

“ALL THINGS NEW”
Inaugural Address – President David Busic
Nazarene Theological Seminary – October 28, 2011
Isaiah 11:1-10; Revelation 21:1-7

1928 was a leap year that started on a Sunday. It was the last year that the Julian calendar was used, and by the end of the year every country in the world had officially adopted the Gregorian system.

That same year Herbert Hoover was elected the thirty-first President of the United States, Amelia Earhart became the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean, and Ty Cobb played in his final major league baseball game. Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington were at the top of the music charts, Amos and Andy debuted on the radio, and Mickey Mouse made his first appearance. It was the last year for silent movies and the first year of the Academy Awards.

I guess you could say, for the most part, 1928 was a fairly unremarkable year. But for the people called Nazarenes something quite remarkable was being birthed.

On March 14, 1928, J.B. Chapman, the forty-four year old editor of the *Herald of Holiness* and the *Preacher's Magazine*, released an obscure editorial entitled “More Preachers and Better Preachers Are Needed.”

The denomination was still quite young, just over twenty years old. But it was growing rapidly and the need for well-trained, equipped, and prepared ministerial leadership had never been greater. Several Nazarene undergraduate and Bible-training schools were flourishing, but there was no graduate level training specifically for pastors and theologians in the making.

Chapman was appreciative of the foundation that had been laid and the work that had already been done. He believed any success the church had had in “the spreading and conserving of scriptural holiness” was due to the “*NUMBER and QUALITY* of our preachers.” And yet he had his concerns.

He wrote:

“Whatever may be our comparative position in these matters, we do not hesitate to say that we need more preachers and better preachers. Saying that we need better preachers reminds us that in order to have better preachers we must have a certain percentage who have had college training and seminary advantages.”

“We must give our young preachers the advantage of the very best there is in seminary training, and yet we must place the Nazarene stamp indelibly upon them while the process is going on. Now I do not mean simply a Bible school or a Christian worker’s training school; I mean a *real* theological seminary.”

“Let’s go to work soon to establish a full-fledged Nazarene Theological Seminary . . . **This thing ought to be done and therefore it can be done.**”

(Excerpt from March 14, 1928 editorial in *Herald of Holiness*)

It was only a small pebble thrown into the water, but its ripple effect would prove to be very significant. The idea of a central graduate seminary as vital to the ongoing growth of the church was now on the table.

It would be another sixteen years before Chapman’s vision became a reality. After rigorous debate, the 1944 General Assembly in Minneapolis voted to establish Nazarene Theological Seminary.

Once again, J.B. Chapman, now a General Superintendent in the Church of the Nazarene, offered prophetic words. Having worked so diligently for this moment, he spoke at the first NTS convocation chapel in 1945:

“It is the obligation of any church to provide for the expert training of its ministers, and the Seminary is the Nazarene answer to this obligation for us . . . We have founded this Seminary in the hope that it will help us secure the type and caliber of preachers called for. We do not expect to find these (preachers) . . . ready-made. We know we shall have to make them, under God.”

(J.B. Chapman, “What We Expect of Our Seminary,” NTS convocation address, September 28, 1945)

Those words were spoken sixty-six years ago last month. Few could have imagined then what God would do through Nazarene Theological Seminary. More than 4,500 graduates of NTS have gone on to be some of our finest pastors, missionaries, and scholars. The church has been given a gift through names like Benner, Earle, Taylor (several times over), Orjala, Grider, Wynkoop, Bassett, Truesdale, Deasley, Staples, Weigelt, Raser, Hahn, and many more.

For these, and countless other reasons, I am incredibly humbled and honored to stand here tonight in the chapel of my alma mater to begin my service as the ninth president of Nazarene Theological Seminary. Even though we knew it would be an overflow crowd and much easier to host in a larger facility, I chose to have it here on this campus, for this is holy ground to me.

Dr. Bassett, if I had known then what I know now, I would have worked to be a better student in your Reformation Theology class!

I consider it a personal privilege to have three former NTS presidents here tonight. Dr. Eugene Stowe, Dr. Gordon Wetmore (my seminary president), and my predecessor, Dr. Ron Benefiel.

