

LIBERAL ARTS AND THE PRIORITIES OF NAZARENE HIGHER EDUCATION

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Introduction

The relationship between denominational identity and Nazarene Higher Education appears to be a strong one in the United States/Canada. In 1999 the Association of Nazarene Sociologists of Religion (ANSR) surveyed the membership of the Church of the Nazarene in the USA and Canada to determine the breadth of higher education in Nazarene church membership. The stratified random sampling (n=455) determined that 61% of those responding had at least some college experience. Eighteen percent had completed a four-year degree, and another 12% had a graduate degree. Of all those with college experience, over half, or 35% of the total sample had attended a Nazarene college.

Seven of eleven Nazarene schools of higher learning in the United States are four-year liberal arts colleges according to the Carnegie classifications of higher educational institutions. The Carnegie classifications of Higher Education (CCCH, www.carnegiefoundation.org) provide an organizational understanding of the types of American colleges and universities, as doctoral, master's, baccalaureate, associate's college, or specialized institutions. The descriptors for each kind of school assist the government, accrediting agencies, and other concerned stakeholders in their assessment of an institution's purpose, such as specialized research or general teaching, and the breadth of its program, in terms of a two-year tech school to a four-year liberal arts college. Baccalaureate colleges, according to CCHE, are primarily teaching schools focusing in a liberal, or generalized, education for undergraduates. Though some Nazarene colleges offer master's level and even doctoral level degrees, and even call themselves "Universities," they are primarily teaching colleges and have an historical mission committed to liberal education.

Of these seven Nazarene liberal arts colleges, five were established prior to 1915. These first five liberal arts colleges were Idaho Holiness School (later Northwest Nazarene University), Pentecostal Collegiate Institute (later Eastern Nazarene College), The Nazarene University (later Pasadena College, then Point Loma Nazarene University), Olivet University (later Olivet Nazarene University), Trevecca College (later Trevecca Nazarene University), and several schools in the Plains states that associated to become Southern Nazarene University. By 1915, the denomination called the Church of the Nazarene had only been established for eight years. This rapid attempt by Nazarenes to institutionalize their educational endeavors leads one to ask,

why did education, particularly, liberal arts education, become a major priority for early Nazarenes? And what developments in the Church of the Nazarene encouraged members to “go to college” to receive a liberal arts education? This paper responds more to the latter question than the former.

An adequate response will need a brief look at the context of higher education in the United States and its transformation from the 19th to the 20th centuries. This paper will look at the developments at Nazarene University in Pasadena, California as particular example in which the emphasis for Nazarenes rested upon liberal arts education. Another focus of this paper is a closer look at the ideas of H. Orton Wiley in this emphasis on liberal arts. Wiley served as a professor, academic dean, and president in two of Nazarene colleges mentioned above for over five decades. His story divulges key historical data about why liberal arts education has been a priority in Nazarene higher education. Before describing Wiley’s experience, a brief synopsis of liberal arts education in the United States is in order.

Liberal Arts Education in the United States

“Going to college,” Christopher Lucas wrote, “meant four years spent on an elm-shaded campus in ivy-covered buildings, under close supervision by college officials, far from the temptations of city life” (Lucas, 1996, 51). Lucas’ statement makes several assumptions about what liberal arts education ought to be. A liberal education presupposed an educational program over four years that offers an established and strict regimen of classes. The student body gathered in a self-contained, even pastoral, setting in order to focus on their studies. In fact, parents could feel comfortable sending their children to such a protective environment, where the next generation could transition safely into adulthood. The buildings, covered with ivy, projected a sturdy institutionalism. The colleges were further identified as having a certain history with the promise of continuity. By the time students reached graduation they could then be released into the outside world to enter a multiplicity of professions with a common experience and balanced foundation of learning.

In reality, these colleges offered an inexpensive course of study for a small student body dominated almost exclusively by male students, usually studying to become clergy. Good teaching was expected from the faculty along the lines of a classical curriculum dominated, as it was for centuries, with the traditional liberal arts: higher mathematics, sciences, rhetoric, logic, theology, and, of course, philosophy. This kind of education was first recognized in Cambridge

and Oxford universities in England, and offered the model for the establishment of Harvard College (1636)—the first school of higher learning in the United States. The 19th century saw the most complete apology for liberal arts education in the Yale Report (1828) and the greatest challenge in the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890.

