

NAZARENE THEOLOGY IN PERSPECTIVE

Inaugural Address

President William M. Groothouse

January 6, 1969

COMMEMORATING 25TH ANNIVERSARY
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INTRODUCTION

On January 6, 1969, Dr. William M. Greathouse was inaugurated as the fourth president of Nazarene Theological Seminary. His predecessors were Dr. Hugh C. Benner (1945-52); Dr. Lewis T. Corlett (1952-66); Dr. Eugene L. Stowe (1966-68).

The formal inauguration of Dr. Greathouse was a historic event. Representatives from the academic world, civic leaders of the area, and churchmen of various denominations were present for this distinctive service. The highlight of the ceremony was the keynote address delivered by Dr. Greathouse, entitled "Nazarene Theology in Perspective."

The message was received with enthusiastic response and acclaim. Requests for publication were numerous. These demands are being met in order that the challenge and vision of this address may be available to our own denomination and to all those in the academic and church worlds who may be interested in the stance of the Nazarene Theological Seminary in these troubled times.

It was decided that this classic documentary would have maximum benefit if used to launch the commemoration of the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of Nazarene Theological Seminary.

Mendell Taylor
Dean

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The preaching of Christian perfection, with John Wesley as chief mentor, wooed much of American Christianity during the latter part of the nineteenth century, but in the main it was the Methodists who were the advocates of this doctrine and experience.¹

Increasingly, the people who had espoused this doctrine, which was never meant to be a

¹See Timothy Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957).

"theological provincialism,"² found themselves unwelcome in their parent denominations. With agapeic hesitancy, but with New Testament poignancy, they formed several small denominations. Three of these "pilot projects," in 1908, formed the Church of the Nazarene — which has since that time welcomed under her wings several other denominations.

Although the denomination's founding fathers established colleges and even so-called universities, along with a few Bible schools, it was not until 1944 that the church decided to establish a graduate school of theology. In 1945, Nazarene Theological Seminary opened its doors, with Dr. Hugh C. Benner as president. During all these years of its servanthood, the Seminary has maintained close ties with the church, and the presence here tonight of so many of its leaders is one of the many evidences of that fact.

I

My subject tonight, as I am formally installed as the Seminary's fourth president, is "Nazarene Theology in Perspective." Let me speak first of the *Nazarene theological stance*, and say, for one thing, about that stance that it is *catholic*. That is to say, Nazarene theology stands in the classic tradition of Christian thought. The Church of the Nazarene espouses the Methodist doctrine of entire sanctification and partakes

²Despite the charge of the late Methodist theologian A. C. Knudson.

of the Wesleyan spirit. It also adheres closely to the many important biblical and Reformation emphases which are not distinctive of Wesleyanism. The 15 articles of its creed draw heavily from the Twenty-five Articles of Methodism, which were in turn basically an abridgment of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. Thus we stand within the classical tradition of Christian faith.

While the Church of the Nazarene has sometimes been classified sociologically as a sect-type institution which is growing into a denomination, theologically we are not sectarian. The *Nazarene Manual* declares, "The Church of God is composed of all spiritually regenerate persons, whose names are written in heaven."³ It states further, "The Church of the Nazarene is composed of those persons who have voluntarily associated themselves together according to the doctrines and polity of the said church, and who seek holy Christian fellowship, the conversion of sinners, the entire sanctification of believers, their upbuilding in holiness, and the simplicity and spiritual power manifest in the primitive New Testament Church, together with the preaching of the gospel to every creature."⁴ We thus believe that one is incorporated into the body of Christ by the birth of the Spirit, signed and sealed by water baptism; and one comes into the Church of the Nazarene by voluntarily associating himself with a fellowship committed to the special task of promoting New

³Par. 24.

⁴Par. 23.

Testament holiness, along with the worldwide preaching of the gospel.

So while a Nazarene takes upon himself the doctrine and the discipline of holiness, in his endeavor to realize completeness in Christ, he recognizes that not all Christian believers are so persuaded. Positively, he extends the right hand of Christian fellowship to all persons who are in Christ.

As a committed Nazarene, the most precious relation in my life is to Christ, and His living body, the *koinonia* of the Spirit. With John Oxenham I full-heartedly sing:

*In Christ there is no East or West,
In Him no South or North,
But one great Fellowship of Love
Throughout the whole wide earth.*

But also as a committed Nazarene, I cherish the truth of Christian perfection and seek by every means to realize the fullness of the Spirit and the mind that is in Christ. Yet all the while I say with Wesley, "Is thy heart right, as my heart is with thy heart? . . . If it be, give me thine hand" (II Kings 10:15).⁵ This is Nazarene ecumenicity. In our pursuit of perfection we seek to maintain the "catholic spirit."

