

# A PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION FOR THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE IN THE AFRICA REGION

Joseph Kiso, D. Min. Coordinator, Africa Nazarene University  
Daryll Stanton, Chair of the Religion Department, Africa Nazarene University

## *Introduction*

It is hard to over-emphasize the importance of education to Africans. The three great challenges of the Africa Region are ignorance, poverty and disease. Education can play a vital role in overcoming all three of these threats. What are the features of an education that will help Africa? Quality is essential and cannot be overlooked in our haste to educate as many as possible as quickly as possible. However, Africa needs a population that is as highly educated as possible, meaning that the drive to educate the masses by all means cannot be ignored.

This paper is a brief philosophy of education to guide the Africa Region of the Church of the Nazarene. It approaches education from the Nazarenes' historic emphasis on holiness education, believing that it will have a major impact on the progress of the church in Africa in the twenty-first century. This paper draws upon the following main sources: *Africa Speaks: An Anthology Of The Africa Nazarene Theology Conference 2003*, the Association of Nazarene Education Systems In Africa's (ANESA) Comprehensive Strategic Plan, *Looking To The Future: 2011-2015*, the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene, and the experience of the writers, both of whom are involved in Nazarene education systems in Africa and impacted by their teaching philosophies.<sup>1</sup> This paper explores the role of higher education and the purpose of knowledge, the relationship between teachers and students in the learning environment, the content of curricula, and how the Nazarene perspective contributes to our educational philosophy. The conclusions drawn in all these areas indicate what kind of impact we hope Nazarene education will have on the communities of Africa.

### *What is the role of higher education in the Church of the Nazarene?*

Higher education has always held an important position in the Church of the Nazarene. This is reflected in the number of universities, colleges and extension schools that the denomination has established around the world. ANESA's Strategic Plan calls for "holiness educational systems in place that facilitate the training and qualification of Nazarene leaders in all fields of service."<sup>2</sup> The education offered focuses on Clergy Development, Leadership Development and Professional/Vocational Development, thus going beyond mere preparation for ordination to encompass training in a wide range of academic subjects. This demonstrates the denomination's emphasis on Christian holiness, which insists that Christian faith must be expressed in the everyday lives of believers.

Nazarene higher education is known for its focus on Christian character formation. The *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene states that "education in the Church of the Nazarene, rooted in the biblical and theological commitments of the Wesleyan and Holiness Movements and accountable to the stated mission of the denomination, aims to guide those who look to it in

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<sup>1</sup> Africa Nazarene University's *Teaching Philosophy* was articulated in September 2010.

<sup>2</sup> ANESA *Comprehensive Strategic Plan: Looking To the Future: 2011-2015*.

accepting, in nurturing, and in expressing, in service to the church and world, consistent and coherent Christian understanding of the social and individual life."<sup>3</sup>

Ultimately, the role of the higher education in Africa is to make Christ-like disciples in the nations. As Phillip Jenkins' book, *The Next Christendom* argues, the global shift of the "center of gravity" of Christianity to the global south will be changed by immersion into the prevailing cultures of those host societies. He argues that while we know what the numbers will look like, we don't know yet what kind of Christianity it will be. He cites all the cultish, syncretistic, "prosperity gospel", "signs and wonders" varieties of Christianity that we find in Africa and elsewhere as evidence of this.<sup>4</sup> With these trends in mind, it should be emphasized that one of the purposes of Christian higher education in Africa must be to ensure that the Christianity of Africa is still faithful to the Christ who birthed it. We must produce pastors and laypeople who understand and are committed to orthodox Christianity. The "Africanization" of Christianity must result in appropriate contextualization and not a heretical perversion of biblical faith.

*Why do we learn? (the purpose and nature of knowledge)*

The purpose of knowledge is to give learners the opportunity to fulfill their God-given potential in the career of their choosing, and teachers the opportunity to practice their God-given ministry of teaching, thus, building up the church in wisdom and in faith. This must involve equipping the learner with necessary skills, which enable him or her to serve God and the community, pursue truth, and experience transformation of the mind. The mentorship of one's teachers enables the learner to become a mentor and teacher to others, reflecting Paul's teaching in 2 Tim. 2:2, so that the benefits of education spread beyond the individual to empower the community.

In light of the above, the purpose of knowledge goes beyond simply preparing the learners for a career. From a Christian perspective, the central purpose of knowledge is to enable the learner, who is created in the image of God, to know Him better. Pursuing knowledge is an expression of what it means to be created in God's image. God is all-knowing, so pursuing knowledge is participating in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). After the fall of humanity into sin, growing in knowledge is part of our being "transformed by the renewing of our minds" (that is, our sanctification). Furthermore, growing in knowledge is an expression of worship of God.

