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## A CALLING TO FULFILL

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From many nations and cultures we have gathered here in Thailand. This is a country that in many ways serves as a way of viewing the broader world region in which you serve. The region is undergoing dizzying economic, political and social change, while at the same time remaining in many ways very much the same. Thailand is a meeting place where people of diverse backgrounds have pooled their cultural and racial characteristics. They have created something new, strong and vital. We have gathered in a mostly Buddhist country where less than 10 percent of the people embrace other faiths, including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Brahmanism.

We have come for the purpose of considering our calling as theological educators in the Church of the Nazarene, a task that will demand our best energies.

In *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), Immanuel Kant asked three questions that have become famous: “What can we know?” “What ought we to do?” and, “For what may we hope?” On the surface Kant’s questions might seem rather simple. But Kant students know that the questions in fact provide keys for understanding his whole program. In this address I too want to ask three questions. My apparently simple questions introduce the most important dimensions of our responsibilities as theological educators in the Church of the Nazarene, with particular reference to Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

Hopefully my three questions will help me deal directly with the responsibilities, challenges and opportunities that greet you in this part of the world. My three questions are: “Where are we?” “Who are we?” and, “What are we to do?” At this juncture in history, when much of the western world seems to have lost its moral bearings,<sup>1</sup> there is no time for wasting our energies on denominational posturing or intellectual gamesmanship. The times require transparency of character and clarity of thought. To engage our world with any hope of being heard we must do the hard work of mind and spirit that the context demands. Being conversant not only with the theology we embrace, but also with the broader socio-political currents that mark our age is imperative.

### **I. Where Are We?**

To appraise one’s responsibility as a theological educator one must first know his or her location. “Location” has many dimensions, only the most important of which will be discussed here.

Let us begin with where we are geographically. The educators gathered here work in the Pacific and in Southeastern Asia, a geographically diverse region that reaches from the tropical islands of the Pacific to the T’aebaek Mountains of South Korea, and to the Great Sandy Desert of Australia. It spans both sparsely populated islands and the bulging cities, from China’s rice fields cultivated as they have been for centuries to the advanced financial markets in Tokyo and Hong Kong. The immense geographical diversity of the region is not incidental to our mission. Geographical locations have played an historic role in the development of the cultures amidst which you serve, their relations with their neighbors, and in the spread of the Christian gospel.

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<sup>1</sup>See Alasdair Macintyre’s description in *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

Mention of geographical diversity immediately calls to mind the diverse historical, social, religious, political and economic “locations” of this vast region. An area that includes Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong whose social and political institutions bear the direct stamp of western history, Thailand that so vividly reveals its oriental and Buddhist heritage, and Indonesia with its indebtedness to Islam and Hinduism—to name a few—will not yield to monolithic categorization.

Given the steady march in both East and West toward a global economy, the homogenizing impact of cyberspace, the growth of democracy in the Pacific and Southeastern Asia, and the exportation of western pop culture, one might be tempted to minimize the differences between East and West. Doing so would be a mistake. Without diminishing the important differences between Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and the Sikhs, the Orient and parts of the Pacific have been largely shaped by ideas and values that are different in fundamental respects from the dominant themes that have shaped the West.

The characterizing ideas and values of Asia and the Pacific have yielded distinct understandings of persons, human destiny, social organization, familial relations, ethics and even history itself. Ernst Troeltch, Willard Van Orman Quine, and others have shown that a culture and its visions of ultimate reality are tightly entwined. In the West, for example, democracy as it has developed is unthinkable apart from the Gospel’s appraisal of persons. In India, for another example, one cannot understand *caste* apart from the Law of Karma and the social distinctions that emerged after the ancient Indo-European Aryans moved into northwest India. We have not even mentioned the influence the ancient tribal religions of the Pacific have had on social values and social organization.

The historical, religious and social locations in which we work demand to be understood and appreciated. Apart from a deep reading of culture, the impact of the gospel will likely be superficial.

All over the world, alert observers are keenly aware of the geo-political developments now shaping this region, and that play a major role in answering the question, "Where are we?" Riveting symbols of the changes—not to be naively overstated—capture our attention. One must not rush to conclusions, but neither should we ignore the winds of change that are blowing.

