

Faith, Living and Learning Conference

Key Note Address: General Superintendent Jim Bond

Mount Vernon Nazarene College
June 16, 2001

Introduction

Good evening, friends and colleagues! It is a very warm, wonderful, and comfortable feeling to again be in the presence of Nazarene educators. I take great pride in our global higher educational system, our 57 institutions offering studies at various levels, and to young people and adults of all ages and in our united commitment to advance the cause of Christ and His Church in the world through Christ-centered education. I have ineffable pride in Dr. Jerry Lambert, our incomparable Commissioner of Education, the IBOE, the leaders and administrative teams who are giving visionary direction to our institutions and the bright, gifted, and dedicated people who comprise our faculties. It is a signal honor for me to be here and have the privilege to address you.

Most of you know that I have a very eclectic ministry background – pastor, missionary, teacher, chaplain, and college administrator. I am a churchman—a servant of God and His Church! At this time four years ago, I sat among you as a peer. I was fulfilled and challenged in my role at PLNU.

When I was at the college, I was guided by our mission statement. For any organization to succeed, it must first have a clear grasp of its mission and be fervently committed to that

operation. Ideally, everything done throughout the organization must justify its existence, expenditures, and activities in direct relation to its mission.

The Church of the Nazarene has a mission statement: “The mission of the Church of the Nazarene to respond to the Great Commission of Christ to ‘go and make disciples of all nations’.” Incidentally, I believe that this statement is too generic and does not have the specificity needed for a denomination. “To make Christlike disciples in all nations” seems to me to have greater clarity, particularity and potential for realization as a mission statement for Church of the Nazarene. Our mission is to call people to Jesus as the world’s only Saviour—that’s evangelism—and to Jesuslikeness as God’s highest objective in our lives—that’s Wesleyan discipleship. I believe that’s our mission!

The Board of General Superintendents believes it is singular in significance that we reaffirm our commitment to our historic calling and mission. With that in mind, we sought to carefully define the core values of our denomination. These were published and first distributed in booklet form at our Millennial Celebration in 1999. Our goal at minimum is to place a copy of these core values in the hands of every pastor in the church. Our ultimate goal is the assimilation and inculcation of these values in the life and thought of every Nazarene in the world.

I note that the theme for this conference is “Embracing the Call.” It is obvious that your calling personally and institutionally is multi-faceted. I focus on one facet, and I couch my remarks within the context of a rather blue-collar, practical title: “Some Thoughts of a Churchman on the Role of Nazarene Higher Education in the Fulfillment of the Denomination’s Calling and Mission.” And they are just thoughts—more suggestive than dogmatic, more provocative than final, expressed more out of concern to confront matters than pontificate resolutions. My

comments focus on issues of enormous magnitude that are critically important to the futures of both college and church and the accomplishment of our common mission.

While I was President at Point Loma I was not unaware of the vital support role of its educational enterprise in enabling the Church of the Nazarene to accomplish its mission. I was, in fact, as a churchman, somewhat driven by this knowledge. Let me tell you that now from my current perspective I am poignantly aware of the stark, naked truth—unless our educational institutions have a sense of appreciation for our history and heritage, a sense of ownership of our unique denominational mission, and are committed with some fire and fervor to stand hand-in-hand with all other church entities to intentionally help actualize that mission, then the denomination called the Church of the Nazarene will continue to exist but will fade into generic “community church” obscurity. I cannot exaggerate the importance of that statement and how strongly I feel about it!

