms are not damaging the leaves and fruits, whether or not the soil is in good condition, whether or not branches are properly pruned so fruits are getting enough sunlight, and so on and so forth. Those footprints around the trees are my fertilizer of love for these apples." The visitor understood the real secret of the delicious beautiful apples he produced from his farm.

Today I dedicate that kind of love to these students called by God to ministry to study at APNTS, so that together we might take our roots deep in solid, well balanced theological education and branch out into new thoughts and new experiences, believing some day we will "fill all the world with God's fruit."

Endnotes

- 1 Jay B. McDaniel, With Roots and Wings, New York: Orbis Books, 1995, p. 23.
- 2 School Catalog of Asia Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary 1999-2003
- 3 The quotations in this theological section are taken from William Greathouse, Inaugural Address, 1969.

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