Let me say further that Nazarene theology is *conservative*. "Fundamentalist" is a tag commonly attached to any Christian body which takes seriously a particular view of the authority of Scripture. Accordingly, the Church of the Nazarene is sometimes dubbed fundamentalist. Fundamentalism, however, is a historic phenomenon,

8 ⁵Sermon XXIX, "Catholic Spirit."

arising in the first quarter of this century as a protest against Protestant modernism. Today it represents the "radical right" of Protestantism, often allied with the radical right in politics. It espouses a view of biblical authority which we may call "biblicism." As "scientism" makes a god of science, "biblicism" tends to make of the Bible an idol.

The Nazarene position with reference to biblical authority is more Lutheran than Calvinistic. For Luther, Scripture was the cradle for Christ. That is, the primary purpose of the Bible is to "preach Christ." Luther's doctrine of Scripture was thus dynamic and soteriological. On the other hand, Calvin stressed the formal side of Scripture as God's written word. Although he balanced this with the idea of *testimonium Spiritus sancti internum*,⁶ Calvin's followers of the radical right have tended to a view of authority based upon a literalistic dogma concerning inspiration, which, in turn, has created an unnecessary theological struggle among conservatives regarding inerrancy.

Wesleyan thought has historically taken a different tack. Wesley was a preacher and an experiential theologian. In his preface to the *Standard Sermons* he wrote:

I am a spirit come from God, and returning to God: Just hovering over a great gulf; till, a few moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing—the way to heaven. . . . God himself has condescended to teach the way: For this very purpose he came from heaven. He hath written it

⁶The internal witness of the Holy Spirit.

down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be *homo unius libri*.⁷ Here then I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone: Only God is here. In his presence I open, I read his book; for this end, to find the way to heaven.⁸

This is the throbbing heart of Wesley's theology of the Word; it is God's message concerning the way of salvation.

The late H. Orton Wiley also takes a Wesleyan stance on this question. After criticizing what he sees as a Roman error of substituting the Church for the Bible, he deals with the opposite position of Protestant orthodoxy. He writes:

Before the second generation of the Reformers has passed away, a movement was set up to place the Bible in the position formerly held by the Church. The Reformers themselves strove earnestly to maintain the balance between the formal and material principles of salvation, the Word and Faith, but gradually the formal principle superseded the material, and men began unconsciously to substitute the written Word for Christ the living Word. They divorced the written Word from the Personal Word and thus forced it into a false position. No longer was it the fresh utterance of Christ, the outflow of the Spirit's presence, but merely a recorded utterance which bound men by legal rather than spiritual bonds. Men's knowledge became formal rather than spiritual. . . . They gave more attention to creeds than to Christ. They rested in the letter, which according to Scripture itself kills, and never rose to the concept of Him whose words are spirit and life.⁹

⁷A man of one Book.

⁸*Works of John Wesley* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, n.d.), V, 3.

⁹H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1941), I, 142.

A word concerning inerrancy or infallibility is appropriate at this point, in view of the current discussion of this topic in conservative circles. During the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversies of the twenties, the late A. M. Hills wrote the first Nazarene theology, in which he asked: "What is the infallibility we claim for the Bible? It is infallible as regards the purpose for which it was written. It is infallible as a revelation of God's saving love in Christ for a wicked, lost world. It infallibly guides all honest and willing and seeking souls to Christ, to holiness, and to heaven."¹⁰

It was Wiley, more than anyone else, who was responsible for the words of the Nazarene article on Holy Scripture:

We believe in the plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, by which we understand the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments given by divine inspiration, inerrantly revealing the will of God in all things necessary to our salvation, so that whatsoever is not contained therein is not to be enjoined as an article of faith.¹¹

Inspiration, that is, pervades the *full*¹² body of Scripture and invests it with the power of the Holy Spirit to bring men to salvation. Revelation is in and through Scripture in a threefold manner: (1) It is most deeply personal, consisting of God's mighty acts which climax in Jesus Christ, God's final deed of redemption; (2) Revelation extends also to the process of inscripturation, by

¹⁰A. M. Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology* (Pasadena: C. J. Kinne, 1931), I, 134.

¹¹Art. IV, Par. 4.

¹²The meaning of "plenary."

which holy men, chosen of God and filled with the Spirit, accurately recorded these mighty deeds and invested them with their special meaning; (3) Finally, revelation becomes illumination, as the same Spirit who inspired the writers of Scripture reveals Christ to the heart and re-creates the believer's existence.

