

DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE...?

Baccalaureate Address

Mount Vernon Nazarene College

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Dr. E. LeBron Fairbanks

In the April 30 issue of the Nazarene News Service, I was shocked to read of the death of a local church Nazarene Youth Int'l president in Bombay, India. The NYI president was killed in a bomb blast. The bombing was part of the continuing strife between radical Hindus and fundamentalist Muslims that has rocked parts of India in recent months.

Immediately upon reading this news, my mind flashed back to my month long stay in India during January of this year. I spoke at the Bombay area District Assembly. I had to cut short the assembly and cancel the holiness convention where I was to speak the following day due to the fighting and bombing going on in the city. Over 450 people were killed in rioting during the four-day period I was in Bombay.

The January trip to India brought back vivid memories of my first trip to India in 1987. I was serving as president of APNTS in Manila, Philippines. The scriptural text of the Seminary is I Timothy 2:5, "*There is one God and one mediator between God and man, the person Jesus Christ.*"

In fact, the India trip in 1987 and trips to two other Asian countries during that year brought me face to face with the profound implications of this passage, and forces me to grapple with the question: "What do I really believe?"

In June 1987, Anne, Stephen, and I spent a few days in Bangkok, Thailand. Although our nights were spent at the Alliance Church Guest House, the days were filled with visiting theological institutions and Buddhist temples. Never had we visited a country so predominantly Buddhist in orientation. Buddhist temples in Bangkok are as common as Christian churches in many North American countries. We saw more idols to Buddha than I ever dreamed possible. A tour guide evangelistically proclaimed to us the merits of Buddhism.

I returned to APNTS with a burning question within me. Do I really believe that there is only one God, and one mediator between God and man, the person Jesus Christ?

Several weeks later, I was in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, to speak at the Commencement exercises of the Indonesian Nazarene Bible College, and at the Indonesian pastors and wives retreat following the commencement service. Very early in the morning on my first day in Indonesia, I heard the eerie sounds coming from the Moslem Mosques. Rather abruptly, I was reminded of the fact that approximately 85 percent of the 165 million people in Indonesia are Muslims. Evidence of this vivid truth was found throughout the country and at all levels of government.

Again, I returned to my office on the APNTS campus with the searching question pounding deep within me. Do I really believe that "*there is only one God and one mediator between God and man - the person of Christ Jesus?*"

In November 1987, I traveled to India to visit our educational institutions in the country as a member of the steering committee of the quadrennial Education Commission of the Church of the Nazarene. Immediately, I was thrust into a culture where approximately 83 percent of the over 800 million Indians espouse the Hindu philosophy of life. I listened to the people and watched them in the exercise of their religious faith.

Again, I returned to campus shaken by the experiences in India. On my knees, I asked myself the question for the third time. Do I really **believe** (not just with my head, but with my heart) that "*there is only one God and one mediator between God and man - the person Christ Jesus?*" Is Christianity a "cultural" religious system for westerners alongside several world religions, all which lead to a god, or is Christianity and its message the only means by which sinful people can be reconciled to a holy God? Is Jesus one of many prophets, or is He the *only* way, truth, and life? Is Jesus the Lord of all, or one among many?

If my answer was no, then the life of holiness was unnecessary, and the entire rationale and motivation for our evangelism mandate and for the world mission enterprise collapses. If my answer was yes, I must come to grips with the call to Christian holiness in my life. On my knees, I reaffirmed my convictional belief that "Jesus is Lord."

To respond positively to this question meant that all of my thoughts, behavior, words and actions must be judged by the conviction that "there is only one God, and one mediator between God and man the

person Christ Jesus." The call to holiness is bedded in this conviction. My life must be "wholly" consumed with a passion to communicate convictionally this truth.

I have come to see that all Christians must wrestle with these fundamental questions. Do we really believe that there is only one God and one mediator between God and man - the person - Christ Jesus? If so, what are the life implications of this faith conviction for us? I want to suggest three implications:

#1. We must take seriously the distinctives of our Christian faith. What do we really believe about God? Man? Sin? Salvation? Do we know the Articles of Faith for the Christian? Have we memorized the Apostles Creed? Are we prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope that we have? (I Peter 3:15)

We must become familiar with key biblical passages which outline our faith convictions such as Peter's sermon in Acts 2:14-41; Peter and John's response before the Sanhedrin in Acts 4; Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7; and Paul's speech before King Agrippa in Acts 26! What is the basis for a "Christ-centered" faith? In increasing ways, if we believe, really believe...we must come to affirm and understand the distinctiveness of the Christian faith.

#2. We must increasingly become world Christians and know the distinctives of the various national religions and contemporary cults. What do we know about Islam? Buddhism? Shintoism? We must know the distinctives of these "religions" and cults in order to defend Christianity when confronted with these challenges from national religions. We must be prepared to articulate our faith and challenge the foundations and assumptions of those philosophies which contradict Christian principles.