Ron is not only a dear friend, he is a Christ-like visionary leader with more creative ideas than he has had either enough time or help. He has reminded us by his consistent example that no one can be a leader in the church of Jesus Christ without a compassionate heart and a deep-seated passion to see justice done for the oppressed and powerless.

I wish my friend, Dr. William Greathouse, could be with us this evening. He was not only one of the great past presidents of Nazarene Theological Seminary, he remains a giant among Nazarene scholars in our denomination's history. He went to his eternal reward this past March, but I sense that the expansive Greathouse-spirit still lingers in these halls.

My heart is full of gratitude tonight. I am profoundly grateful for God's faithful and loving providence in my life; for family and friends that have supported and encouraged me to be the best servant-leader I can be; for the Board of Trustees whose confidence in me went the second-mile by electing me TWICE; and to the devoted and talented administration, faculty, and staff for so graciously welcoming me into the NTS family. Thank you. I love you all.

And I stand before you tonight fully committed to the mission of Nazarene Theological Seminary *"to prepare women and men to be faithful and effective ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to offer itself as a theological resource to the Church (to the Nazarenes specifically, and whenever possible to the wider Christian church generally).* That is the stated mission of NTS.

That was the vision of Chapman and those early Nazarene pioneers. That has been the vision of former presidents, past and present faculty, trustees, and friends of the seminary to this very day. But it is no secret that recent years have not been easy ones for the Seminary we love. Most contributing factors have been out of the hands of leadership, many of which are cultural.

The world is certainly different, if not more complicated, than it was in 1945. Peter Kuzmic is quoted as saying that the most defining word of our time is the word "post." We live in a post-Christendom, post-Enlightenment, post-western, post-denominational, post-literate, post-Cold War, and post-modern world. I guess you could say we minister in a "post-everything" generation.

We use the word "post" partly because we know something has ended. But we also use the word because we are not really sure of what lies ahead either. We live in a "post-everything" world.

People respond to the "post-everything" environment in different ways. But for those of us who remember what the world was like before "post," our responses are most often reactive. We feel afraid. We want to hunker down and protect what we have. We want to bring back the "good old days."

The rise of fundamentalism, even among some in our own faith tradition, is largely a reaction to the disappointment of what has been left behind and the uncertainty of what lies just ahead.

To quote Brooks Hatlen, the old grizzled convict in *The Shawshank Redemption*: “*The world went and got itself in a great big hurry!*”

Phyllis Tickle, quoting Anglican Bishop Mark Dyer, observes that one way to comprehend what is currently happening in twenty-first century Christianity is to understand that about every five hundred years the Church (capital “C”) feels compelled to hold a giant rummage sale.

That is, about every five hundred years the power structures of institutionalized Christianity, whatever they may be at the time, become a kind of hardened shell that must be shattered in order for renewal and new growth to occur.

While some have questioned the veracity of her reading of history, and certainly not all would agree with her assessment, few would argue that we are living in a time of rapid and disruptive change. And so for the sake of argument let’s hear what she has to say.

Around five hundred years from our twenty-first century context places us in the sixteenth century. That is about the time of what we call in religious circles the **Great Reformation**, when a new form of Christianity emerged, led by a feisty German professor and priest named Martin Luther, and an acerbic, yet brilliant, Swiss pastor and theologian named John Calvin. (It always gives me pause to remember that our particular stream of Christianity insists on using the word “protest” in the title!)

Five hundred years from the Great Reformation takes us to the **Great Schism** of 1054, when Constantinople and Rome decided to have a holy fight and part ways over doctrinal differences and worship preferences (imagine that). As a result, Greek Orthodoxy became the faith of Christianity in the eastern world, and Roman Catholicism became the faith of Christianity in the Western world.

Five hundred years prior to the Great Schism brings us to the sixth century and **Gregory the Great**. The rise of Gregory to the papacy ran concurrent with the Fall of Rome and the dawn of the Dark Ages. It was a time of excruciating upheaval, not only for the Church, but for all civilized society. Illiteracy, animism, and religious superstition were rampant. It was Gregory’s Spirit-led guidance of the Church into monasticism that would protect and preserve the faith of Christianity for all future generations.