This I understand as the Lutheran-Wesleyan-Nazarene doctrine of the Word of God. It is dynamic, as opposed to an idolatrous biblicism. It is indeed a conservative position, but not fundamentalist. "A conservative," says William Hordern, "is marked by the desire to preserve the truth and values of the past, but his mind is not closed to change if he can be persuaded that the change is for the better."¹³ The enlightened Nazarene position seems to be that of open-minded conservatism.

The heart of this conservatism is the answering conviction that our salvation is *sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone)—that the living Word of God is the fount of all saving truth. Thus Nazarene theology "bows to the truth of revelation."¹⁴ The entire Nazarene theological enterprise must be carried on in obedience to God's word found in Scripture and Christ.

Besides being catholic in spirit, and conservative, Nazarene theology is *evangelical*. We stand solidly with classical Protestantism in asserting that salvation is not only *sola Scriptura* but also *sola gratia*, *sola fide* (by grace alone through faith

¹³*New Directions in Theology Today* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), I, 77.

¹⁴Karl Barth, *God in Action* (Manhasset, N.Y.: Round Table Press, 1963), p. 47.

alone). "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us unto himself by Jesus Christ" (II Corinthians 5:18). From first to last, our salvation is the work of God; hence it is by grace through faith. God is both the Initiator and the Perfecter of the faith by which we are saved. With James Arminius we ascribe "to grace the commencement, the continuance, and consummation of all good."¹⁵ This grace is not only God's gracious favor toward us in Christ; it is also the gracious assistance of the Spirit without which we can neither turn to God to be saved nor persevere in His service. Man has fallen away from God as the true End of his existence and is therefore inescapably self-centered. He has neither inclination nor power of himself to return to God; left to himself, his only freedom is the freedom to sin. But God has not left man to himself. Through the atonement a sufficient measure of grace is given to every man to enable him to return to God and be saved. If death has come upon all men through the disobedience of one (the first Adam), "through the righteousness of one [the last Adam] the free gift [of God's prevenient grace] has come upon all men unto justification of life" (see Romans 5:12-21). In Wesley's words, the "grace or love of God, whence cometh our salvation, is FREE IN ALL, and FREE FOR ALL."¹⁶

This concept of universal prevenient grace, as opposed to irresistible grace for the elect, is a

¹⁵*The Writings of Arminius* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1956), I, 253.

¹⁶*Op. cit.*, VII, 373.

distinctive Wesleyan-Arminian contribution to theology. It seeks to preserve the scriptural paradox of divine grace and human freedom. On the one hand we gratefully confess with Harriet Auber:

*And every virtue we possess,
And every victory won,
And every thought of holiness
Are His alone.*

But on the other hand, "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). By the free gift of God's grace, I may respond to God's proffer of salvation through Christ, and find life; but, like the Pharisees, the stoners of Stephen, I may "resist the Holy Ghost" and be damned. If I am saved, it is by His free grace; if I am lost, it is by my own willful perversity.

This is the paradox of divine sovereignty and human freedom. Only by holding these two apparently contradictory truths can we ascribe to God the rightful glory for our salvation without denying the undeniable fact of our own solemn responsibility before the Almighty. When finite reason tries to resolve the tension between these two poles of revealed truth, it lands theology either in a position of absolute predestinationism on the one hand or of Pelagian humanism on the other. Would we not do well to leave the matter in paradox, just as Scripture does?

In summary, therefore, we may say that the Nazarene stance is catholic (as opposed to sectarian), conservative (as opposed to fundamentalist), and evangelical (as opposed to
14 Pelagian).

II

Secondly, let me speak of *our distinguishing tenet*, Christian perfection. It is our abiding conviction that God raised up the Church of the Nazarene for a special purpose, to bear witness to the grand truth of Christian perfection. The preamble to our Articles of Faith reads:

In order that we may preserve our God-given heritage, the faith once delivered to the saints, especially the doctrine and experience of [entire] sanctification as a second work of grace, and also that we may cooperate effectually with other branches of the Church of Jesus Christ in advancing God's kingdom among men, we, the ministers and laymen of the Church of the Nazarene . . . do hereby . . . set forth . . . the Articles of Faith, to wit . . .

Then follow our 15 articles. That is to say, within the framework of evangelical Protestant faith we declare that our distinguishing tenet is entire sanctification.

Our cardinal doctrine is not Christian perfection, but redemption through Christ in terms of the New Testament *kerygma*. Within the kerygmatic proclamation, however, we lay special stress upon the fact that "for this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (I John 3:8). We believe that the atonement deals not simply with the fruit but also with the root of sin, not merely with the symptoms of man's moral disease but with the disease itself.