Politically we are located amidst escalating hopes for socio-political changes that will grant people greater say in how they live and are governed. The hopes appear to be indistinguishable. Think of the contribution to this ferment that access to other cultures and ideas *via* the Internet is making. People, economies and governments from Samoa to Beijing must come to grips with the primary changes in our perceptions of time, space and boundaries that cyberspace is provoking. Theological education in the Church of the Nazarene must take account of the hopes that fire the imagination of many people, as well as the stubborn injustices that plague millions.

Though we must not overstate the importance of our economic location, its importance must not be overlooked. Protests in Seattle and Prague against the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund notwithstanding, we are well into economic globalization (international economic integration). This reality that has already immensely affected relations between governments and peoples. I do not have the expertise needed to weigh the *pros* and *cons* of economic globalization,<sup>2</sup> currently one of the most heated debates in the international community.<sup>3</sup> But I do know that economic globalization is vastly increasing interdependence among countries, and that it can apply moderating pressures on countries that might otherwise be

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<sup>2</sup>For a recent discussion of the current debate see, "New Image: A Human Face," Joseph Kahn, *The New York Times on the Web*, September 26, 2000. <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/09/26/world/26FUND.html>.

<sup>3</sup>See "The Case for Globalisation," *The Economist*, September 23-29, 2000, [http://www.economist.com/editorial/freeforall/current/index\\_id6368.html](http://www.economist.com/editorial/freeforall/current/index_id6368.html).

more belligerent. Economic globalization leads to an accelerated exchange of goods and ideas among people. The temptation to make war on one's neighbors declines because it would disrupt one's ties with its trading partners.

But economic globalization also tends to shape local economies, societies, and even governments in the interest of large multinational corporations. Sometimes this occurs at the expense of local values and histories. As the last Asian economic downturn demonstrated, economic globalization also makes the economic success or failure of one nation heavily reliant on its neighbors. The September 23, 2000 issue of *The Economist* makes a strong case for globalization as the best weapon we have for combating third world poverty.

Karl Barth said it best a long time ago. We must learn to preach with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. We who teach future clergy persons must know how to read the signs of the times and must teach students how to address the Gospel to the "locations" in which they minister. We must educate wise readers of the Scriptures and wise readers of culture.

Many people believe that we are also located at the end of modernity and at the beginning of postmodernity. I will not here debate whether a "postmodern turn" has occurred. I believe that it has, but the following observations do not depend on that assessment.

Some of the alleged characteristics of postmodernity bear directly on the question, "Where are we?" One characteristic is religious pluralism, not to be confused with a plurality of religions. The centerpiece of religious pluralism is the refusal by any one religion to make absolute and exclusive claims about its own vision of reality. Doing so would depreciate other religions. Religious pluralism leaves persons and communities to respond to their encounter with "transcendence" in ways that suit their experiences and expectations. It does not interfere with other religions. Religious doctrines and practices are thought to be largely, if not completely, relative to the communities in which they arise and are cultivated.

I should be careful not to speak as though religious pluralism is monolithic anywhere in the world, for we need only note the rise of religious fundamentalism throughout the world. When surveying popular religion on the world scene, one may wonder just how much ground religious pluralism can legitimately claim.

Nevertheless, among those who participate as leaders on the world stage of religious studies and interchange, literate persons are supposed to have embraced religious pluralism. They should have left behind all religious exclusivism and proselytism. A “missionary religion” is thought to commit the error of “totalizing.” That is, by claiming to “know” *totally* what is right for everyone, a “missionary religion” claims entirely too much and thereby becomes oppressive. It is blind to just how historically conditioned its “absolutes” are. Only philistines and provincials fail to get the message.

Closely associated with religious pluralism is a recognition of the community-indexed nature of truth. What religious adherents normally believe to be transcendent, ultimate truths, are in fact relative to the communities in which their stories (narratives) are nourished. A story’s authority does not reach beyond the community that embraces it. Commentators on the postmodern condition often speak of *the loss of metanarrative* as marking the postmodern turn. A metanarrative is a more or less overarching (religious) story that shapes a people and gives their lives meaning.