And finally, five hundred years before Gregory the Great was the first century and **the birth of Christianity**, when a Jewish carpenter named Jesus of Nazareth, came announcing the Kingdom of God is near. And his life, death, and resurrection were so momentous that the epochs of human history were reconfigured according to the time before his birth and the “Year of Our Lord.”

These are some of the great hinges of Christian history. I find it fascinating, however, that we associate these eras with the word “great.” In view of the fact, that at the time they felt like anything but “great” to the people experiencing them. They felt disruptive. They felt uncertain.

They felt like something had been lost. They felt, well, like they were living in a “post-everything world.

We only call them “great” in hindsight, because only now do we realize that what felt so unsettling at the time was really God doing a new thing.

And as Tickle points out, when these mighty upheavals happen there are three consistent results or corollary events.

First, a new, more vital form of Christianity does indeed finally emerge.

Second, the institutional expression of Christianity, which up until then had been the dominant form, is reconstituted into a more pure and less hardened expression of its former self. And as a result of this very difficult process, the Church actually ends up with two new strong expressions of the faith, whereas before there had been only one. In other words, while the Church was birthing a brand-new expression of its faith and practice, the Church actually benefitted from a whole new home makeover.

The third result of these mighty upheavals in Christian history, and perhaps most important of all, is that every time the crusty, hardened layers of an overly-institutionalized Christianity have been broken open, the faith has spread, dramatically and exponentially, into brand new areas where it has never been before.

Whether or not Tickle’s reading of history is correct, I can’t help but think about the power and goodness of God.

With all the angst and pain the Church was going through in these great turning points, God was not in distress at all. Because in exactly what we thought was a virtual death, God was creating an actual birth. And so we call them “great” only by looking in the rear-view mirror of the sovereignty of God and seeing the new thing for what it is.

Tickle maintains we are now living IN and THROUGH one of those five-hundred-year rummage sales.

No wonder we call it the “post-everything” generation! And as difficult as it may be, and as unsettling as it may feel, we as the Church must adapt, or be left behind from the new thing God wants to do.

A few years ago I was playing golf with some friends. A little girl was selling lemonade along the fairway just behind her house. The sign said: “One cup. Fifty cents.” It was late in the day and it looked like she had been there for quite a while. My pity got the better of my common sense, and I decided to make a purchase.

There was an empty Styrofoam cup and a half-full pitcher of watered-down warm lemonade on the folding table. She poured me a glass and I took a few sips. I could tell she was watching me carefully, so I took a few more drinks, said thank you, and started to walk away.

She quickly replied, “Excuse me, sir, but you can’t take that with you. It’s my only cup!”

But that’s exactly how we are, aren’t we? We are used to drinking from the same old cup. We want things to stay the same, and when they don’t, we react and resist.

But the Scriptures are clear that our God is a God of “new” things. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is making all things new! NEW community; NEW covenant; NEW commandment; NEW wineskins; NEW bodies. If anyone is in Christ they are a NEW creation. God is making all things new!

The Scriptures that were read a moment ago remind us of that truth. Isaiah prophesies a day when a shoot will emerge from the stump of Jesse and will stand as a signal to the peoples.

You are driving down the road. You see the remains of an old tree. Where once there had been a strong oak, it has now been reduced to nothing more than an old, sun bleached stump. Dry . . . barkless . . . cut off . . . DEAD! Just a remnant of what it had been.

But wait! You see a tiny green branch, no more than a sprout, emerging from the stump. And you realize, as hard as it is to believe, there is something still alive. All is not lost. Something new is coming!

Do you see what Isaiah sees? Look! Out of the stump of Jesse there is a shoot. God is doing a NEW thing in Israel through his righteous Messiah. Restoration. Renewal. The lion will lay down with the lamb. They will neither harm nor destroy. Shalom will once again be the order of the day. Destruction and devastation will have to bow in reverence to the King.

Do you see what the Revelator sees? Look! There is a NEW heaven and a NEW earth. Tears are being wiped away. Mourning and crying and pain are gone. Death is no more. And there is the King on the throne announcing, “Behold, I am making all things new.”