While we accent the work of full redemption, we do not do this in such a way as to place ourselves outside the mainstream of Christian tradition. Our position is not sectarian. In common with historic Christian faith we believe that sanctification is the other side of the coin of justification, that in its broadest sense it is the total process of moral and spiritual renewal which begins at the moment of conversion and continues to glorification. But with John Wesley we believe that within this process there is a second "moment," a distinct and critical stage of Christian faith and life, when by the Holy Spirit God cleanses the believer's heart from the root of sin and perfects him in love. This critical act of God we call entire sanctification.¹⁷

At this point we are at one with historic Methodism. In conference with his preachers John Wesley asked:

Q. 4. What was the rise of Methodism, so called?

A. In 1729, two young men reading the Bible, saw they could not be saved without holiness, followed after it, and incited others to do so. In 1737 they saw holiness comes by faith. They saw likewise, that men are justified before they are sanctified; but still holiness was their point. God then thrust them out, utterly against their will, to raise a holy people.¹⁸

In 1790, a year before his death, Wesley wrote: "This doctrine is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propagating this

¹⁷Art. X, Par. 13.

¹⁸Cited by Colin W. Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 167.

chiefly he appears to have raised us up."¹⁹ In his *Understanding the Methodist Church*, Nolan B. Harmon comments: "The doctrine of Christian perfection has been the one specific contribution which Methodism has made to the Church universal. . . . In all else we have been, as we should be, glad and energetic followers of the main stream of Christian belief."²⁰ Colin Williams, while he comments on the point that the doctrine of Christian perfection is an embarrassment to Methodism, does place it in proper perspective. He writes: "It is only in the context of the total expression of the Christian life represented in Wesley's theology that his doctrine of perfection can be understood, for perfection is simply the climax of the limitless faith in God's grace that shines through every part of his theology. It is here that his theology comes into focus."²¹

We Nazarenes count ourselves to be inheritors of this truth from Wesley, who received it from the Scriptures and the classic thought of the Church Universal. George Croft Cell claims that "the Wesleyan reconstruction of the Christian ethic of life is an original and unique synthesis of the Protestant ethic of grace with the Catholic ethic of holiness."²² Cell argues convincingly that the "homesickness for holiness"

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 167-68 (fn.).

²¹*Ibid.*

²²*The Rediscovery of John Wesley* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1935), p. 347.

constitutes "the innermost kernel of Christianity."²³ The essence of this holiness is Christlikeness, "no more, no less," such as caught the imagination of St. Francis of Assisi.²⁴ It was this "lost accent of Christianity" which had fallen into the background of interest in early Protestantism. Cell quotes Harnack's observation that Lutheranism in its purely religious understanding of the gospel went to such an extreme in its reaction against Roman Catholicism that it neglected too much the moral problem, the "Be ye holy; for I am holy." "Right here," Cell continues, "Wesley rises to mountain heights. He restored the neglected doctrine of holiness to its merited position in the Protestant understanding of Christianity."²⁵ Wesley's view of Christianity thus had two foci: "We love him, because he first loved us" (grace); and "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (holiness).²⁶

The genius of the Wesleyan teaching, says Cell, is that it neither confounds nor divorces justification and sanctification but places "equal stress upon the one and the other."²⁷

In his doctrine of justification Wesley comes "within a hair's breadth of Calvinism,"²⁸ which, as a Protestant persuasion, opposed the Roman doctrine that good works are meritorious. Thus in May, 1766, Wesley wrote: "I believe justifica-

²³*Ibid.*, p. 348.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 349.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 359.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 362.

²⁸See William R. Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1946), Chap. IV, "Within a Hair's Breadth of Calvinism."

tion by faith alone, as much as I believe there is a God. . . . I have never varied from it, no, not a hair's breadth, from 1738 to this day."²⁹ And again on March 26, 1790, one year before his death, he wrote:

About fifty years ago I had a clearer view than before of justification by faith; and in this, from that very hour, I have never varied, no, not a hair's breadth. . . . I am now on the border of the grave; but, by the grace of God, I still witness the same confession.³⁰

Fitchett relates an instance which shows how deeply Wesley was allied with Luther and Calvin on this point of justification. In 1783, when he thought he was dying, he said to his attendant, Joseph Bradford: "I have been reflecting on my past life. I have been wandering up and down between fifty and sixty years, endeavoring in my poor way, to do a little good to my fellow-creatures; and, now it is probable that here is but a few steps between me and death, and what have I to trust to for salvation? I can see nothing which I have done or suffered, that will bear looking at. I have no other plea than this:

*"I the chief of sinners am,
But Jesus died for me."*

When he actually lay dying in 1791; his memory went back to that scene eight years earlier. "There is no need," he whispered, "for more than I said at Bristol. I said then,

*"I the chief of sinners am,
But Jesus died for me."*

²⁹Cited by Cannon, *ibid.*, p. 81.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 82.