#3. Finally, if we really believe that "there is only one God..." then we must find specific ways to translate this belief into action. Our thoughts, values, priorities, attitudes, and behavior must be shaped by this conviction. Therefore, Work and Witness trips, and Faith Promise opportunities are so important. These and other expressions give us tangible ways of stepping out and affirming our faith in ways that put our testimony on the line and in ways that give concrete expression to our belief.

There are specific ways by which you can draw the line and say, "*Yes, I believe...therefore, I will do this...and not this.*"

There are approximately 700 million Hindus and 300 Muslims in Asia, in addition to the one billion Chinese who espouse Confucianism and Taoism. In fact, approximately two-thirds of the world population lives in Asia and the sub-continent of India, and only approximately three percent of this vast number professes Christianity.

Christians globally must confront these staggering truths with a united strategy to avoid "cheap grace;" to "give up small ambitions" to proclaim that Jesus is Lord - *the only mediator between God and man*.

Christians in Asia and the subcontinent of India taught me by word and deed that the simplicity of holiness is wrapped up in the chorus I heard them sing often,

I'll say yes, Lord, yes, to Your will and to Your way.

I'll say yes, Lord, yes, I will trust You and obey.

When Your Spirit speaks to me,

With my whole heart I'll agree,

And my answer will be yes, Lord, yes.

To make this commitment demands a purity of heart that wills only one thing. A commitment to and lifestyle of holiness is the one foundation on which a life can be built that seeks to "go where You want me to go, dear God, over mountain, on land, or sea, I'll say what You want me to say, dear Lord, I'll be what You want me to be."

In Manila or Mount Vernon,

In Columbus or Calcutta,

In Nashville or Nairobi,

To the rich or to the poor,

In the cities or in the countryside,

At home or far away.

I close with the story of William Borden, Jr. A ship named "The Invader" was custom-made in Quincy, Massachusetts, in 1905 for William Borden, Sr., founder of the milk company by that name. It is now located in San Diego, California. There were no heirs to assume ownership of the boat; thus, it was sold at public auction. That's how it ended up in San Diego.

The Borden's had a son, William Borden, Jr., who was given every advantage imaginable throughout his youth. Frequently, they reminded him that he was the person chosen to inherit the company, and that he should begin "grooming" himself for the awesome responsibility.

Then one day, it was off to college he went. While there, some friends introduced him to Jesus Christ. That's when *everything* changed, and he began to experience a vital, dynamic trust relationship with God through His Spirit.

He announced to his father that he would be relinquishing his future in the company to become a missionary to the Orient.

The parent's shock was almost too much to bear. Mr. Borden scrambled to do all within his power to talk his son out of his "foolish" decision. He offered further enticements. He attempted to induce guilt. He even tried scare tactics, warning his son of a plague that was spreading through the Orient -- but to no avail. The boy's mind was made up, so he departed.

After a few months, William, Sr., received a letter from the missionary board. As he began reading, tears welled up in his eyes. His son had died. He had contracted the fatal disease. Mr. Borden's intense sorrow soon turned to anger as he thought about "what might have been." If only...."

The funeral came and went, but the sorrow remained. In fact, it intensified. But Mr. Borden was about to learn how totally surrendered his son was to God.

Some months later, a small package arrived in the mail. It was from another missionary who had been the son's close friend.

The letter inside spoke of their friendship, and the son's tremendous ministry. The letter concluded with this postscript: "Mr. Borden, you will find your son's Bible enclosed. It meant so much to him, and I know it will to you."

The father began to thumb through the Book he knew very little about. Then, just as he was about to close it, he noticed some words scratched on the back flyleaf. The date beside corresponded to the week before his son's death.

Upon closer inspection, he discovered that this was *his son's own handwriting*. His heart was overwhelmed as he slowly and softly read to himself:

NO RESERVE

NO RETREAT

NO REGRET

These are the words and testimony of the person who has been sanctified through and through by the Holy Spirit.

These are the words of a holy man of God who had come to terms with the life implications of the faith conviction that *there is only one God, and one mediator between God and man, the person Jesus Christ*. As you come to the close of *this* academic year, and for the prospective graduates, the close of your studies at MVNC, I urge you, as your college president, to live your life, wherever God places you, in such a way that regardless of the circumstances, married or single, rich or poor, at home or far away, in the vocation in which you were trained at MVNC, or a totally different calling, you, like Borden, can say,

No Reserve

No Retreat

No Regret.

Why not write these words in the flyleaf of your Bible, as I did, following Borden's example. Increasingly, I want this to be my epitaph if, by radical faith - I believe, really believe - that *there is only one God, and one mediator between God and man, the person Jesus Christ*. This is my deeply felt prayer for each one of you.

Join me in singing a closing chorus.

I'll say yes, Lord, yes, to Your will and to Your way.

I'll say yes, Lord, yes, I will trust You and obey.

When Your Spirit speaks to me with my whole heart I'll agree,

And my answer will be yes, Lord, yes.

May it be so, Lord. Amen.