In God’s economy all things become new! Fresh; alive; NEW!

In these days of “post-everything” I have been asking myself what NEW thing does God want to do with Nazarene Theological Seminary?

My friend Scott Daniels was having a conversation with Richard Muow, the president of Fuller Theological Seminary. He told Scott that the three most important questions that inform his task as a seminary president are:

- (1) What is God doing in the world?
- (2) What does the church look like that understands what God is doing in the world?

And (3) what does the seminary look like that is forming people to lead the church that understands what God is doing in the world?

I think those are very important questions. While it is probably premature for any of us to have specific agendas for the direction of our Seminary, we can still ask, and prayerfully begin to answer, “*What kind of minister does the Church need today based on what God is doing in the world?*” When we answer that question we have discovered God’s preferred future for NTS.

There are certainly challenges to be faced. Some are the same old challenges in new clothes. Others, however, are unique to our time.

We face unprecedented financial realities at the Seminary. The revenue streams we have relied upon in the past are diminishing. As a result, difficult decisions have been made and there have been necessary cutbacks in staff and programs. I applaud the sacrifices our current faculty and staff have made in order to manage these tough times. We must find new ways to fund, enhance, and strengthen the work of the Seminary.

We also live in a culture of controversy where it is difficult to have civil conversations about important issues. We now exist in a world where if you disagree with me, then you are not only wrong, you are the enemy. Name-calling is rampant. Demonizing those who think differently is routine. The polarizing environment of our day has escalated to the point that even to be clear about what Nazarenes actually believe can be dangerous and even career-threatening.

New opportunities in technology have also created new expectations from students, threatening the accustomed way graduate level education has always been done. Perhaps we have reached a time when fewer students are willing to be full-time residential students. Modules, online classes, multi-campus venues, and global partnerships are all excellent new methodologies that are being explored. But we must continue to innovate additional ways to deliver graduate theological education in the 21st century.

There are other challenges: fewer religion students in our undergraduate schools; decreasing denominational loyalties; increasing fear among some of academic pursuits in theology and spirituality; and a global economic downturn. These are just a few of the challenges facing Nazarene Theological Seminary in this current five-hundred-year rummage sale.

So the question remains: What kind of Seminary shall we be in this time of change and upheaval? While I am obviously new to this assignment, and confess there are many things I have to learn, I want to go on record with a few essential, indispensable core values of our theological identity that will not change for us, even as our world is.

1. We are a Christian seminary.

Relativism and general spirituality may be a popular cultural point of view today, but we are unapologetically a school who holds the particular belief that Jesus Christ is Lord. And with that affirmation of faith we join with the Church Universal in affirming the historic Trinitarian creeds and beliefs of the Apostolic faith.

We believe that the Word of God, as found in the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testament are initiated by God, inspired by God, and authoritative in all things pertaining to our salvation. We believe the Christian Scriptures are the center of our life and practice.

And we love the whole church of God, joyfully celebrating the inbreaking of God's kingdom whenever and wherever it may be found.

We are a Christian seminary.

2. *We are a Protestant seminary.*

We are aligned with the whole Christian tradition, but we are children of the Reformation. We believe that we are saved by grace through faith, and not by our good works or spiritual performance.

We also believe in the priesthood of all believers and in the primacy of preaching.

Preaching matters a great deal to us. We will continue to be a seminary committed to produce passionate preachers of God's Word. Preachers who will not deliver moralistic, humanistic, legalistic, positive-thinking sermons; but preachers who will preach the whole Gospel of Jesus Christ with eternal conviction and Holy Spirit anointing.

We are absolutely committed to the expectation that the women and men who graduate from our seminary will be better preachers than they would have been if they had not come to NTS.

As Timothy Tennent, president of Asbury Seminary, noted: "When you receive an Asbury graduate as your pastor, you better not get a pastor who gets behind a pulpit and dishes out bland moralizing, three stories, and a joke. You will get God's Word faithfully proclaimed and applied to the issues of the day. If you get the other, send him or her back for a refit."

We are a Protestant seminary.