The importance for our consideration of the “loss of a metanarrative” in the West is that Christianity has largely lost whatever “authority” it once held for shaping the western worldview. With that loss has gone any alliance between Christianity and western expansion. During the Modern era the West forcefully moved East. Today, particularly in religion, the East has moved West. Witness the prominence of eastern religions in the United States and England. The powerful attraction that eastern visions of reality and human life have for many in the West clearly signals that the tide does not flow one way only.

A Christian theological educator in this part of the world at the beginning of the third millennium is in important ways *located* differently from his or her predecessors, particularly those who arrived from the West. Now he or she is just one more voice in an ancient discussion that easily predates Christianity. But if the gospel is indeed the gospel of God, then the changes in *location* represent no major loss at all. “How much space does the Church need,” asked Dietrich Bonhoeffer? He answered, “Only so much space as it takes to proclaim the Gospel.”

Our location raises the second and third questions.

## II. Who Are We?

Recently my wife and I took my eighty-nine year-old mother from the health care center where she lives, to spend some time with us in our home. On the second morning, she awoke completely disoriented. In near panic she repeatedly asked, “Where am I?” Before we could succeed in answering her first question she frantically asked another, “Who am I? Who am I?” The occurrence was both humorous and sad.

My mother’s second question is one currently being asked by some organizations and emerging nations. It is also being asked by many Christians who seem to have lost their bearings amidst a plurality of religions and moralities. I confess my astonishment at the need some Christian thinkers have to re-invent the Christian faith. John Hick, for example, has redefined Christianity in a way that Paul, Augustine or Luther would not have recognized.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>See John Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995); *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); *God has Many Names* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1986); and *The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994).

To be sure, no Christian or Christian body should smugly assume that they perfectly understand the Christian faith. Continued exploration and growth are essential for discipleship and the Church's life. No one and no denomination will ever perfectly embody the Christian narrative. Our knowledge, the Apostle Paul tells us, will be imperfect until the day we see our Lord "face to face" (1 Cor 13:8-12).

In the Christian faith there is abundant room for humility, and for confessing the times when we have equated "the Faith" with our own petty interests and limited vision. Nor is the theological enterprise ever complete. The dynamic character of human life and human history, and the liveliness of the gospel require that we "answer for" and systematically articulate "the Faith" in each new generation and in the diverse cultures in which the Church bears witness. In the Church of the Nazarene, for instance, we are moving into a maturity that recognizes the need to articulate the Wesleyan-Arminian Tradition in diverse cultural contexts. We should have a growing number of denomination-wide theologians who influence the church by writing from an African, Latin American, European or Asian perspective. Many in the Church of the Nazarene will progress in this direction, and all of us will be enriched. There is plenty of room in this denomination for theological discussion and appropriate variety.

However, humility and the need for lively re-articulation notwithstanding, at the beginning of the third millennium we have abundant resources for unambiguously knowing "who we are" as theological educators in the Church of the Nazarene.

Who are we? **We are Apostolic Christians.** We embrace the Apostolic Christian faith—one Lord, one faith and one baptism for the remission of sins. This means first of all that unambiguously we confess Jesus of Nazareth to be the Christ of God. We believe that in Jesus of Nazareth the Creator of Heaven and earth, the God of the Patriarchs and the Prophets, became incarnate. With the Apostles and all subsequent apostolic Christianity, we affirm that Jesus who is the Christ *is* the Gospel of God. He both *is* and *preached* the Good



News. In Jesus, the Incarnate God acted definitively to reconcile the world—all persons *and* the creation—to Himself. In our Lord, the Father inaugurated the long expected Kingdom of God. Christ is the *eschaton*, the *telos* of God.

Who are we? **We are Apostolic Christians.** We believe that in the cross of Christ the Triune God took upon Himself the sin of the world and made reconciliation for all humankind. To those whose minds are enlightened by the Holy Ghost, God reveals the cross to be both His wisdom and His power. We believe that in the Easter resurrection, God the Father, by the Spirit, confirmed forever the witness and atoning work of His Son. Never can there be any good reason to doubt the meaning of either event. We believe that the entire Christ event—our Lord’s birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension—definitively reveals the very Person of the One, Eternal God (John 1:14-18). To know this Christ is to know God Himself.

