

Education for the Preparation of Ministers in Asia

by Floyd T. Cunningham

Nazarenes always have recognized the link between education and evangelism – that these are not opposing but complementary aspects of our mission. APNTS as an educational institution of the Church of the Nazarene aims to prepare ministers who will fulfill the Great Commission to make disciples. The making of disciples is a never-ending and challenging task for us to live up to. It begins by making converts, but it does not end there. It proceeds to help them into disciplined, sanctified, Spirit-filled lives, fruitful for God's kingdom. The mission of the Church of the Nazarene is both to help evangelize the peoples of the world, and to bring a full gospel of sanctifying grace to those who already are Christians, so that there might be true transformation of values and character. This is related also to what William Greathouse termed our cardinal doctrine, that of redemption through Jesus Christ; and our distinguishing doctrine, sanctifying grace. We proclaim this full gospel through our deeds as well as our words.

Phineas Bresee put it this way near the time of the founding of our denomination: "While the evangelization of men and their great commission is our first work, it also inheres in our commission to train and educate those, who through our labors, are brought into this great salvation." To Bresee the mission of our church was first to the "heathen," as he called them, of America, and especially to its cities. He wanted to see "centers of holy fire" in the cities of America. The first mission abroad he supported was an urban work in a malaria-infested part of Calcutta, India, which sought to demonstrate that holiness is perfect love by ministering to child widows and other orphans. Bresee also talked often of the mission of the Church of the Nazarene to "Christianize Christianity." The precise means of accomplishing this may have been somewhat unformed in Bresee's mind, but he believed that we must be freed from all of the worldliness, empty ritualism and spiritual coldness of other churches, and that we must go where they seemed unwilling to go, to the poorest of the poor. In these ways we witness to fellow Christians.

Bresee and later generations of Nazarene educators have endeavored to maintain both "true religion" and "sound scholarship" in equal measures. There has been a kind of implicit Thomism in our philosophy of education, that Truth is Truth, whether it is found through revelation or through the humanities and sciences. Bertha Munro, longtime Academic Dean of Eastern Nazarene College, embodied this philosophy of education. One of the tasks of Christian education which must never be forgotten, she said, is that of evangelizing the student. "The faculty member is not responsible to indoctrinate or to require the student to accept God's will or his own ideas; he is responsible to let him know and help him to understand how he himself has related himself to God, and his subject to

the basic Christian philosophy.”

In recent days General Superintendent John A. Knight has also articulated clearly the wedding which there must be between education and evangelism. At the 1989 WOMEC seminar he said that “all who are engaged in theological education must incorporate [both] the offering of a broad and provocative conceptual base . . . And the specific focus on evangelism and training for world evangelization. ”He continued, “These must not be antithetical to, nor isolated from, each other. It is not a matter of either/or.”

APNTS emerges out of decades of educational philosophy such as this.

The first Bible college of the Church of the Nazarene in Asia was begun in 1915 in Kumamoto, Japan, soon after the return of Hiroshi Kitagawa from the United States. So an Asian, rather than a North American missionary, had the honor of being the first Nazarene Bible school president in Asia. Kitagawa had studied under theologian H. Orton Wiley at Pasadena College and had been ordained by H. F. Reynolds. He had been commissioned, and was being paid, as a missionary to his home country. His “mother” in the faith, the Rev. Minnie Staples, had never finished grammar school, but was effective as an evangelist, speaking Japanese fluently. She and Kitagawa served as a team. In 1921 both Kitagawa and the school moved to Kyoto. In the war years the Church of the Nazarene cooperated with the Free Methodists and Kitagawa served as president of a united school in Osaka. After the war the Nazarenes reopened their own school, this time in Tokyo. Even in the beginning, Nazarenes in Japan ministered among merchants, professional people of the middle class. Some were converts from Shintoism, others from Russian Orthodoxy. In such a culture as Japan it has been imperative that Nazarenes as well as other Protestants have a respectably-educated and prepared clergy. There was less need for other institutional work in Japan but great need for ministerial education.