Later he repeated these words, and then added, "There is no way into the holiest but by the blood of Jesus."³¹

Thus for Wesley, as for Luther, the Christian's hope is not in his own righteousness but in that "alien righteousness" which comes through Christ. Justification is not simply the gateway into God's favor; it describes the believer's relationship to God at any moment of his earthly pilgrimage and supremely at the moment of death. Wesley would surely concur with Luther that justification by faith is "the article upon which the Church stands or falls." It is the gospel.

Nevertheless, Wesley believed that within the justified life a true work of sanctification is carried forward by the Holy Spirit, a work which may include a divine act of purification which purges the heart from remaining sin and makes it perfect in love.

W. E. Sangster thinks that "perfect love" is the true name for Wesley's doctrine.³² This name underscores the positive, social nature of holiness. Wesley himself shrank from using the term "sinless perfection,"³³ since the saintliest of Christians "come short of the law of love" as it is set forth in First Corinthians 13.³⁴ Because of their ignorance, those who have been made perfect in love are guilty of what Wesley calls "invol-

³¹W. H. Fitchett, *Wesley and His Century* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1808), pp. 510-11.

³²*The Path to Perfection* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1944), pp. 142-49.

³³*Op. Cit.*, XI, 418.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 417.

untary transgressions"³⁵ of God's law. "It follows that the most perfect have continual need of the merits of Christ, even for their actual transgressions, and may say for themselves, as well as for their brethren, 'Forgive us our trespasses.'"³⁶ Moreover, "none feel their need of Christ like these; none so entirely depend upon him. For Christ does not give life to the soul separate from, but in and with, himself." He then quotes the words of Christ, "Without (or separate from) me ye can do nothing."³⁷

Wesley thus makes two qualifying points. First, Christian perfection is not absolute but relative to our understanding of God's will. Hence the fully sanctified man feels deeply his imperfections and lapses from the perfect law of love and maintains a penitent and open spirit which saves him from Pharisaism. He never forgets that he is justified, not by works, but by grace, and thus leans wholly upon the Lord. Secondly, he knows that the perfect love which is God's gift to him through the Spirit is a "moment-by-moment" impartation of God's life to his soul. "The holiest of men still need Christ . . . as 'the light of the world.' For he does not give them light but from moment to moment: The instant he withdraws, all is darkness . . . for God does not give them a stock of holiness. But unless they receive a supply every moment, nothing but unholiness would remain."³⁸ With

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 396.

³⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 394-95.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 395.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 417.

St. Paul such a person confesses: "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh [myself apart from Christ's indwelling presence],) dwelleth no good thing" (Roman 7:18). There is therefore no room for boasting save in the grace of Christ, who pours God's *agape* into my being.

The scriptural basis for this view of "imperfect perfection" is found in Philippians 3:11-15 and Romans 8:17-27. Though by the grace of God we may have been brought into spiritual adulthood (love made perfect), we are still, in the words of E. Stanley Jones, "Christians in the making." We have not yet attained to the perfect mark of final Christlikeness for which we were claimed of God through the gospel; but we do have a singleness of purpose which permits the Spirit to carry us forward toward that goal with steadiness (cf. Hebrews 6:1). This is the thought of Philippians.

In Romans we are reminded that our Christian existence in the Spirit is an existence in the "time between the times," i.e., in "this present time" between Pentecost and the Parousia. By the grace of God we may be no longer "in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be the Spirit of God dwell in" us (Romans 8:8-9). But we are still in a body which is unredeemed and we must suffer the "infirmities of the flesh"—the racial effects of sin in our bodies and minds, the scars from past sinful living, our prejudices which hinder God's purposes, our neuroses which bring emotional depressions and cause us at times to "act out of character," our temperamental idiosyncrasies, our human weariness and fretfulness,

and a thousand faults our mortal flesh is heir to. "For we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (II Corinthians 4:7).