Anyone who knows me well knows that I have disdain for sectarianism. I was a missionary in Brazil for less than two years. It was in many ways a dark chapter in my life—painful and soul-searching. My brief missionary career aborted too quickly but I came home liberated, knowing that my ultimate allegiance was not to a denomination but to Christ and His Kingdom. I had known this in theory but to know it in personal concrete reality was freeing. I continue to live in that commitment and freedom. But I also know that the Church is essential in bringing God’s Kingdom into reality, and I believe the Church of the Nazarene has been given a special significant function in the Church. Yes, denominations like the Church of the Nazarene are important to God in His work in our world. If we do not fulfill the unique and specific role to which we believe we are divinely called, then the Church and Kingdom languish and a vacuum is created where our mission is not carried out. Bottom line—an essential element of the message of God’s redemptive activity in Christ is what John Wesley termed “Christian Perfection.” We

Nazarenes believe with Wesley that “this doctrine is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists (and Nazarenes); and for the sake of propagating this chiefly he appears to have raised us up.”

Question—Do we yet believe this? Do we embrace it with conviction and commitment? Do we view it as our “reason for being” on the campuses of all our educational institutions—and all other entities of the church? If our educational system is the servant of the church in the accomplishment of its unique mission, it seems to me that these are fair questions to ask in this context. I am not being accusatory. I am baring my soul. I believe that we are in a struggle for the soul of our denomination and that struggle is being waged throughout the church at all levels and around the world. In my judgement—the two places in the church where this struggle ensues most poignantly are our educational campuses and our local churches. Interestingly, I perceive we may be more purposeful in our efforts to be true to our tradition within the academic community than we are at the local church. Let me say it again—I am not being accusatory. We are colleagues, not adversaries. I believe in you! I am appealing to you. We have a situation that requires thoughtful dialogue among our best and brightest people who love God and have great affection for His Church, particularly the Church of the Nazarene—people who will make the commitment to see us through these current dilemmas that we might ultimately impact people and cultures around the world where we are located with the liberating holiness message.

I am placing in your hands a copy of the *Core Values Booklet*. Allow me to place my words of challenge to you within the context of these core values.

We are a Christian People

This statement identifies us with the one, holy, universal, and apostolic church. “We stand with Christians everywhere in affirming the historic Trinitarian creeds and beliefs of the Christian faith.”

Kenneth Collins describes John Wesley’s theology as “conjunctive.” He means by this that our doctrine of salvation is not a reflection of any one theological tradition but a “well crafted and intentional synthesis of the diverse elements that appear in Scripture (which is ultimately normative for Wesley) and which are, therefore, and not surprisingly, reflected in several different traditions.” I believe his perceptions are accurate, and that is another important reason why our theology is such a good fit for this current generation. Many are calling for a return to the early church fathers, believing that postmoderns will resonate with this. Our Wesleyan “conjunctive” theology is perfectly suited, then, for these times. These are our days!

David McKenna recently published a book entitled, *What A Time To Be Wesleyan*. This includes us Nazarenes. Not only are we a “good fit” theologically for the times but our Wesleyan “catholicity” positions us well for impact. Sectarianism, disconnectedness, exclusivism are out; embracing the call today means tearing down walls, cooperation, inclusion. This was beautifully demonstrated in John Wesley’s oft-quoted statement: “If thine heart is as my heart, if thou lovest God and all mankind, I ask no more: give me thine hand.”

Without compromising denominational distinctives, I believe we need to be involved meaningfully in the broader Church. I am pleased to see U.S. Nazarenes participating in the National Association of Evangelicals and the Christian Holiness Partnership. I commend you scholars for your involvement in the Wesleyan Theological Society. This past quadrennium we became official members of the World Methodist Council (a global organization of Wesleyans). I urge those of you from other countries to join hands with Christians of other traditions that

together, we may present a more united face to the world. I think this is in part what we mean when we say, “We are a Christian people.”

As Wesleyans, we are “centrists,” avoiding the extremes of Fundamentalism on the one hand and Liberalism on the other. Consequently, we get “shot at” from both sides, particularly from the Fundamentalists. I think that the threat of liberalism is more subtle though very real and potentially destructive. We must not minimize its dangers but the fundamentalist attack is frontal, overt. From their literalistic biblicism they have made their view of creation the litmus test for evangelical orthodoxy for everyone.

