

CALLED UNTO HOLINESS:

Christian Holiness in the Wesleyan-Holiness
Tradition and the Vocation of Nazarene
Colleges and Universities

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There is no doctrine more central to the Church of the Nazarene's tradition and mission than Christian holiness; its propagation is to a large extent the *raison d'être* of our denomination and its institutions of higher education.⁸

Unfortunately, teaching and preaching about sanctification have recently declined. However, it is our contention that the doctrine and experience of Christian holiness are absolutely central to the Christian gospel and must remain central to the mission of Nazarene higher education.

A proper biblical doctrine of holiness begins with the Triune God's holy and creative love, expressed fully in the person of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God (John 1:1-14). Through Christ, God created the universe in order to express divine goodness and love. He created human beings in His image that we might reflect divine love through worship of God and care for each other and creation (see Gen. 1-2, esp. 1:26-31). Because of sin, the image of God in humanity is corrupted, impairing our capacity to reflect God's love, with terrible consequences for all of life (Gen. 3:10-19; Rom. 8:19-22). But, through the grace of God, freely given in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and actualized

through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are reconciled to God, the image of God is restored, and our ability to reflect God's love is appropriately renewed (2 Cor. 5:16-20).

As John Wesley recognized, this restoration, or "new creation," comes with some significant complications (see Wesley's sermon "Christian Perfection"). Although redeemed by grace and empowered for Christ-likeness, we remain finite creatures embed-

ded in and profoundly affected by interpersonal relationships, communities, and both social and natural systems; yet we are subject to sin's corruption. This reality defines the great multidimensional challenge and vocation of the Christian and the Church. That is, we are called to be instruments of God's reconciling and sanctifying grace, overcoming sin wherever it might be found. And, as an extension of the Church, Nazarene colleges and universities have a special role to play in this ministry of reconciliation.

The holiness tradition has often spoken of the fulfillment of this ministry in the way that Jesus did: We are to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength and love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-34). In these terms, the special role of Nazarene higher education in fulfilling the ministry of reconciliation becomes clear: *Nazarene colleges and universities exist chiefly to form Christians and a Church that will more perfectly love God and neighbor, including all of creation* (Rom. 8:21-23). Every aspect of the Christian university should ultimately serve this aim!

We affirm that all truth is God's; that God has endowed us with minds to inquire and reason critically; and that there



is no topic, idea, or question that cannot be addressed within the community of Christian faith, and especially within a Christian college or university. Indeed, Christ calls us to



love God with our *whole minds* and therefore undertake the most open and wide-ranging educational inquiry imaginable, trusting that the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth (John 16:13).

What we advocate are not institutions of higher learning that restrict edu-

educational opportunities because of their holiness mission, but instead institutions that *pursue an appropriate ordering of their activities around their core mission*. That is, we do not understand the *telos* of education to be learning itself nor the formation of persons who will make more money, achieve greater professional success, or be more effective servants to society in some vague, ultimately vacuous, sense. Rather, we wish our students to study scripture and theology that they might understand the vibrancy of their spiritual heritage and better hear the Word of God spoken through scripture and tradition; to study the natural sciences that they might find a deeper appreciation for the wonder and richness of creation; to study the social sciences that they might have a better understanding of the complexity and contingency of the social world we inhabit and the extent to which it has been corrupted by sin; to study the humanities that they might develop a deeper appreciation for the human experience of both sin and grace and develop the ability to think critically and communicate effectively; to study the arts that they might find their imaginations inspired and discover means for lifting the human spirit

in its celebration of the Author of creativity; and so on, all of which will empower them for life-long service *within and for Christ's Church*.

We also affirm that holiness universities must treat education as comprehensive and integrative. The incarnation, in which the eternal Word of God has become flesh and entered fully into creation, brings together the multidimensionality of life into a complete whole, as does the Greatest Commandment. The task of Christian education is not merely that of expanding the mind or the spirit, but both intertwined with care of the body. In the same sense that overemphasizing disciplinary distinctives distorts the true unity of creation and practically undermines the educational process, the sharp bifurcation of mind and heart, of classroom and chapel, is caustic to the integrated whole of the person and life and therefore should be foreign to the aims of a holiness education.

Finally, with John Wesley we affirm that there are a great number of corporate and individual practices that Jesus' disciples should deliberately undertake through which God's sanctifying grace works—what Wesley called the “means of grace”—including chiefly faithful and regular practice of the sacraments; corporate worship; participation in small groups; study and reading of scripture; works of mercy and compassion; self-denial; and education. We contend that our colleges and universities will fulfill their great calling only when they are understood to be covenantal communities in which *every* aspect of institutional life is treated as a potential means of grace.⁹ ■

ENDNOTES

⁸ Church of the Nazarene, *Manual 2009-13* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2009), 5-6.

⁹ See also Mark Maddix's essay, footnote 2.

WORK CITED

Church of the Nazarene. *Manual 2009-13*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2009.

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