A full-orbed doctrine of Christian perfection must place the truth of holiness within the framework of "this present age," which is characterized by these "infirmities of the flesh." Thus Paul declares that we have been "saved by hope"—the hope of that final stroke of sovereign grace which shall bring to consummation that grand work of sanctification which began when we were converted. This is the hope of the resurrection. Wesley would agree with the late Karl Barth, who comments on this Romans passage: "If Christianity be not altogether restless eschatology, there remains in it no relationship whatever to Christ."³⁹ Thus Wesleyanism is in perfect accord with "the theology of hope."⁴⁰

I realize that many people scorn such a doctrine of "imperfect perfection." But to deny the possibility of being filled with the Spirit and knowing God's perfect love, because we are still finite creatures subject to the limitations of an earthly existence, is to miss something which is vital to New Testament Christianity. We therefore subscribe to "the Wesleyan paradox" of Christian perfection. The full truth is not gained by removing the tension between the two poles ("perfect"—"not yet perfected") but by holding these two truths with equal emphasis.

³⁹*The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. by Edwyn Hoskins (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 314.

⁴⁰See Jurgen Moltmann, *The Theology of Hope*, trans. by James W. Leitch (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

Only thus does the Christian life flower into Christlikeness.

We devoutly believe that God has entrusted to the Church of the Nazarene "the grand depositum" of this New Testament teaching of heart holiness. If we cease to "groan after" this perfection in Christ, if we fail to make this emphasis the focus of salvation truth in our preaching, if we do not pay the full price for Pentecost in our individual experience and in the life of the church, we will forfeit our Nazarene birthright and our very reason to exist. Most tragic of all, we will fail God, who commissioned us to "spread scriptural holiness over these lands."

III

I have talked about two matters, namely, our general theological stance and our distinguishing tenet. Now let me speak of *our present theological task*.

Some words attributed to Luther should be a reminder to every committed Nazarene preacher and theologian:

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides, is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.⁴¹

⁴¹Quoted by Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* 24 (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), p. 18.

Admittedly, our society is pluralistic. It is therefore difficult to pinpoint one spot where "the battle rages" at the moment. There has never been a totally uniform culture. Yet as we study the art and literature of the past we can discern at any time "a drift towards a monolithic and uniform whole." In former ages it took great periods of time for cultural concepts to spread, and by the time they reached other areas there were new concepts at the place of their origin. But in our small world cultural changes spread rapidly and influence great sections of mankind. Francis A. Schaeffer is surely correct in reminding us that "the orthodox Christian has paid a very heavy price, both in the defence and communication of the Gospel, for his failure to think and act as an educated man at grips with the uniformity of our modern culture."⁴²

The Process of Secularization. Many scholars do see such a new uniform culture emerging. Says Lesslie Newbigin: "The most significant fact about the time in which we are living is that it is a time in which a single movement of secularization is bringing the peoples of all continents into its sweep."⁴³ Harvey Cox reminds us that we must carefully distinguish secularization from secularism.

Secularization implies a historical process, almost certainly irreversible, in which society and culture are delivered from tutelage to religious control and closed metaphysical world-views. . . . Secularism,

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁴³*Honest Religion for Secular Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), p. 11.

on the other hand, is the name for an ideology, a new closed world-view which functions very much like a religion.⁴⁴

Secularization is a fact of history with which we must reckon. In itself it is neither good nor bad. Both Newbigin and Cox see it as an expression of biblical religion. "As a Christian," says Newbigin, "I see this process of secularization as an extension of the prophetic attack, in the name of the living God, upon all structures of thought, patterns of society, idols whether mental or metal, which claim sacred authority over men. It is a continuation of God's age-long education of man to stand upon his feet and answer his maker, to live the life of responsible personal freedom."⁴⁵

This process, however, does open up the possibility of a world in which it is easy to forget God and give up all traditional religious practices, and at the same time lose all sense of meaning and purpose in life. Secularization left to itself leads to secularism; it needs the strong prophetic voice of the gospel to make it minister to the fuller life of man and society.

Accordingly, there has arisen in the Church what is called "the secular gospel." The several forms of this gospel are heroic attempts to relate the message of Christ to the thought-forms and social demands of what Cox calls "technopolitan man." I do not think it unjust to point out that this new "gospel" represents a radical shift away

⁴⁴*The Secular City* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1966), pp. 20-21.

26 ⁴⁵*Op. cit.*, p. 76.

from historic Christian faith which posits as most meaningful the "I-Thou" relationship of personal faith. In its mildest form God is reduced to a co-partner with man in his task of remolding the world after the mind of Christ. The "I-Thou" relationship for technopolitan man has become an "I-you" relation, for technopolitan man is "man come of age" and therefore capable of creating by himself a Christian society.⁴⁶

In its form made popular by Bishop Robinson the secular gospel sees God as wholly immanent. Not only is there no God "up there"; there is no God "out there." God in Bonhoeffer's phrase is "the 'beyond' in the midst of our life"; the God who is found, in Kierkegaard's words, by "a deeper immersion in existence." "For 'God'," says Robinson, "denotes the ultimate depth of all our being, the creative ground and meaning of all our existence."⁴⁷

In its most radical form the secular gospel dispenses altogether with the God concept. For Van Buren a statement about God is merely the announcement of an intention to act in a certain way which arises from contemplating the events recorded in the Gospels. "The two commandments, love to God and love to neighbour, are two ways of saying one thing." Thus the very word God is a symbol with which we might well dispense.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Cox, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

⁴⁷J. A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), p. 47.

