

TWO PARTS OF A WHOLE

The Church of the Nazarene and Its Educational Institutions

Mark C. Mountain

Christian higher education stems from religious zeal, and educational and spiritual components cannot be easily separated. The Church of the Nazarene, for example, was born out of holiness movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—an amalgamation of church associations from around the country came together to form what is today known as the Church of the Nazarene. This group adopted several educational institutions that later became a major focus of the church's work. In the early 1920s, then General Superintendent James B. Chapman clearly communicated the fact that Nazarene colleges are inseparable from the church:

I will say that we must make our schools strong on scholarship and adequate in equipment and must turn out educated people who are not only spiritually right but intellectually correct and scholastically strong . . . This leaves but one type of school for us to consider, and that is the college. We shall have to provide for academy students at our college for some time to come, and we shall always make our Bible Department the most prominent of all, but we must build a few good colleges. My thought is that our colleges will fill the whole demand and that we shall do well to adopt this as our policy . . . And that we encourage such of our schools as cannot reasonably expect to become colleges to cease operation as soon as they can, for they must sooner or later die.¹³

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark C. Mountain, Ed. D., University of Nebraska—Lincoln

Executive Assistant to the President

Adjunct Professor of Christian Education

Director of Presidential Initiatives and Government Relations

Olivet Nazarene University

Dr. Mountain's doctoral dissertation title is *The Church of the Nazarene: A Denomination and Its Colleges*.



Thus, the Church of the Nazarene set out to establish colleges and universities distinct in mission. Set against a landscape of other Christian institutions, the denomination's schools are unique in theological emphasis, funding, and educational philosophy.

The Reformed tradition, originated by John Calvin and represented primarily today by Presbyterian and United Church in Christ congregations, emphasizes such utter depravity of humankind that students cannot know or choose. So God does the choosing, an entirely gracious and, thus, irresistible act. This constructs a classroom pedagogy that focuses on God's sovereignty over all knowledge and people, including God's predestined plan for students, and points toward contrasts of sacred and secular influences.

The Lutheran tradition, now sponsoring more than 20 U. S. colleges, acknowledges the fall of humankind through sin but emphasizes justification by faith, the choice of humankind. But human beings remain in paradox, both saint and sinner. Supporting the practice of faith is "non-theological" content, which explains in part a strong support of public education as well. This informs a pedagogy responsible for the world's work.

The Roman Catholic tradition does not conceive of the fall as a totally depraving event, but a wounding one. According to this belief, human beings never fully broke relationship with God. Even while salvation is necessary, there is inherent goodness in humankind. However, while the guilt of sin may be forgiven by God upon confession, the penalty for sin must be erased by acts of penance, a reparation mediated by priests. This influences a works-oriented pedagogy: faith becomes credible by action.

Nazarene educational institutions are distinct from these traditions in at least four ways, three theological and one by

Set against a landscape of other Christian institutions, the denomination's schools are unique in theological emphasis, funding, and educational philosophy.

*Unfortunately,
many colleges
and universities
that were once
sponsored by a
denomination have
become very loosely
connected.*

governance. By prevenient grace, God incessantly draws human beings to himself, by all means, without boundary, and every individual has an opportunity to respond to God by free will. Set against the “pessimism of sin” is God’s “optimism of grace,” that God desires we be entirely sanctified. This work of God brings us into entire consecration, such that students receive not only forgiveness of sin, but a new nature, removing the desire to sin, leading toward a life marked by spiritual power rather than struggle. This puts teachers in partnership with God: His initiative, our labor, by all means—readings, lectures, relationship, media, everything.

Nazarenes again differ from the Reformed, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic traditions by governance. Almost all Roman Catholic educational institutions in the United States, are independent from the Vatican. Lutherans operate regional synods. But the funding and trustee structure of the Church of the Nazarene connects its educational institutions to the denomination differently. Local Nazarene churches annually fund colleges and universities by apportionment and populate the school board with only lay and clergy trustees who hold membership in the denomination. This ensures stability of mission and proportionate support. Therefore, to describe Nazarene higher education as *church-related* or even *Christian* does not adequately illustrate just how strong the relationship is between the denomination and its schools.

Unfortunately, many colleges and universities that were once sponsored by a denomination have become very loosely connected, a mere “heritage” or historic reference of association. The Church of the Nazarene’s educational institutions continue the aspiration of expressing the denomination through its work. Nazarene schools and the Church of the Nazarene are two parts of a whole. ■

ENDNOTE

¹³ James B. Chapman, quoted in Education Commission of the Church of the Nazarene, *A Study of the Educational Structure in the Church of the Nazarene* (Jan. 1964), 53.

WORKS CITED

Burtchaell, James T. *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998.

Chapman, James B. Quoted in Education Commission of the Church of the Nazarene. *A Study of the Educational Structure in the Church of the Nazarene*, Jan. 1964.