In India the situation of the Church of the Nazarene was quite different. In central India our work was among rural villagers, most of whom could not read or write. We borrowed workers in the early days from other denominations, and missionaries complained about having to get these preachers converted first. Nonetheless it took a long time for us to see the absolute necessity of educating our own workers. In 1918 Leighton Tracy (20 years after the beginning of our work) laid out a plan whereby the church would establish a system of village primary schools. These would be capped by a central school for the higher grades, which would be a boarding school. The best of our students of this boarding school, Tracy envisioned, would go on to a ministerial training school which would also be a boarding school. These boarding schools were particularly necessary in order to develop Christian character, Tracy believed. Left in old, Hindu environments Christians succumbed to its “inborn customs and prejudices.” Completely removed from this culture they would have the opportunity to adopt new thoughts. Through a system of Nazarene schools

throughout the field, Indian leaders, both clergy and laity, would emerge. Essentially Tracy was advocating a completely fresh start toward the creation of a church which would be at the same time both truly Nazarene and truly Indian, as he himself put it. Yet it was not until 1927 that a Bible training school was established, in Buldana; and even then it was an on-and-off-again proposition. It had an enduring existence only after moving to Washim in 1935.

Our original work in China was in a similarly-located area, among rural villagers with little education. The Nazarenes developed not only primary schools in several towns, but also conducted literacy campaigns for adults, including old women (something unheard of in China). Missionaries began a Bible training school in 1923, in Damingfu but it closed in 1928 due to government regulations. It was reopened in 1935. The following years, until it closed again in 1942, were years of political turmoil all around (especially after the Japanese took control of the region in 1937), but were marked by constant revival. The graduates of this Bible school took leadership in the church after the missionaries were forced to evacuate, and until this day have been pastoring and evangelizing. The Japanese war killed some of the graduates, others suffered persecution by the communists, some repudiated their faith; but those who have persevered have persevered to the end. They have been passing on their theological education by a kind of oral tradition, beginning with their own children. To this day the Christians of that area of China know that their spiritual roots are in the "Preaching Holiness Church," the name used long ago for the Church of the Nazarene in China.

Out of this experience, as soon as the missionaries were able to establish a short-lived work in southern China after the World War II, in Kiangsi, they established a Bible school. The same thing when missionaries opened the work in Taiwan; within two years there was a Bible school in Taipei. From Northern China the missionaries had learned their lesson that the church is not a building, not the missionaries, but the national people. Leadership abilities must be developed in them through education. In fact missionary Francis Sutherland, the one chiefly responsible for the educational work in Northern China, envisioned as early as 1948 the necessity of having a Seminary in Asia. It was here, he said, that people so highly regard education and educated people, that earning the respect and attention of the people demanded a highly-trained ministry.

When Sutherland made these remarks the Seminary in Kansas City was only three years old, and still arguing for its own right to exist. Shortly before his death, General Superintendent J. B. Chapman defended the Seminary to one critic, saying that it was a mystery to him that holiness people would be thought of as not believing in education. Having a seminary had been in the plans of the Nazarene colleges from very beginning days, he reminded. "If I had it to do again," Chapman testified, "I would try to get better training than I did." He went on to say that he believed that "our Seminary is a necessary step in the forward program of our church."

In those years, as well as in the decades following, sometimes it has been necessary for education to defend itself, but on mission fields education and evangelism always have been inseparable. John Pattee, who had seen the positive effects of education on the church in China in the late 1930's, began a Bible college in the Philippines shortly after the church sent missionaries to the country. Pattee taught New Testament Greek and other subjects on weekdays, and held revivals which led to the start of several new churches on the weekends, taking with him bands of Bible college students. As the Philippines shows, though the postwar impetus in Nazarene missions was strongly evangelistic, the establishment of ministerial training schools often soon followed the opening of new fields. W. C. Esselstyn, a missionary long involved in educational work in Africa, remarked in a book with strong evangelistic emphases edited by R. V. DeLong in 1947, that education was crucial for the church. If all the money and effort of the mission were diverted to evangelism, he said, there would be an influx of new converts for a time; but they would be shallow in faith and commitment. Education produced more lasting results.