3. *We are an evangelical seminary.*

We take the Great Commission seriously. We stand in the tradition of John Wesley who said: "The whole world is my parish." We believe we have been called and sent to participate in the *missio dei* (mission of God), and to make Christlike disciples in the nations.

In fact, we believe so strongly in this that we added a single line to the end of the NTS mission statement: *We are a missional seminary serving a missional church.*

New initiatives like our Global Seminary Consortium and 365m are helping us to fulfill this mandate.

We are an evangelical seminary.

4. *We are a Wesleyan seminary.*

We drink from the stream of the great 18th century Wesleyan revivals that swept across England and America.

We believe in the prevenient grace of God that goes before us drawing us to Jesus. We believe the foundation of our theological house is built on the love of God that casts out all fear.

We believe in the radical optimism of grace that not only forgives us of our sins, but transforms us from the inside out. We believe that the perfect love of God can be poured into our hearts, making us into the likeness and image of Jesus.

Our Wesleyan roots also mean that we are *via media* people of faith, who will not be pulled to the extremes of the left or swayed to the fears of the right, but we choose the stability of the orthodox, middle way.

And as a Wesleyan seminary we believe God has called us to serve the poor, the marginalized, the hurting, and the underserved, and that to be like Christ calls us to care about issues of biblical justice and righteousness.

We are a Wesleyan seminary.

5. *We are a Holiness seminary.*

Not only are we the offspring of the eighteenth century Wesleyan Revival, we are the descendants of the Holiness movements of the nineteenth century.

We believe God is holy, and calls his people to a life of holiness. We believe there is a deeper work that God wants to accomplish in every believer that not only purifies our heart from sin, but enables us to love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind.

This, of course, does not mean that a believer will never be tempted again, or that we are incapable of sin. Rather, it means that through the power of the Spirit, we are given the power not to have to. We are free to say “yes” to God, and “no” to sin.

Therefore, we are not a seminary that believes personal piety and intellectual integrity are mutually exclusive. We will continue to maintain the highest academic standards necessary for well-equipped ministers, even as we recognize that we must also produce women and men who are Spirit-filled, and who think, act, serve, and look like Jesus.

Holiness is nothing more and nothing less than living in the world like Jesus, through the indwelling power of the Spirit of Jesus.

We are Holiness seminary.

6. *We are a Nazarene seminary.*

We are not a generic theological graduate school. We are here at the call of the Church of the Nazarene.

This does not mean we are not a resource to the WHOLE Christian church. We are exceedingly grateful for the non-Nazarenes who support, pray for, and even attend NTS. We welcome persons from all Christian traditions who want a quality theological education. The richness of their diverse perspectives makes all of us better.

But it is to say, that we are NAZARENE Theological Seminary. Which means that the Seminary does not demand that the Church conform to our needs; we stand ready to serve the Church and her needs.

Our Nazarene forefathers were given the supernatural wisdom of God to understand from the beginning that right belief and right practice must go together. Orthodoxy and orthopraxy are inseparably united.

That is why higher education has been embedded into our Nazarene DNA. I am very proud of the quality and excellence of our universities and colleges. We have one of the finest liberal arts education systems in the world. It is a part of the fabric of who we are, and NTS is made stronger when our universities are robust and vibrant.

But let me be clear: NTS must never be far from the local church, and the local church must never be far from her central seminary. We must insist that this relationship of Church and Seminary be stronger than ever before.

I have been a pastor for my entire professional ministry. And I now know, more than ever, that the quality of life and health of our congregations are greatly shaped by their pastoral leadership. When pastors are clear about their vocation, have been given the highest level of academic excellence, and maintain a high level of piety and devotion to God, the result is most often long and fruitful ministries.

More than six decades ago J.B. Chapman said: *“We need more preachers, and better preachers.”* Today he might say it this way: *“We need more pastors, and better pastors.”* God grant that it may be so.

We may live in a “post-everything” world. Perhaps we are in one of those 500-year religious rummage sales. And Nazarene Theological Seminary may need to look very different than it has in years gone by.

But we are not afraid, because we know our faithful God is making all things new. Our present hope is firmly rooted in God’s good future.