Our centrist posture is clearly reflected in the 1993 action of the General Assembly in the adoption of Manual paragraph 904.9: “The Church of the Nazarene believes in the biblical account of creation (In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...’ Genesis 1:1) We oppose a godless interpretation of the evolutionary hypothesis. However, the church accepts as valid all scientifically verifiable discoveries in geology and other natural phenomena, for we firmly believe that God is the Creator.”

The fact is we do not draw a line in the sand and demand adherence to any one view. One can believe that God created all things in a seven-day period of 24 hour days or that God employed some form of “gradual creation” or “continuing creation” that encompassed millions of years—you can believe either view and be a good Nazarene.

We affirm that God is the Creator; we do not affirm “how” God created. As a General Superintendent, I am guided by the Manual and pledged to uphold it. Therefore, I reject the Fundamentalist’s dogmatism regarding its view of creation but within the boundaries of our Manual, I also defend a Nazarene’s right to view creation as having occurred within a seven day

period of 24 hour days in the same way that I defend those who believe that “scientifically, verifiable discoveries in geology and other natural phenomena” compel them to believe in “gradual creation.” The fact is we refuse to allow an issue like this to divide us into warring factions within the church. We tolerate differences in non-essential matters but remain respectful and in fellowship with those with whom we disagree, including Fundamentalist (as much as we are able).

While I urge that we embrace the Fundamentalists as brothers and sisters in Christ, I also believe they represent a very serious threat to us. I suspicion that far more than we know, Fundamentalism has insidiously crept into the mainstream of our denomination. I fear that many of our people, even including our pastors, are more fundamentalists than they realize.

Regrettably, many outside our tradition continue to align us with Fundamentalists, even such scholars as Mark Noll (at least it is implied in *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*). This is not a new battle; we have been fighting it throughout our history. It was even embraced by some of our early leaders and theologians.

Under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, Dr. H Orton Wiley skillfully led the Church through the theological jungle of Liberalism and Fundamentalism to a very distinct hermeneutic principle. It is time to reaffirm our commitment to this hermeneutic—to be who we are. Such refocus is the responsibility of all of us but I believe the scholars of the church have unique responsibility and great potential in helping initiate resolution to this rather precarious predicament.

How? Permit me to make one suggestion—you need to publish more, focusing on some of these key issues. Address it to the church. Write simply in lay language. Write as those who love the

church, believe in the church, and are eager to serve the church. Coordinate your efforts so that you address issues with your best collective thought. I am appealing to you. We need your help.

I know that some of you are already doing this. The wonderful book, *Reflecting God*, and the accompanying study and leaders guide, all published by NPH and written in collaboration with scholars from sister holiness groups illustrates what I have in mind. It is a good model! I am aware that many of you are involved in the Centennial Project, a massive publishing undertaking by NPH, to produce new textbooks written by our own scholars. Incidentally, the success of the project is dependent, not only in your writing and NPH publishing, but the bottom line is that you must utilize the books in the classroom for the project to be cost-effective.

I am also eager for you to publish outside our own circles to help the broader church world understand who we are. I took offense when Mark Noll included us with the fundamentalists whom he labeled as “anti-intellectual” and made us responsible in part for the lack of an evangelical mind. In the same way I was frustrated when *Christianity Today* senior writer, Tim Stafford, wrote recently “no Christian tradition can be more out of synchrony with academia than Nazarene holiness.” (Thanks, Thomas Oord, for your letter to *Christianity Today* and we must give Stafford credit for a reasonable response). My point is this—if we are known as anti-intellectual or as those whose theology is out of synchrony with academia, whose fault is it? We have an educational task, not only within the denomination but also without. And I think that responsibility lies here in part within this group. I challenge administrators to grant more release time to our scholars for publication. I challenge you scholars to write and publish more directly to the Church. Let’s establish with focus and intentionality “who” we are as a vital member of the Body of Christ.