The current “uncertainty” about God among some Christian thinkers that passes as humility before other religions is not humility at all. It is a failure of theological nerve, a failure of faith. And it patently betrays the apostolic witness (Gal 6:12). The claim to “know” God in Christ, and by the Spirit in the Church, has everything to do with obedient response and nothing to do with arrogance. Revelation is God’s act, not a human fabrication.

So ours is a confession of faith. As the New Testament makes clear, the Christian confession occurs in response to God’s deed (Acts 2:36; Rom 3:19-26). Our faith in Christ is called forth by the Holy Spirit of God Himself. Christians in their communities do not create their faith, as John Hick and others seem to believe. The Christian Church, we believe, is the creation of the Holy Spirit, not the construction of a particularized “narrative community.”<sup>5</sup> We confess our

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<sup>5</sup>See John’s Hick’s contributions to *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, eds. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996).

faith because we have, through the Church and by the Spirit, been grasped by the Divine Reality that we call the gospel of God, the gospel of the Kingdom, the gospel of our Lord.

**Ours is an apostolic faith** because we believe in the definitive authority of the Holy Scriptures in all things regarding faith and practice. We believe that the Old and New Testaments belong to the Spirit and to the Church. They authoritatively and definitively serve the redemptive purposes of the Spirit, and the holy life of the Church as the worshiping and witnessing *koinonia* of the Spirit.

**Ours is an apostolic faith** because we confess the Apostle's Creed and the great ecumenical creeds, Nicea and Chalcedon holding special Trinitarian and Christological importance. We do not *deify* the creeds. We recognize the limitations of the language, culture and conceptuality associated with them. We are not ignorant of the sometimes less than honorable human maneuvering that occurred in conjunction with the Councils. Nevertheless, with all orthodox Christianity we believe that in spite of notable limitations, the Holy Spirit worked in the life of the Church to create the Creeds. They do now faithfully articulate the Triune God—the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**Ours is also an historic faith.** We affirm the Church, the Body of Christ. We believe that we are members of Christ only as we are members of His Church, His community of redemption and self-disclosure. We know that only as members of the Church can we rightly learn and live God's story of creation, covenant, justice and salvation.

We are aware of and shamed by the many instances in which the human institution we loosely call the Church has grossly missed the will of God, betrayed the gospel, allied itself with injustice and given a sorry witness in the world. For this we readily and humbly confess. However, we believe that through this all-too-faulty history God is bringing "many children to perfection." We believe here the resurrected Christ, through the Holy Spirit, dwells. In this most human

“rock” that confesses Jesus to be the Christ, God is even now working toward that day when the Kingdom will be consummated. The Son will be revealed as Lord of all—and to all—and God the Father will be universally proclaimed and exalted. We believe that in the Church of Christ, the story of God is being told in the lives of faithful and obedient sons and daughters. They are being forgiven, transformed, sanctified and filled with the Spirit of Christ. In the Church of Christ we hear the living Word of God in proclamation and in the sacraments. Here we meet the Christ who is our Lord and learn about the people that we are to become.

**Who are we? We are Protestants.** We mean this not in a sectarian sense, but with reference to some defining affirmations. First, we believe in the supreme authority of the Scriptures as the definitive witness to the Gospel of God. They must always be made to stand above tradition, reason and experience—including denominations and human subjectivity. We understand what Paul Tillich meant by “the Protestant Principle.” “Protestant” first means that no finite person or institution should ever be permitted to take the place of the free God. The Spirit “protests” against all such efforts and will surely bring them to naught.

As Protestants we unambiguously affirm that we are justified, reconciled to God, by grace through faith alone. It is not of works lest any person should boast. From beginning to end our salvation is of God. We believe that both grace and faith are God’s active gifts. Furthermore, as Protestants we believe that justification by grace through faith forever remains the only basis for our being “in Christ.” We both begin and continue “in the Spirit,” never in the flesh. “For through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness” (Gal. 5:5). Sanctification, which we hold so dearly, rests on, continues and is the *telos* of justification, never its substitute.