⁴⁸Paul Van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (London: SCM Press, 1963), p. 183.

While we admire and should emulate the seriousness with which these secular theologians tackle the problems of man's mundane existence, we must resist the implication that in order to reach secular man with the gospel of Christ and get into the struggle to remold society in a Christian pattern we must scuttle the notion of a transcendent God who is actually "there" as the living God of creation and history. To sacrifice faith in the living God who acts in history to redeem us is to *destroy* the gospel. To be sure, this God is not the general god of theism. He is rather the God who is revealed in the saving deeds to which the Bible testifies, the God whose face has been unveiled in Christ and whose love has been manifested in our Lord's dying on the Cross. He is the God who raised Christ from the dead and the One to whom in the last resort "every one of us shall give an account." He is the God of the future, "the God of hope" who shall bring human history to its divinely intended end when Christ appears in glory.⁴⁹ It is this personal, living, saving God who has made His name known to us with whom we have to do in the Christian gospel. And to this God I am responsible. In the final analysis I am not accountable to myself—not even to the depths of my being—but to this One who is other than myself, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Newbigin regards any attempt to play down the biblical emphasis upon God as the living God who confronts man and calls for his answer

as not only "thoroughly mistaken" but also as a paving of the way for the secular society to become the conformist society, and eventually the totalitarian society. For the secular society to be a truly free society, it must know and heed the voice of the living God.⁵⁰

The Plague of Meaninglessness. A good deal is being said today about man's coming of age. The traditional biblical language about man, it is said, reflects a period when man felt himself unequal to the forces of his environment and called upon God for "supernatural" help. Today, by contrast, it is suggested that man has outgrown this childish mentality. Now he knows how to control the powers of his environment, so he no longer needs to pray. God is becoming progressively unnecessary as man's knowledge of his environment increases.

But this is only half the truth. To get the whole truth you must read the fiction of our time, as well as the scientific and technical journals. You must study the philosophy of our day and consider the meaning of contemporary art and music. You must consult the psychiatrists as well. Alongside, and probably beneath, the sense of mastery over his environment, there is also a sense of something like meaninglessness and even terror as man faces his future. Someone has pointed out that the suicide rate varies from nation to nation in something like a direct ratio to what is called development. A mood of despair has settled down like a pall upon the

28 ⁴⁹See Moltmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-72.

⁵⁰*Op. cit.*, p. 76.

spirit of mankind. A suffocating fog of meaninglessness seems to be stifling many of the most serious and sensitive minds of our day. Modern man is a victim of nihilism. The universe is a god called Swirl. Personality is an illusion. No mind informs life. God is dead. Thus human existence has no more ultimate significance than insect life.

This, I submit to you, is "where the battle rages" in our time. Sartrean existentialism has brought modern man to complete despair. In one way we should thank God that this is true, for Christianity is not romantic optimism. The gospel is realistic, and many of these people are ready to listen to anybody who is authentic and has something to say which offers them a real hope. No existentialistic half-gospel will do. We must be prepared with Paul to face the consequences of being found false witnesses. "If you can produce the body of Christ, the discussion is ended. If Christ was not raised, our gospel is vain." This is the realism of the New Testament *kerygma*. Either God exists or He does not. Either Christ was raised or He remained in the tomb. Either Scripture gives us a reliable account of God's self-disclosure and mighty deeds in our behalf or it does not. Either we have a gospel of hope which is good news for modern man in his terror and despair or we do not. There is no middle ground.

The Mission of the Church. We have now come to the heart of the issue. The Church exists as God's own chosen witness to the truth of His saving presence and power. One of the Servant

passages in Isaiah puts the matter exactly: "'You are my witnesses,' saith the Lord, 'and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am He. . . . I, even I, am the Lord, and besides me there is no saviour. . . . *you are my witnesses,*' saith the Lord, 'that I am God'" (Isaiah 43:10-11, 12, free translation). The New Testament parallel is found in the prologue of Acts: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; *and you shall be my witnesses*" (1:8, RSV).