The Yale Report, written by that college's faculty, hoped to establish the liberal arts as the course for American higher education for the coming generations ([www. higher-ed.org/resources/Yale_Report.html](http://www.higher-ed.org/resources/Yale_Report.html). 3/4/2002). Liberal arts colleges, according to the Yale faculty, were to help students discipline their minds, focus their attention upon expanding their knowledge, and develop "character." The college was obligated to provide a familial atmosphere of close-knit faculty and students on a resident campus. Furthermore, the liberal arts college was "not to teach that which is peculiar to any one of the professions; but to lay the foundation which is common to them all." Pressures to offer education for agricultural, business, mechanical, or some other kind of professional training was to be averted for a while.

The Yale Report's influence waned by the mid-1800's, in 1862, President Lincoln signed a law granting federal land to each state to be used as an endowment for a higher educational institution. The law encouraged the states to develop institutions to pursue a curriculum expanded beyond the liberal arts to include military training, agriculture, and mechanical arts. This purpose was to be accomplished "in such a manner as the legislatures of the States may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes on the several pursuits and professions of life" (First Morrill Act, 1862). The Act obscured the priorities of liberal education by adding the requirement of the land-grant university to pursue professional training as a requirement for funding. The second Morrill Act (1890) further encouraged the endowment of land-grant universities for newer states in the Union.

By 1900, Charles W. Eliot, the president at Harvard, retooled the liberal arts college to include a wider array of classes and specializations within its traditional curriculum. Using the German university model, Eliot hoped to institute an elective system of education whereby students were granted more choice in the selection of their course of study at the undergraduate level. This expansion of the college curriculum in the country's first liberal arts college, along with the governmental standards for funding that required professional training, led to a revolution in the idea of what a classic liberal arts education should look like. Besides the

curriculum reform at Harvard, a particular social development also skewed the trajectory of liberal arts colleges in the United States—the trend toward increasing secularization.

The increasingly secular nature of American higher education began with the establishment of the first non-church-related college in the United States in Berkeley, California. In 1867, the College of California offered its assets to the state of California to bring about a state university, transitioning higher education for the first time to a school that was fully funded by the public. Daniel Gilman led the transition fresh from his leadership role at John Hopkins University, the only graduate school in the country without an undergraduate student body. Gilman hoped that the new state university in Berkeley would adopt a “religious spirit that no one would object to” (Marsden, 1994, 142). This meant essentially no religious foundations at all. The college, though non-sectarian, would retain the liberal arts tradition of promoting “the development of character” (Marsden, 144). In the end, the religious base of American higher education was gradually replaced with nominal notions of religiosity. The transition from religiously-inspired campuses to those with a mission to increase secular knowledge and professions created a vacuum for spiritual education tied to the liberal arts. This opened the door for church-related colleges to offer a student (and their parents) a place for higher education that wedded the desire a religious atmosphere with traditional liberal arts curriculum. Though, the traditional liberal arts were augmented with professional studies in these church-related colleges that could not escape the curriculum reforms for more professional training.

The liberal arts college metamorphosed into a “complex institution, supporting graduate research, professional education, specialized studies in the arts and sciences, and . . . a number of affiliated colleges, and educational and cultural agencies” (Weneck, 1991, 1). In Weneck’s study at the New York City-based Teachers College, a professional training school was united with Barnard College, a women’s liberal arts college, and Columbia College, a men’s liberal arts college, to create a single university among disparate campuses with varying student bodies and purposes. However, Teachers College wanted to provide its students with a liberal arts background along with the professional training of the teacher—which became possible through its partnership with Barnard and Columbia. As the complexity of institutions grew, small colleges, professional schools orbited around a central liberal arts campus. The melding of professional and general studies provided the context for smaller colleges like Nazarene University in Pasadena, California, to develop a religiously-centered, liberal arts college from a

specialized Bible school intended to train church leaders. Church-related liberal arts campuses gave an alternative to the secular and sprawling state universities.