As Protestants we believe that the Church is where the Spirit creates the *koinonia*, where the Word of God is preached, and where the sacraments are rightly administered.

We also believe in the priesthood of all believers. All of God's people are called and empowered by the Holy Spirit to minister to God, to their sisters and brothers in the Church, and in the world. No one other than the Spirit of the resurrected Christ "mediates" Christ to His people. As servants gifted and empowered by the Spirit, we are all priests to God and priests to one another. We offer a sacrifice of praise and worship before the Lord, glorifying the Name of the Lord, even as Christ glorified His Father. The Christian minister, ordained to the Christian ministry, has a special responsibility to study and preach the Word of God, and to celebrate the sacraments, but not to lord his or her position over Christ's people.

**Who are we? We are Wesleyan and Arminian.** This part of our identity distinguishes us in Christ's Church. But it should not make of us a party or sect. The Apostle Paul's stinging rebuke to the Corinthian schismatics should not be lost on us: "Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul" (1 Cor 1:13)? In the Church those who place party loyalty above primary unity with their Christian sisters and brothers are guilty of schism and are subject to judgment. With all Christians, we are Christ's and Christ is God's. That which unites us is far more important than that which distinguishes us. Distinctions should enrich the Church, not tear at its fabric. If we have something to teach the Church, we also have much to learn. Let the word "uniqueness" never cross our lips. Only schismatics aspire to that dishonor. Mary Artemesia Lathbury's nineteenth century hymn, "Lift Up, Lift Up Thy Voice" asks,

*And shall His flock with strife be riven?  
Shall envious lines His church divide,  
When He, the Lord of earth and heaven,  
Stands at the door to claim His bride?*

—*Mary Artemesia Lathbury (1841-1913)*

What we in the Wesleyan and Arminian tradition embrace we hold to be absolutely faithful to the spirit and teachings of New

Testament, and to historic Christianity. We recognize that not all of Christ's Church views the Faith in all details as we do. But we seek to practice Christian charity toward all parts of the Church, no member excepted.

**Just what is the vision that marks us?** First, with absolute conviction we believe that the Father has in Christ elected or chosen all persons to partake fully of His salvation (Rom 5:15-17). We would agree with Karl Barth that Christ is God's first elect One, that the Church is elect through Christ and that all persons are elect in Christ through the Church. We resolutely reject the notion that God is in any way partial in His love and grace.<sup>6</sup>

We believe that to be human is to be graced by God. Wherever there are persons, there the gracious God is present, prompting them toward eternal life. This we believe not necessarily because of what we can observe, but because of what we believe about the will and actions of God. For us, God—not individuals—is the one who asks “the question of God” in us. And the very asking of the question is a sign that God is being faithful to His promise to draw all persons to Himself. For us the “natural man” as one who is apart from God's grace is a mere abstraction.

We believe that for all persons the *telos* of prevenient grace is an *evangelical* (gospel) encounter with the Christ who through the Spirit convinces persons that Jesus is Lord. The New Testament teaches that while there are many who witness to Christ, there is only One—the

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<sup>6</sup>Clark Pinnock says that “most Reformed believers in Europe, including McGrath, have accepted what was enshrined in the Agreement of Leuvenberg (1973), which involved a drastic revision of Calvin's thought. It tossed out double predestination and spoke of God's election of humankind in Jesus Christ, as Barth does. . . . I am grateful to reformed theology for having reformed itself—though I wish more evangelicals in North America would get the message” (*Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World* [John Hick, Dennis L. Okholm, Timothy R. Phillips, eds.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 187-91). See also *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

Holy Spirit—who discloses, convicts, convinces, and transforms hearers and respondents (John 16:7-11). Not until the Holy Spirit “convinces” has one in the strict sense *heard* the gospel. Only the Holy Spirit can make of the “preached word” the “living word of God.” In our tradition we are patient to wait upon the Holy Spirit. We should never make the mistake of thinking that nothing is happening if a person does not immediately embrace our message. Though diligent in our witness (John 15:26-27), we wait upon the Spirit of God.