We are a Holiness People

There are those of us who believe that we are adrift in a sea of theological illiteracy, subject to merciless tides, currents, and even occasional rogue waves. We are being pulled back and forth between “generic evangelicalism,” a “pseudo-Nazarene fundamentalism” and a “liberalism justified with Wesleyan-like accouterments.” Religious pluralism abounds everywhere. It supposedly is a trademark of postmodernism. And it is making inroads into the Church, including the Church of the Nazarene.

The local church is where the rubber meets the road. Every week we have people coming into our church from other denominations and even other faiths. They bring with them their set of beliefs. We do not want to offend them for fear they might leave. Thus we often are reluctant to proclaim our own theology and be true to our own tradition even in our own churches. Such compromise has effect upon our own Nazarene people because not hearing the doctrines preached and taught, they lose importance for our laypeople. They are left in a theological fog as to what 21st century Nazarenes believe. Within our church we are creating theological chameleons who can change theology as needed. Case in point—2nd and 3rd generation Nazarenes relocate to another city and then make their decision about the church with which to associate based not on theology but which church best meets their felt need. Granted, the picture may be a bit over drawn; regardless, I believe I have described a subtle temptation from which Nazarenes are not immune and to some extent, we have already fallen victim.

Now I believe this issue represents the most acute, perplexing, and potentially destructive condition that we are facing. It is at this point more than any other that I say we are in a battle for the soul of the church. It is my view that theologically literate pastors and lay people are not a luxury or ideal but absolutely essential in preserving the Gospel message and the fidelity of the Church and its mission.

Apart from the fact that this scenario plays into the mood of these postmodern times, I have been asking myself, “What has happened to cause this theological malaise?” It is obvious that our pastors are on the front lines of this battle. I noted this entry in Wesley’s Journal: “I preached at Twerton and on Thursday went to Launceston. Here I found the plain reason why the work of God had gained no ground in this circuit all year. The preachers had given up the Methodist testimony. Either they did not speak of perfection at all or they spoke of it only in general terms without urging believers to ‘go on unto perfection,’ and to expect it every moment. And wherever this is not earnestly done, the work of God does not prosper.” I think that’s a large part of our current problem—many of our pastors are not proclaiming the holiness message with clarity and conviction. This is a generalization based on anecdotal and personal perceptions! There are many marvelous exceptions.

But let me advance this one step further—if my perceptions regarding our pastor’s preaching and teaching are true, why are they not more faithful in their proclamation of our doctrines? Can it be that our teachers in our educational system must also share some of the responsibility for our current state? Let me explain what I mean.

I have a concern that there is not much emphasis on the “secondness” of sanctification. Why? Let me put it in this context. As you know, there has been serious discussion among our scholars in recent years regarding the distinctives of classical Wesleyan theology versus the Wesleyan Holiness Tradition that has derived from early American Methodism. The discussion is not bad for us. There must always be a place for open and honest debate among our scholars. I will defend that. Our Articles of Faith make provision for both classical Wesleyan theology and the Wesleyan holiness tradition. Also in 1984 the Board of General Superintendents ruled that since

terms used to define Entire Sanctification in Article X represent both traditions either view may be taught among us.

But here is my concern—what is the impact of this discussion upon the preachers who come from our colleges, universities, and seminaries and enter our pulpits? More particularly, what, if any, impact has this had on the understanding and proclamation of entire sanctification as “that act of God, subsequent to regeneration, by which believers are made free from original sin, or depravity, and brought into a state of entire devotement to God, and the holy obedience of love made perfect. It is wrought by the baptism with the Holy Spirit, and comprehends in one experience the cleansing of the heart from sin and the abiding, indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, empowering the believer for life and service. Entire sanctification is provided by the blood of Jesus, is wrought instantaneously by faith, preceded by entire consecration; and to this work and state of grace the Holy Spirit bears witness.” (*Manual: Church of the Nazarene: Articles of Faith X, Entire Sanctification*)