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<sup>3</sup> *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene 2009-2013*, 176.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6-8.

*What is the role of learners?*

Gregory's "Law of the Learner" portrays a learner as "one who attends with interest to the lesson."<sup>5</sup> ANESA calls for education to prioritize the needs of learners, and for the financial responsibility of students, especially from those who are able to afford it.<sup>6</sup> The learning experience requires students to absorb and understand the subject matter presented by the teacher. This requires the student to critically assess the validity and basis of their own presuppositions in light of the teaching they receive. Through engaging with the life experiences and knowledge of other students as well as contributing to class discussions, whether in traditional or e-classrooms, students are required to test their own beliefs and to build a firm foundation of knowledge to support their worldview. This, in turn, enables students to apply what they learn to their own community contexts in practical and relevant ways.

*What is the role of teachers?*

The role of the teacher is to provide foundations and basic structures of knowledge within which students can engage creatively and constructively with the subject matter. Such requires the teacher to have mastered the subject content and to be able to transmit knowledge and experience in ways which stimulate learners' interests and encourage the learners' own minds to action. This includes striving, in collaboration with the educational institution, to ensure that students have access to the best resources possible: high-quality books and online resources. The institution is also responsible for ensuring not only that those it hires are qualified to teach the academic level they are assigned, but also that they are the best-qualified people possible to teach their students.<sup>7</sup> The teacher should be able to listen to students' own experiences and see how they contribute to the learning environment. Teachers must maintain a conducive learning environment through effective management of noise, disorder or confusion. The role of the teacher is also one of mentoring and of being a good example in lifestyle, attitude and beliefs. This is essential for positive character formation in students and reflects the teaching style practiced by Jesus with his disciples. Those hired to teach in Nazarene institutions must not only be committed to Christ, but also respectful and sympathetic to the Nazarene ethos and doctrine.

*What should we be learning? (the shape of the curriculum)*

The course of study should be appropriate to the level of learning. Courses of varying academic levels should be offered to allow students who do not have a high level of formal education to begin at a level appropriate to their abilities, and to advance to higher levels thereafter. All courses should make provision for community service. Courses should address

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<sup>5</sup> John Milton Gregory, *The Seven Laws of Teaching*, Revised edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984).

<sup>6</sup> ANESA, *Looking to the Future: 2011-2015*, 15 & 27. Currently multitudes of African Nazarenes find it difficult to personally finance their higher education.

<sup>7</sup> ANESA, *Looking to the Future: 2011-2015*, 9 & 21.

current market/industry/professional trends in the related field of study. All classes should contribute to character formation and integrate faith with learning. This means that courses for vocations other than Christian ministry should explore the specific ethical issues that pertain to that subject field from a Christian perspective.<sup>8</sup> This would also normally require foundational Bible and Christian beliefs classes. Courses for Christian ministry should require engagement with current issues in the community in a way that provides relevant academic information. They should also teach students both to apply that information practically and to think through creatively transferable models for engagement with contemporary issues which students can apply to any situation in which they find themselves. All three of the above points include the need to make students aware of social and political issues in their particular context so that they can engage with them in an informed way. Examples include issues of computer literacy, ethical use of technology, negative ethnicity, gender equality, polygamy, HIV & AIDS awareness,<sup>9</sup> good governance, corruption, conflict resolution, and the current ecological crisis.<sup>10</sup> These issues are presently common concerns in the Africa Region and call for educators to contextualize the curriculum for Africa.

*What happens in a teaching/ learning encounter? (the nature of teaching and learning)*

Communication is essential to the learning experience. The teacher needs to transfer knowledge and skills, aiding the character formation of learners in a way that enables them to develop their own ideas about right behavior and practice within their particular vocations. Learners are required to absorb the thoughts presented to them and encouraged to challenge the basis of their own assumptions to ensure that they are reasonable and well-informed. During the mentoring experience, relevant foundational information is conveyed to the student by the teacher, in order to enable the student to participate in a creative process of critically engaging with the topic in the communal learning environment. This mentoring process is compassionate and caring, modeling servant leadership, integrity, and discipline. Such mentoring teaches students to engage in a lifelong learning process. Assessment of academic performance is essential, as it helps learners to discover their own gifts, talents and graces, while developing them more fully. This process is vital for community development. It also helps students to overcome their own limitations and deficiencies in thought and practice, in order to make them well-rounded members of their communities. Self-assessment is also part of this process.

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<sup>8</sup> E.g., Study of the application of Christian values in various career fields (i.e., Law, Marketing, Business, etc.)