General Superintendent G. B. Williamson felt much the same way when he visited India in the early 1950's. Despite what had been implemented of Tracy's plan of many years before, he found ministerial education inadequate. Despite recent spiritual revivals and renewed emphasis on evangelism, with only seven ordained Indian ministers at that time, and only two of these educated in Nazarene schools, Williamson was pessimistic about the future of the work. He believed that it was the duty of the Church of the Nazarene for the sake of our future church and its leaders, to further strengthen our educational program in central India, and even hoped that at some point the national church would be strong enough to support its own graduate-level seminary.

Japan, rather than India, had both the resources and will to more fully develop its ministerial program. Mildred Wynkoop was specially chosen to spearhead and reorganize the educational work in the early 1960's. In an important paper she wrote in April 1963 on the "Educational Problems in Japan," she said that though in early days preaching evangelistically was rightly the urgent emphasis, today evangelism must be defined broadly to include "the tedious rebuilding of the foundations of thinking," so that both strong character and a strong church might be built. In America, the Church of the Nazarene had been "compelled" to build schools in order to preserve the Christian heritage, since the "evangelistic arm had to be supported by educational muscles and bone." The same demand for an educated, adequate Christian leadership existed in Japan. We need, she said, a high quality of education for our leaders, lay as well as clergy. Wynkoop laid the groundwork and more for what the Japanese called the first graduate theological seminary of the Church of the Nazarene outside of Kansas City. Actually it was a five-year program, building the theological seminary on top of a required two-year junior college religion major (which could only be accomplished in three).

Nevertheless, Nazarene leaders never envisioned Japan Nazarene Theological Seminary as an international school, nor did the school develop masters programs. For that reason the founding of Asia Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary in 1983 was an historic event not only for the region but for the church. Until that time NTS in Kansas City could claim to be the graduate divinity school of the denomination. No more. Why?, and why here? First, sometimes some people were lost when they studied in the West. Second, not only were some people lost, but some things were lost in studying in the West, such as the ability to relate to one's own culture. Third, the Church of the Nazarene was growing in Asia, especially in Korea. Yet because of language problems and higher costs, leaders thought it better to locate in the Philippines rather than in Korea. Fourth, Asia had a much higher level of literacy and college-educated persons than most other parts of the world. It possessed Confucian and other heritages that placed a high value upon the scholar. Fifth, Asia had for decades possessed a highly-advanced level of church leadership, dating back to the days of Kitagawa and Isayama in Japan, Bhujabal in India, Chung in Korea, Berg in Australia. For these reasons and others top leaders in the Church of the Nazarene, including Eugene Stowe, Jerald Johnson; Donald Owens, articulated and built upon the vision for APNTS. We are the product, however, not of their vision only, but of the many decades of advance of the Church of the Nazarene in this part of the world.

What has gone before have been years of persevering from times of few converts to times of great revivals and spiritual harvests. We are the product of evangelism and must never lose our commitment to it. But right now we are in years of waiting as we prepare for leadership in Asia for the 21st century. There is nothing easy in study; we would rather be in the field. But God has called us to be as prepared as we possibly can be for the challenges facing the church and the world in the years ahead -- years and problems which no one can foresee -- challenges demanding broad conceptual principles and deep commitments that can be applied to future situations. From what was, to what is, to what will be: persevering, waiting and going. All show the continuity of God's grace. Our mission is to make disciples, which means to make converts, and to make true Christians of these converts through the on-going and sanctifying work of God's grace.