We are not reluctant to say that through enabled response to prevenient grace a person may evidence signs of aspiring toward God. We affirm that all longings for God are through-and-through *Christic* in character. That is, we identify religious hunger as the result of God’s activity through Christ, not as a rejection of Christ. All persons have been visited by prevenient grace, and the prevenient Christ prompts all persons toward evangelical conversion. Nevertheless, we do not diminish the sin and error that mark all persons apart from hearing and receiving the gospel. We recognize and stress an all-important distinction between anticipating the Christ in prevenient grace, and fulfilling that anticipation in an evangelical (disclosive) encounter with the Savior. Only in that liberating, reconciling event can one confess, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16). Only then do old things pass away, and all things become explicitly new in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). When the Spirit reveals the Christ as the Redeemer, then one can be “born anew from above” (John 3:1-21).

Hence, in the presence of religious pluralism we both affirm without reservation the scandal of particularity—the Christological confession, while at the same time affirming the presence and activity of the prevenient Christ in all persons, even through the instrumentality of other religions.

We reject the old artificial distinction between general and special grace that permitted God to generally reveal himself to all, while selecting but a few for evangelical revelation and salvation. As noted

above, if Clark Pinnock is correct, the number of theologians willing to embrace the old Reformed position has greatly diminished. As Wesleyans, we believe that all grace is *Christic* and intentionally redemptive.

Ours is a Christocentric rather than a Logos theology. We boldly embrace the scandal of particularity. In Jesus the lowly Galilean, and nowhere else, the eternal God became incarnate and secured redemption for all the race. The scandal of particularity is God's doing and it isn't to be tampered with or eroded by embarrassed theologians.

**As Wesleyans we confidently establish the primacy of transformation and sanctification over the primacy of sin and impotence.** Not all parts of the Christian community do this and we should be most intentional regarding our posture. For some parts of Christ's Church, preaching, worship, theology and Christian life are done according to a vision that gives the primacy to sin, to the "not yet." The primacy of transformation (sanctification) belongs to eschatology. We, on the other hand, believe that the atonement and Pentecost even now establish the primacy of regeneration and sanctification, a primacy not to be construed as sinlessness or as collapsing the *not yet* into the *already*. A current primacy of transformation and victory *as realized eschatology through the atonement and the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit in purity and power* is the issue.

Without reservation we believe that the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus sets us free from the law of sin and death. Our doctrine of regeneration and sanctification is simply a celebration of *Christus Victor in life and doctrine*, as we believe to be the cardinal theme of the New Testament. We believe that in Christ, God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, God has dealt the death blow to all that alienates us from God, that thwarts our worship of God in true holiness, and that blocks our loving our neighbor as the righteous law of God commands.

*Lift up, lift up your voices now!  
The whole wide world rejoices now;  
The Lord has triumphed gloriously,  
The Lord shall reign victoriously.*

*In vain with stone the cave they barred;  
In vain the watch kept ward and guard;  
Majestic from the spoiled tomb,  
In pomp of triumph Christ is come.*

*And all He did, and all He bare,  
He gives us as our own to share;  
And hope, and joy and peace begin,  
For Christ has won, and man shall win.*

*(“Lift Up, Lift Up Your Voices Now,” John Mason Neale, 1851)*

We do not diminish our unending need for confession and forgiveness from God and our neighbors. We recognize our failures to love mercy and pursue justice in all things. Nevertheless, we believe that through Christ’s atoning work and the indwelling Spirit the just requirements of the law can be fulfilled in anyone who will be crucified and raised to new life with Christ, who yields to regeneration and sanctification by the Spirit (Rom 6). The primacy of transformation over the primacy of sin means simply that when the Spirit of Him who raised Christ from the dead dwells and reigns in us, then we can live according to Spirit and not according to the flesh. By the Spirit’s renewal we can set our minds on the things of the Spirit, not on things of the flesh (Rom 8:4-11; Gal 5:25-26).