<sup>9</sup> This is all necessary because currently 69% of the people infected with HIV & AIDS in the world come from sub-Saharan Africa (UNAIDS, World AIDS Day 2012).

<sup>10</sup> While Africa experiences many conflicts due to ideological differences, the leading cause of violence is inequitable distribution of resources, which is exacerbated by ecological issues, and causes further damage to the environment, leaving people with even fewer resources. In light of this, awareness of ecological issues is vital.

*What is the place and purpose of educational institutions/ entities  
within the Church of the Nazarene?*

The purpose of Nazarene educational institutions is to prepare believers for ministry in all walks of life, whether they are training for ordination or not. Nazarene institutions also offer courses designed to meet the needs of those seeking ordination, in whatever context they find themselves - rural, urban, etc. In order to provide the high-quality education that Africa needs, universities and colleges should make every effort to ensure that the standard of education offered in their extension schools and in their main campuses is as high as possible. These call for cross-regional partnerships, like the Global Consortium of Nazarene Seminaries and Graduate Schools, to enable the underdeveloped regions of the denomination to acquire the resources they need to provide good quality academic education.<sup>11</sup> Due care however needs to be taken to ensure that the denomination is not promoting a dependency syndrome. We should be of the view that we are all equal and working together to accomplish a common mission. These institutions are resource centers where pastors can access resources for sermon preparation, ministry needs, and life-long learning after graduation. They could host forums, symposia, and think-tanks which discuss current issues affecting the Church and the society, thus ensuring that education is a progressive experience rather than one which results in academic stagnation.<sup>12</sup> Institutions should also help their local communities by hosting community events and community health clinics, where possible. Providing such services also gives community residents the opportunity to encounter different vocations as well as the people practicing them, and to inspire them to seek a career which appeals to them.

*Does the Wesleyan or Nazarene perspective contribute anything  
to these categories mentioned and, if so, how or why?*

Historically, the three main distinctives of international ministry of the Church of the Nazarene center around evangelism, compassionate ministry and education. These are grounded in the priorities of both the founders of the denomination and the broader Wesleyan tradition (e.g., the work of the Salvation Army, abolition of the slave trade, and the prison ministry of John Wesley). The blueprint for education outlined above also includes aspects of compassionate ministry and evangelism. Educational institutions also seek to reach non-Christians through the learning process and to present them with a holistic education, which witnesses to the gospel of Christ. Nazarene institutions should embrace students from all backgrounds, regardless of their

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<sup>11</sup> I.e. These partnerships should be aimed at resourcing the educational institutions of the denomination to enable them to provide education, especially to those who would otherwise be excluded from it due to lack of opportunity or finances (e.g., by providing teachers, bursaries, scholarships, facilities).

<sup>12</sup> African academic work sometimes struggles with repetition of the same information and ideas, without moving forward to new paradigms and practices as a result of engaging with that information.

religion, gender, tribe or ethnic origin, health status or any other form of diversity. Wesleyan concern for empowering the poor (which also stands within the broader evangelical tradition) should lead to efforts to ensure that education is available to the poorest in society, and that the education offered focuses on transforming culture to create a more just society. Courses should not only explore how Christian faith affects a particular profession, but also how practicing that profession can help to bring about societal transformation - i.e., practical and communal holiness. The Wesleyan doctrine of prevenient grace is a wonderful way to theologically justify the idea that open-minded persons of any faith background should be able to identify and embrace “truth” when they see it or hear it. As Al Truesdale and Keri Mitchel have explained, the Wesleyan way of salvation helps us to understand of how God in Christ, through the Spirit, works to redeem. Through various stories they illustrate how extensive and persistent the creative love of God is.<sup>13</sup> This teaching provides a basis for an appreciation of all that is good in other cultures and other religions.

### *Conclusion*

This paper has outlined a brief philosophy of education which seeks to explain the value of Christ-centered learning to African society. It seeks to sensitize those engaged in education delivery systems to an awareness of the need for education which is both academically rigorous and practically relevant. Such education will enable African believers to engage with their own communities' issues from the perspectives of both their Christian faith and their chosen academic discipline, and will give non-Christians a holistic and Christ-centered experience of education. It is hoped that this paper will go a long way in enriching our education systems in the Church throughout Africa to the glory of God.

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<sup>13</sup> For a more detailed explanation of how God’s grace reaches beyond the boundaries of established religion, see Al Truesdale & Keri Mitchell, *With Cords of Love: A Wesleyan Response to Religions Pluralism* (Kansas city: Beacon Hill Press, 2006), 119-142.