

We Shall Remember Them: Memories of New Zealand Nazarene Saints

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“At the going down of the sun, and in the morning, we shall remember them.” This statement is repeated every year without fail at dawn parades throughout New Zealand. The parades are held on ANZAC day, New Zealand’s “memorial day” when troops from the World Wars are honored. The conduct of these troupes, and how they are remembered, is indicative of and formative for New Zealand culture. The troops are remembered for embodying virtues New Zealand most cherishes as a society.

No doubt the same is true around the world, and also in the church. A sermon published by Victor Potopov of the Russian Orthodox Cathedral in Washington, D.C. lauds the memory of Russian saints. He opens his message with these words, “Of the limitless richness of Christ’s personality, each nation has selected those features of holiness that are closest to its heart, that are most readily understood, that are, for that particular nation most attainable” (“The Day of all the Saints of the Russian Land,” The Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, Washington, D.C., June, 1985, online, <http://www.stjohndc.org/Homilies/8506.htm>). Potopov identifies three particular Russian virtues embodied by the saints of his church: patience, humility, and love. He places all in a context of suffering and calls his parishioners to remember the saints, to bring to mind their expressions of those virtues and to strive to imitate them.

In the latter years of his life, Peter Bourke (d. 1992), a New Zealand journalist, began compiling notes for a history of the Church of the Nazarene in New Zealand. Nazarene work in New Zealand began in 1951. Bourke’s notes include selections from missionary books on the Church of the Nazarene in New Zealand, Bourke’s own personal memories and notes from interviews with several other New Zealand Nazarenes. Not surprisingly, the remembrances of Nazarene saints gathered in the manuscript yield more insight into New Zealand’s cultural values than into general holiness values. Even though many of the pioneers described by Bourke were not New Zealanders, the characteristics Bourke identifies in them are virtues and personality traits valued and idealized by New Zealand society as a whole.

The traits which come through strongest in Bourke’s notes are those of hard work, inventiveness and ingenuity, frugality, perseverance despite meager resources and opposition, a sense of humour, a friendly personality, and team spirit. These are the features of holiness that are closest to New Zealand’s heart. This is not to say that the other ‘spiritual’ virtues were not present in Bourke’s notes, but they were not as important in defining holiness for Bourke and most of those he interviewed.

In the classroom at Asia Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, we asked students to write about the person who for them most embodied the ideals of holiness (Christi Bennett’s class “Doctrine of Holiness,” 2000). In their essays Filipino students (the largest group in the class) emphasized patience, humility, not getting angry, and hard work, while some also mentioned effective preaching and prayer. Missiologist Paul Hiebert observes that while

North Americans define the cardinal sin as sexual immorality, in South Asia losing one's temper is considered much worse (*Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985, p. 47). This cultural value comes through as Filipino students list 'not getting angry' among the treasured traits of their own 'holy heroes'.

A life of prayer, including time spent at the 'prayer house' was, not surprisingly, important for the Korean depictions of holiness. Papua New Guinea and Myanmar (Mizo) students mentioned the absence of vices and the importance of sexual purity. Korea and Myanmar cultures do not allow a man even to touch a woman who is not his wife. Putting holiness into practice, and not just words was mentioned by students from the Philippines and Bangladesh. The students tended, then, in rehearsing their memories, to select those virtues which are 'closest to the heart' of their cultural experience, their cultural ideals.

The portrayal of the Church of the Nazarene in New Zealand reflects this principle. While Bourke's history is not consciously attempting to describe holiness, it is recording the beginning of a holiness denomination in New Zealand. The holiness distinctive is emphasized in the history. The doctrine is the reason why the church was introduced, and opposition from other churches was because of the doctrine. An initial openness to Roland Griffith's (American) preaching was abandoned by all denominations in New Zealand except the Salvation Army and Brethren.

Explicit definitions of holiness are twice included as a clarification for other denominations which accused the Nazarenes of teaching 'sinless perfection'. Bourke writes that "it really meant perfect love or perfect motive and that God was able, through the Holy Spirit, to deal with the sin problem, but that this would be a continuing process" and "it simply means perfect love and aiming for the highest standards, as put forward by Jesus Christ" (Bourke, 13, 21). Gideon B. Williamson (American General Superintendent) is remembered to have preached on the 'power to witness' in a service in 1953 where Mrs Aline Taft was sanctified entirely (Bourke, 5).

Yet it is not specifically adherence to these definitions of spirituality, which is emphasized by Bourke and his informants. It is what 'perfect love' meant to these New Zealand Nazarenes that is interesting. The virtue of being a hard worker, especially in manual labor, is mentioned of pioneer Roland Griffith (American) in the construction of the first church, which was in Auckland. The first District Superintendent, S. Palmquist (American North West) also engaged in manual labor and was "never afraid to roll up his sleeves" (Bourke, 79. Palmquist was D.S. from 1968). In regard to the campsite at Piha, Palmquist "worked like a Trojan" and often had to be carried off the job at the end of a 'working bee' (Bourke, 14). Those unwilling to join in the physical tasks were seen as unworthy for the holiness denomination. Not surprising in a country not far-removed from its pioneer days, a country built on the sweat of agricultural workers. A young ministerial student, Rex, was helping with the excavation for Auckland First church when he declared that he had been called to preach - not to crack rocks, and he walked off the job (Bourke, 41).

A sense of humor and a friendly personality are also valued in New Zealand culture. James A. Michener in *Return to Paradise* identifies the 'typical New Zealander' as a person 'addicted to dreadful jokes'. Bourke notes Palmquist, Jervois Davis (American immigrant pastor), and

Hillary Hansen (pastor) for their sense of humor (Bourke, 14, 53, 67). Friendliness is noted with regard to George Yearbury (pastor) and Jervois Davis (Bourke, 39, 57).

Perserverance despite opposition and hardship is another New Zealand value that is noted in Bourke's history. This is often linked to faithfulness. Bourke quotes extensively from Griffith's appeal in the *Voice of the Nazarene* which calls for martyrs, that is, people willing to make costly sacrifices (Bourke, 9-10. July, 1957). The Tonga family (immigrants from Nuie Island) provides an example of this. Otara pastor's wife Joan Ranger remembers that they "were faithful witnesses and, amidst many trials and battles they proved to be real saints of God" (Bourke, 33. Events are from 1973). This is the same virtue New Zealanders idealize at ANZAC day as they remember the disproportionate sacrifices New Zealand made in the world wars of the twentieth century.

More spiritual characteristics such as prayer, preaching, patience, kindness, and caring are also mentioned (in some cases more by the females that Bourke interviewed). But the definition of holiness in terms of the values of New Zealand culture seems unmistakable. In Bourke's history it is the ideals that are closest to the New Zealand heart that receive the most attention.

The definition of holiness and the memory of the saints is conditioned in part by the culture of the observer. This realization is important in the presentation of holiness and the memory of the church in New Zealand, and in any culture. It is important, too, for the writing of church history in an international church--even historians have a hard time escaping the shaping force of cultural values. "At the going down of the sun, and in the morning, we shall remember them." But will you remember the same things about them that I do?