So we preach and celebrate the indwelling Spirit of Pentecost who by the authority of Christ’s resurrection cleanses believers of that which would countermand Christ’s reign. He empowers us for witness and service, for holiness and justice, in the Church and in the world. We also believe that the New Testament clearly establishes the primacy of the fruit of the Spirit over the gifts (Gal 5:22-24). We believe that the fruit of the Spirit is *uniform and confirms* His baptism,



while the Spirit *diversely* dispenses Christ's gifts in the Church for witness and service.

Our optimism regarding God's grace extends also to the whole creation. Itself the result of a gracious creative deed, the creation is fully included in the redemption our Lord has won. It too is and will be numbered among the children of God, "set free from its bondage to decay, to obtain its share in the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom 8:19-21).

Creation's future, as is ours, is one with the future of Christ. Contrary to the Gnosticized Christianity prevalent among many conservative Christians, everything that is other than God is His creation and the object of His care. Neither do we despair regarding culture and the plane of human history. The realm of political and social structures will some day be made whole in Christ. Justice and peace will be the order of the nations. The kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord. The redemption of the world our Lord inaugurated will be consummated in the power and time of Him who raised the Son from the dead (1 Cor 15:20-28). Exploitation of the poor and defenseless, the rape of women, the abuse of children and ancient hatreds that pit one nation against another surely tempt us to despair. But our hope rests in the meaning of Christ's resurrection by the Eternal Father. "How" and "when" all of this will occur is of no interest to us. We know only that the consummation of the Kingdom will look just like the Christ who inaugurated it. Jurgen Moltmann is correct; we already know the world's future because we already know Christ who is the future of God. *Maranatha!*

### **III. What Are We To Do?**

The third question is reminiscent of the one asked of Peter on the Day of Pentecost by those who had heard his stirring message. The power of the Gospel prompted their question and called them to action. So it must be with us.

Theological educators in the Church of the Nazarene do not have a “job” or a “position.” They have a ministry and a mandate to educate Christian ministers who can faithfully preach, model and teach the whole counsel of God. Our assignment is a trust placed upon us by the church. What could be a higher responsibility or joy than this?

As a theological educator I have lived with a holy fear every day of my professorial life. I have taken seriously James’ warning, “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness” (James 3:1). I have walked into each class session as a steward who knew in advance that he would some day be judged. On that day I will appeal to God’s mercy, not to my own success or failure.

**What are we to do?** *First*, theological educators in the Church of the Nazarene must be deeply committed disciples of Jesus Christ. Erudition, no matter how exalted, is never permitted to replace discipleship. Quite simply, the highest honor that a theological educator must ever know is that he or she has by grace been admitted to the school of Jesus. For us, study of the theological disciplines begins and proceeds in faith. Theology, for us, is worship. It is a disciplined and systematic examination of God’s self-disclosure in Christ, and His living among us in the power of the Spirit. As teachers we serve and worship God through the use of our minds. In the best sense of the term, as Douglas Hall puts it, we “think the faith”<sup>7</sup> as persons who have tasted and seen that the Lord is good.

*Second*, theological educators in the Church of the Nazarene have a fiduciary responsibility to the sixteen Articles of Faith. True, an educator must have appropriate latitude to work creatively and to employ the rich resources of the whole Christian family. I have found

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<sup>7</sup>Douglas John Hall, *Thinking the Faith : Christian Theology in a North American Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1991).

that the church grants this latitude. However, the classroom in the Church of the Nazarene does not belong to the teacher. It belongs to the Church of the Nazarene, as the church belongs to Christ. The theological educator is a steward of the Articles of Faith and should be ready at all times to give account for his or her stewardship.

As a good steward of the church's faith, a theological educator should leave the denomination richer than it was when he or she began to tend the vineyard. Imaginatively and faithfully, theological educators in the Church of the Nazarene should lead students to understand, appreciate and hopefully embrace with conviction the faith of the church. Neither a pedantic, wooden repetition, nor a skeptical dismissal of our theology should ever occur in a Nazarene classroom, extension program or any other instructional setting. A teacher willingly makes himself or herself accountable to the church. This occurs not because of coercion but because of love, wisdom and maturity.

*Third*, we are to transmit to our students a first generation love for Christ and his Church. For us education can never be reduced to the transfer of information. We are interested principally in the transmission of spirit. I shall not forget the day in class when William Greathouse, displeased over his charges' apparent failure to receive the spirit of his instruction, suspended his lectures and placed us on our knees to pray. The "prayer meeting" kept us in session for over two hours.