Please allow me to personalize this matter for a moment. Recently, Dr. Harold Raser gave me a copy of his book, *Phoebe Palmer: Her Life and Thought*. Of course I have known Phoebe Palmer and her contribution to American Methodism. However, the reading of the book brought into fresh focus Palmer’s influence in shaping the Wesleyan Holiness Tradition and its ultimate impact on my life, thought, and ministry. This was essentially the training I received during my college and seminary years. To quote and paraphrase Dr. Raser: “Palmer developed a stylized ‘foolproof’ way of holiness to guide the seeker after ‘full salvation’.” She pressed for entire sanctification to occur now, meaning that process, or growth in holiness, took a backseat to immediacy at Nazarene Theological Seminary. Palmer’s approach was rational. Raser summarizes three motifs that governed Palmer’s system: There was a strong emphasis on:

1. The way of holiness (there is a definite path to be followed);
2. The shorter way (it is not so long and wandering a path as some may hold);
3. The simplified way (it is a path easily understood and simple in the directness with which it reaches the goal.)

Now that's basically the way that I, and I suspect, all others who attended our colleges and seminaries prior to 1968 were trained regarding seeking and experiencing entire sanctification. That's the way I preached it. I give the 1968 date because that's when William Greathouse became president of NTS. Though Wesley's theology was obviously taught in several courses prior to this date, there were no specific courses on Wesley and his theology.

So, what's the problem? Wesley believed that Christian perfection was both instantaneous and gradual, though He intentionally sought to maintain a healthy balance between the two. I suspect that over time, followers of Wesley fell victim to the subtle temptation to operate at either the pole of instantaneousness (Palmer) or the pole of process. The pendulum has swung widely from pole to pole—and it continues to do so today! I surmise that the pendulum is currently swinging more toward process than crisis. Balance must always be our goal.

I know that this is an oversimplification of the issue. I also know that it can be argued that there is no conflict between Wesley and Palmer regarding instantaneousness. The differences are slight. But my question persists—what effect has this debate had on our preachers? Has it left them with questions that ultimately have minimized the importance of “secondness”? And if so, has it marginalized the holiness message? Has it left our students in a quandary as to what to believe? If so, amid personal uncertainty, it is a “stretch” to believe that they will preach and

teach the “instantaneousness” of holiness. I do not question that they believe in holiness and will proclaim the process whereby we are being changed into the image of God in Christ. But if they are proclaiming process alone, what do we more than others??

Have you noted in recent times that people from reformed traditions—both denominations and para-church organizations—are calling people with intentionality to holiness, Christlikeness, Spirit-filled lives? Obviously they come from a different viewpoint but they are calling people to radical commitment and discipleship and to live like Jesus. Thank God!

Question—if we desert the instantaneousness of holiness and emphasize only process, how do we differ from the others who are calling for holy living? Failure at this point takes us away from the historic path we have traveled for a hundred years.

Let me reiterate—I am being exploratory, not accusatory. I have many questions but I am in quest of answers. I am a leader of this denomination, not by my choice but by God’s will expressed through the vote of His people. I will lead! I am a process-oriented leader. I am smart enough to know that if we win the battle for the soul of this denomination of my great affection we must gather our best, brightest, and most spiritually-minded people who love the church and ask the hard questions. Who are we? Where are we? Where do we want to go? What do we have to do to get there?

Next spring a collection of 250 of our international scholars and practitioners will gather in Guatemala City for a theology conference. The timing is propitious! The opportunity for addressing critical needs is in our hands. We dare not miss the moment. It is my perception that this is not a time for discussion of esoteric doctrines or splitting hairs over exotic theological issues. If we want to serve the Church effectively today, it is a time for earnest prayer, serious

soul searching, and a united commitment to strategize how we can win the battle for the soul of the Church of the Nazarene.