Wiley's Vision for Liberal Arts Education

With the rise of the secular university with its expanding complexities, Protestant fundamentalists rejected the notions of university reform. They sought the ideals of the past without dealing with the realities of the present. Moderates, however, hoped “to solve some of the problems created by university reform without completely rejecting modern practices. Moderates were often associated with ‘liberal arts’ colleges, where they tried to selectively adopt some of the reforms instituted by universities, while retaining the more intimate environment of the traditional college.” (Reuben, 1996, 230) Donald Metz places the Church of the Nazarene’s vision of higher education squarely in the camp of the moderates (Metz, 1991, 50), without giving much of a reason for their moderation. I contend that the Church of the Nazarene turned to liberal arts education as its *modus operandi* because of H. Orton Wiley’s leadership.

H. Orton Wiley, writing on “The Value of a College Education,” considered liberal arts to be the “best possible preparation for the great work to which God has called them,” and this being all students, not just those seeking a ministerial education (1918). In the same article, Wiley cautions students to avoid the desire to earn money as the main motive for attending college. Rather, students should pursue an education that offers, “true worth [that] will seek the spiritual things of the kingdom of God.” For Wiley, the best way to develop personal worth and encourage a spiritual emphasis in Nazarene higher education was through the liberal arts college.

The Purpose of the Church-related Liberal Arts College from Wiley's Perspective

The purpose of the liberal arts college, according to Wiley’s letter to John E. Riley late in his life (1956), was actually best stated in the 1947-1948 Catalogue for Pasadena Nazarene College. In the catalog, Wiley considered the importance of liberal arts for the Nazarene college student, writing:

The purpose of the institution through its College of Liberal Arts and its Graduate School is twofold: to provide a sound education in the liberal arts from a Christian viewpoint, and to prepare an adequately trained ministry for the church. Thus, instruction within the College of Liberal Arts is confined to the broad cultural categories of human experience: the arts, languages and letters, the sciences and social studies. It has been felt that Pasadena College could best

serve its constituency by emphasis on the importance of an education in the liberal arts as a pre-requisite for a complete life (Annual Catalogue of Pasadena College, 1947-48, 21-22).

The need for graduate studies and professional training is evident in the excerpt, but the emphasis upon the liberal arts makes a college education “sound,” a student’s experience “broad,” and the preparation for life “complete.”

“Sound” Education through a Liberal and Religious Curriculum

For Wiley, the core of the college course was the liberal arts. A course schedule from 1913 listed a classical curriculum of liberal education with Wiley teaching courses in philosophy and history of philosophy. Philosophy was still considered the “queen” of the liberal arts. However, the 1913 schedule includes sociology, psychology, geology, biology, and modern languages—examples of an expanding curriculum without losing the core of a liberal education. Reflecting on the New Testament parable of the talents, Wiley applied Jesus’ teaching to an understanding of liberal education, stating, “Our Lord recognized the differences in ability found in men, but He made a challenge to all” (1951). Whether student had many talents or few, the liberal arts college might help students multiply their competencies and abilities. The liberal arts curriculum challenged and developed the student through its basic curriculum and supplemented by courses that reflected current professional needs.

The order of courses was rigid with a set of courses offered each year with little choice in the matter for students. Regardless, students in 1912-13 could pursue a baccalaureate degree at Nazarene University (NU) in a liberal arts course (B. A.), a scientific course (B. S.), or a literary course (B.L.). A general liberal arts core supplied the foundation for students’ further study and professional interests. Almost 40 years after writing the NU Catalogue in 1912, Wiley later asserted that a college course of study should “not consist in a multiplication of courses in the Bible and cognate religious subjects” (1951). Liberal arts education was to be a basic function of Nazarene colleges and not limited to professional studies.