As in the days of the ancient prophets and the days of the apostles, God is on trial in history. The Church is His chosen witness to proclaim before the nations the reality and glory of His saving presence. This fact of election alone explains our presence here this evening. We are the chosen people of God. We have been called by His gospel and Spirit; we have been forgiven and put right with Him through His saving word; we have been cleansed by the infusion of His Spirit, who is creating in us the mind which was in Christ; and it is all to one end, that the world may know and believe and understand that He is God.

The Task of the Seminary. To put the matter in one sentence, the task of the Seminary is to help the Church understand and realize *its* task. Helmut Thielicke has warned, "We are in danger of becoming a church of parsons, which is to say, a church without laymen (even though here and there they may still fill the churches). *And we are also in danger of becoming a theology without a*

church, a church without a theology, because both are talking past each other."⁵¹ He goes on to insist that the task of the theologians is to provide equipment for preachers who are preaching to laymen. Theology is not meant to bewilder laymen; it is meant to speak to them, illuminate their beings with the light of God's Word, and give them motivation and direction in their mission to be Christ's witnesses in the kind of world in which they live and work and play.

Ours is a *theological* enterprise. But the theology of the Church must be the theology of the Word, and it must be so taught as to speak to the condition of men and women who live in our contemporary society. We must overcome the suspicion that theology is simply ivory-tower speculation. It is the bread and butter of the Church. Theology is life, and, rightly understood, the task of the Church is theological. Alive to God in faith and obedience, the Church testifies to the presence and power of the Eternal in the affairs of men. Cleansed and empowered by the Holy Spirit, she witnesses with urgency to the saving power of the living Christ. To witness, the Church must first understand, then experience. The fundamental task, therefore, is to clarify to the Church the nature and meaning of her being. "This must be done in the realm of theological thought," says Gerald H. Anderson, "not only to increase effectiveness in presenting the Gospel to the world, but also to give Chris-

⁵¹*The Trouble with the Church*, trans. by John W. Doberstein 32 (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 28.

tians a deeper understanding of what their task is in the world."⁵²

While acknowledging the centrality of theology in the task which is assigned to us, we cannot overlook the fundamental responsibility of communicating this saving Word in the most effective ways to our times. Understanding is the very essence of communication. Theology makes this possible as it arises out of the faith-life of the community of believers. But the skills relating to the proclamation of the theologically corrected and focused truth in the increasing variety of ministries in the Church must be developed and sharpened so that the optimum possibility of understanding will prevail. The minister, therefore, must be trained in the "practice" of the ministry as well as the "proclamation" of the ministry.

Nazarene Theological Seminary deeply senses the need to maintain the balance between the "graduate" and "professional," between the "theoretical" and the "practical." We must produce preachers of the Word, but they must know how to preach most effectively with the talents they possess and which can be employed by the Holy Spirit. We must have men who can indeed *evangelize* and as a blessed result produce growth in our churches. We must have men with ability to involve our laity—young, middle-aged, retired—dynamically in the almost overwhelming task of witnessing to an adequate gospel in these troublesome days, men trained

⁵²*The Theology of the Christian Mission* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1965), p. 4.

in the art of equipping the whole people of God for the building up of the body of Christ. We must have men with a sense of theology, history, destiny, propriety, passion, and a risk-taking creativity. And it takes a balanced, Bible-centered, world-concerned curriculum to produce the man in the pulpit that our church and our world so desperately need today.

To this end Nazarene Theological Seminary has committed herself to take a long and hard look at her present patterns of operation, instruction, and services to the church. Out of a widely representative Council for Institutional Research and Development, we hope to project, as accurately as our prophetic powers will permit, the form and service which our school should take in the next decade. As an integral part of this study and as a witness to excellence to our seminary community, we will seek to be accredited by the agency which offers such to institutions of our kind.

In conclusion, when the holiness revival was at its zenith during the nineteenth century, it had a genuine social concern, for it imbued men and women with Christlike compassion. This compassion was not limited to what we in the holiness churches call "soul burden," although this was its throbbing heart; it was compassion for real people everywhere and in all kinds of circumstances. It was compassion for men where they were — materially, physically, spiritually. The holiness greats of the past — Wesley,

34 Booth, Bresee, McClurkan — were men of conta-

gious compassion, and particularly for the poor, "who heard the gospel gladly." And when we are truly sanctified and made perfect in love by the infilling of the Spirit of Christ, we too become like persons. It is the nurture and intensification of this compassion which is perhaps our most pressing need. Let it be heard by all those who share in our educative responsibility that Nazarene Theological Seminary will seek to be a leader in inspiring and nurturing this Spirit-created, active love for the souls and bodies of men.