We are a Missional People

You will note that our mission includes Worship, Compassion and Evangelism, Discipleship and Christian Higher Education. Yes, we believe that Christian higher education is a central part of the mission of our church. Please note also the clear statement: “The mission of the church in the world begins in worship. It is as we are gathered together before God in worship...that we know most clearly what it means to be the people of God. Our belief is that the work of God in the world is accomplished primarily through worshiping congregations.” That opening sentence is powerful: “The mission of the church in the world begins in worship.” There are some key words here: mission, church, world, worship. These words adhere and give meaning to us as the people of God. They also provide me opportunity for one last appeal.

I know that the mention of the word “worship” triggers for many of you, particularly North Americans, unhappy thoughts, deep emotions, disillusionment, anger, frustration, etc. Where are we going in worship forms and music? I don’t know! I just know one thing—we must be guided by patience, love, respect for differing opinions, and prayer for the Lord of the Church to give guidance. I am inclined to be philosophical and anecdotal but will refrain.

Well, I recant that statement. I have one last story that has helped me in my own attitude toward the worship differences. Mildred Bangs Wynkoop is a name recognized in these circles—a distinguished theologian who walked among us and helped guide us during the last half of the last century. During the rebellious era of the 1960’s and early ‘70’s here in this country, she

wrote a book—John Wesley: Christian Revolutionary. I ran across an interesting passage that has relevance for us.

There have been a number of crucial moments of insight in my life. Almost all of them have come as a climax to a period of painful, even torturing questioning. Perhaps I felt as a snake must feel as he gets too big for his skin and must discard his familiar and comfortable protection to expose his tender under-skin to the rough earth as he struggles out of the old.

One of those times came when the church seemed to be failing me. The pastor's sermons were boring, the music was mediocre (even awful), the people weren't blessed as they once had been, the prayer meetings were dull, the attendance at all the services was dropping. The church had in the past been a haven of peace to my often-troubled spirit, a place of excitement and joy when I was depressed, food when I was hungry, and encouragement when I was sad. The people restored my self-confidence after a week of being buffeted by my associates, and the church wiped away my petulant tears when the world had been unjust. Now the church was making demands upon me. It was withdrawing its sympathy. The people were ignoring my long face and shutting their ears from my tale of woe. They ceased praying for me with enthusiasm when I made my frequent, dramatic trips to the mourner's bench. They gathered instead around newer converts. Some even had the impudence to ask me to pray with others instead of myself.

"I don't like this church," I said, "it is backsliding. I can't keep a good experience here. The people do not create a red-hot atmosphere of shouting blessing anymore. I'm going somewhere else." In my tears and sorrow and disillusionment there came a voice from somewhere, I knew not where, which said to me so clearly, so shockingly, "You are no

longer a child. You are too big to be picked up and carried anymore. The time has come for you to pick up and give aid and love to the many new spiritual babes who need your care.” This was a crisis in spiritual maturation. That was lesson number one. Some years later came lesson number two—or was it 200 or 2,000? I’ve needed so many lessons!

My proud aunt, not a Christian as I identified a Christian, visited us in our small, poor bedraggled church and parsonage. I was ashamed of it. I said to her, “I am anxious to get into a bigger, better place, where my talents and intellectual achievements can be nurtured in a more congenial atmosphere.” She answered, “But wouldn’t it be better to bring this excellence to this small place? They need it.” I am not often speechless but I had nothing to say that day and nothing but long, long thoughts for days to come.

My friends, I appeal to you—stay with us! We need you! Help us work through our dilemmas! Help us refocus on our unique mission. Embracing the call means embracing the Church—blemishes, defects, and imperfections all! And vowing by God’s grace to remain in the church, always seeking to be positive, constructive and redemptive! Thanks for permitting a churchman to share some thoughts on the role of Nazarene Higher Education in the fulfillment of the denomination’s calling and mission.