

# NAZARENE EDUCATION FROM AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

Rodney L. Reed

I serve as the chief academic officer at Africa Nazarene University in Nairobi, Kenya. As a missionary to Africa for ten years, my contribution to this publication will help provide an international or global perspective. The primary purpose of this book is to discuss what it means to teach within the ethos of Nazarene higher education. This is critically important in my African context so I want to address this issue directly and practically. And so let me frame my comments by asking and answering the following question: *What does an African faculty member in a university or college need to know about higher education in the Church of the Nazarene?*

First, as has been mentioned in some of the previous articles, special attention needs to be given to teach the faculty the mission of the Church of the Nazarene: “To Make Christ-like Disciples in the Nations.” But the goal is not only for them to know it, but also to own it and to seek to make their teaching an expression of it, regardless of the course of study or the content of any particular unit.

What does it mean “to make Christ-like disciples in the nations,” you may ask. Fortunately, the meaning has already been broken down very well for us elsewhere in the booklet titled *Christian, Holiness, Missional*. However, let me say a word or two about each of those elements, which will place them in an African educational context.

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We are to be *Christian* in our teaching. That means placing Christ at the center of everything. As it says in Colossians 1:17, “[I]n Christ all things cohere.” All knowledge has its beginning and end in Christ. Make no apologies about that in the classroom. However, in ANU’s context, because of our reputation as a university where character and integrity are taught, we have many Muslim and a few Hindu students. I want my faculty to know that placing Christ at the center does not mean being disrespectful or dismissive of other faiths. Christians should model respect and appreciation of other faiths in the classroom, and that is especially true of Wesleyans, who believe that through God’s prevenient grace, God is at work even outside the four walls of the church drawing humanity to Himself.

ANU includes the phrase “*Holiness Education*” in its logo, and hence every piece of stationery, every bookmark, every brochure, and almost every piece of branded merchandise has that slogan on it. Even some of our buildings are branded with it. We want our faculty to know, experience, and model the transforming power of God’s love to re-make us into God’s image and to fill us with love for humanity. In our context, holiness is often associated with Pentecostalism and speaking in an unknown prayer language. While respecting that viewpoint, we must occasionally clarify for faculty and students that the Church of the Nazarene believes that the gift of tongues as described on the Day of Pentecost was for the purpose of the spread of the gospel into other (known) language groups (Acts 2:5-11) and that the true test of the fullness of the Holy Spirit is not the manifestation of any particular gift of the Spirit, but rather the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit, the greatest of which is love (1 Cor. 13).

**T**he Church of the Nazarene is *missional*. Africans will not be able to avoid associating the word “missional” with the Western *mission*-aries who brought the gospel to Africa. For some Africans, the word “missionary” brings up fond images of a sacrificial servant of God who built a school or clinic or church nearby. But for others, it brings up an image of one who stood with the colonizers who stole the Africans’ land and who said nothing in opposition to apartheid and other forms of oppression of African peoples. So for

an African faculty that has been well-schooled in the history of the complicity of the Christian missionary movement in the colonization and underdevelopment of Africa, I want to say that the Church of the Nazarene intends for this word, “missional,” to mean that the church is on a mission that includes the liberation and development of people holistically. The church has a God-given mission to fulfill, and the very reason the Church of the Nazarene has set out to establish higher educational institutions around the world is that the church is convinced that such education is an essential part of that mission.

That leads to another point that was made by Mark Mountain in his essay, “Two Parts of a Whole: The Church of the Nazarene and Its Educational Institutions,” but deserves further emphasis for the sake of an African faculty. The Church of the Nazarene is not a large denomination, but it stretches around the world—it is present in over 150 world areas. And wherever it goes, it establishes educational institutions. By most standards, we have universities and Bible colleges and training institutions far in excess of what would be considered normal for a denomination our size. This commitment to education is commendable and is something an African faculty can appreciate.

But a Nazarene university or college education is not just any education. Education in the Nazarene university or college tradition has these essential characteristics:

1. **Liberal Arts, Not Just Professional Training:** The Church of the Nazarene believes that we should educate to enable our learners to make a life, not just a living. Any education that strives for excellence should be holistic in nature (mind, body, and spirit), creating a well-rounded and well-grounded person.
2. **Service to Community:** The purpose of education is not so one can say that he or she has arrived and become somebody. Its purpose is so an individual will serve others





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and help them to become caring individuals. In Africa, there is tremendous pressure from the extended family and community to get training that is designed simply to bring money back into the family or community. It's all about money! Young students who want to choose a career path that is oriented toward service to others are often discouraged from doing so. The educational philosophy of the Church of the Nazarene is all about teaching our students to use the knowledge and skills they have gained in the classroom to serve others.

3. **Character formation:** Kenya and many African nations are ranked high in terms of the prevalence of corruption in society. Because of the Nazarene emphasis on holiness of heart and life, our universities become centers of moral excellence and incubators of integrity—at least that is what we strive for them to be. The Three C's of ANU are Character, Competence, and Community. We want our faculty to intentionally shape the character of our students.
4. **Integration of Faith and Learning:** Historically, private universities are a relatively novel idea in most of Africa. Most faculty members have received their education in public universities where “God is checked at the door” before the student walks into the classroom, and little or no effort is made toward integrating subject content with Christian faith. Because Christ is the integrating factor of all knowledge, we constantly encourage our faculty to creatively find ways to integrate their faith into classroom instruction, no matter what the discipline.
5. **Role Modeling:** Because of the characteristics listed above, faculty at Nazarene institutions must be positive role models for their students. Bottom line: if you don't want to live a morally exemplary life or don't have a testimony of God's grace to share, then don't sign the contract to teach in one of the educational institutions of the Church of the Nazarene.

It is my hope that from these few words that non-African educators have gained an appreciation for Christian higher education in the African context, and African educators have gained a deeper appreciation for education in the Nazarene context. ■