That students will recognize our learning, our ability to teach, and that they will master the information we want to transmit, is important. But it is not all-important. Most importantly, students must know that we have partaken of the first fruits, and that our greatest passion is to "follow Jesus all along the way."

*Fourth*, the teacher must first be a student. The one who would teach must first be teachable. One must be mastered by—come under

the governance of—what one proposes to teach. Arrogance and theological education are mutually exclusive. Neither are authority and arrogance to be confused. Jesus, the Servant, taught as one “having authority,” not as an arrogant one. Teachers must communicate to their students a recognition that the field of study they are pursuing transcends the teacher, and that there are criteria of investigation, understanding, argument and interpretation by which the teacher also abides.

Teachers who are first of all students love to learn. They do not try to acquire a marginal body of information that will keep them one step ahead of the students. Teachers who are students first will exercise the diligence and discipline that characterize a student because they want to, not because some external authority requires it of them. Sad the “teacher” whose thirst for learning has been quenched. Honorable is the teacher for whom the whole world remains a fresh horizon to explore. Only such a teacher can ever hope to transmit to his or her students a love of learning and to help them develop patterns of study that will equip them for independent study.

*Fifth*, theological educators must seek to introduce to their students the whole Christian story. In the Church of the Nazarene there is no place for transmitting a narrow, defensive and sectarian image of the Christian faith. Ours is a catholic faith. The whole Christian story belongs to us and we to it. Martin Luther, John Calvin, Karl Barth and Karl Rahner are ours too. Consequently, we have a responsibility to introduce the theology of the Church of the Nazarene in its most catholic dimensions. The doctrine of Christian holiness, for example, is not this denomination’s only “string” and it should be taught only within the context of a holistic theological framework.

Properly, we should rely heavily upon the formative theologians of our own tradition. But our students must also drink deeply, and critically, from all the Church’s great teachers—from the Early

Fathers to its current exponents. So let theological education in the Church of the Nazarene be marked by fidelity to the church's Articles of Faith, to the entire Christian story, and by teachers who know how to mine the best of Christian scholarship in each century and in all its branches.

*Finally*, as theological educators in the Church of the Nazarene we are to teach students how to shepherd Christ's flock. For us theology is a "churchly" enterprise. It occurs in and for the Church. This of course does not exclude us from the academy. Our scholars must be participants there too. But we must know the difference between the domains of a dispassionate scholar in the academy and a teacher of the Church (certainly the two are not necessarily opposed). Principally, theology must enrich the *koinonia* in worship, Christian ethics, mission, witness, evangelism, education and fellowship. The one who despises the Church as unworthy of one's mental energies, as is currently true of at least some in the academy, thereby forfeits the right to speak of oneself as a "Christian" theologian. The greatest and most lasting theologians in the history of the Church—whether biblical, historical, systematic or practical—have thought that their highest honor was gained by serving the Church well. The same must be true of the humble offerings we will make.

In the past hour we have engaged in a particular form of worship. So I will now conclude all my questions and answers by quoting a hymn to the Trinity that we sang in our church on the Sixteenth Sunday of Pentecost. Alexander Viets Griswold (1766-1843) wrote the hymn:

*Holy Father, great Creator, Source of mercy, love and peace,  
Look upon the Mediator, clothe us with his righteousness.  
Heavenly Father, heavenly Father, through the Savior hear and bless.  
Holy Jesus, Lord of Glory, whom angelic hosts proclaim,  
While we hear thy wondrous story, meet and worship in thy Name,*

*Dear Redeemer, dear Redeemer, in our hearts thy peace proclaim.  
Holy Spirit, Sanctifier, come with unction from above,  
Touch our hearts with sacred fire—fill them with the Savior's love.  
Source of comfort, source of comfort, cheer us with the Savior's love.  
God the Lord, through every nation let thy wondrous mercies shine.  
In the song of thy salvation every tongue and race combine.  
Great Jehovah, Great Jehovah, form our hearts and make them thine.*