Wiley (1951) illustrated the relationship of humanistic learning with divine illumination through an ancient Hebrew legend of Enoch. Enoch heard that God would desire to destroy the earth twice (once by water, then by fire). God erected to pillars, which had “all the knowledge that had been revealed to or invented by men.” These pillars became the center of learning—the first university. Many leaders came to study bringing peace throughout the land. When a great

flood struck the earth and destroyed most of civilization, the waters finally receded, the pillars remained. The pillars represented two poles in learning—wisdom of divine revelation, and wisdom acquired by human experience. Enoch, the prototypical teacher, was to convey the values of both “divine revelation and human acquisition.” This was the goal of religious education. “These pillars, like those of the ancient temple, should have their place at the gates of every Christian college and university.” The purpose of Nazarene higher education reflected more than a place for regimented Bible study, rather, “going to college” broadened the experience of students as they passed through a period of “self-discovery” and encountered a larger world (1918).

The “Broad” Experience Offered by a College

The Nazarene campuses to which Wiley presided over were usually small, no more than a large house as the administration building, a building with classrooms, and two dormitories. Wiley valued the small campus, because it offered students “close and stimulating contacts” with other students, faculty, and church members. The campus was self-contained, but not ingrown. The students were encouraged to spend time off campus in outdoor outings, such as the nature hikes outside the NU campus in Pasadena during Wiley’s tenure as president. While Wiley was at Northwest Nazarene College (NNC), mission bands traveled the northwestern states encouraging churches to consider the importance of foreign missions and the possibility of sending their students to NNC. Eventually, these practices were part of Wiley’s intention that Nazarene colleges should offer opportunities to broaden the horizon for students—that a liberal arts education should expand the limitations of one’s own experience beyond oneself for the purpose of serving not the self, but the world.

The Pasadena Nazarene College Catalogue for 1947-1948 acknowledges offering students the “big picture” of common human experience. A college education should develop “open-mindedness” to the search for knowledge and a “loyal adherence” to discovery of truth. The value of cultivating social relationships supports one’s “intelligent devotion” to God. The abilities required for this kind of education include “the power to rightly understand and interpret others,” “heartily co-operating...in every good cause,” and to “arrive at certain definite convictions without being dogmatic or coercive.” Wiley wanted the benefits of a democratic common good to stand upon the Christian ideals of common truth. The broadening effects of a liberal college experience required a stable foundation of Christian ideals. The purpose of these

experiences beyond oneself into a larger world was driven by the Christian ideal of service to others.

Wiley viewed the Nazarene liberal arts college as an establishment and as a missionary agency. He wrote that the task of Christian education held two ideals in tension “to cherish and preserve knowledge” and to “convey knowledge to others” (1951). The Christian college student should recognize his or her “duty and privilege.” The gospel parable of the vineyard workers, in Matthew 20, illustrated for Wiley the idea that a common experience of a college education (the church’s privilege) was given to all students who accepted the challenge (the church’s duty), though for some the college experience might intellectually drain them while others found the same academic process easily accomplished. Wiley explained earlier in his career that the “truly Christian student sinks into greater humility as he [or she] perceives himself [or herself] but a speck in the infinitudes about him [or her], and with this realization of his [or her] own insufficiency comes the sufficiency of God” (1918). From this place of humility, whether intellectual or spiritual, the college experience prevents unabated “egotism” and “superficiality” (1951). For Wiley, this meant the colleges should maintain an open admissions policy: “No Christian redeemed young man or woman should be denied entrance to our [Nazarene] schools or colleges.”

The College as Preparation for a “Complete Life”

From the beginning, Wiley believed the liberal arts college needed to establish a place for students to “cherish and enfold the mentality with which God has endowed us in loyal relation to the Divine” (1912, 14). The students’ relationship with God was of primary importance. The liberal arts curriculum not only made this connection to the Divine, but developed the whole person. Traditional biblical ideas about personality stemmed from ancient Hebrew and Greek concepts of body, mind, and spirit. Instead, Wiley used the modern psychological language of “spiritual, moral, mental and physical” (1918). The college experience provided students with a balanced, or “symmetrical,” development of personality. Education answered the “dissatisfaction” of modern life, which failed to activate the operations of the “whole being.” Instead of teaching a person a single skill set to accomplish a repetitive task, the liberal education was to provide a well-rounded body of experiences that awakened and challenged the totality of a person’s knowledge and abilities.

The “symmetry of character” offered the student a proper “estimate of the values of life” (1918). Learning to study was one way this was accomplished. Wiley hoped students develop the “habit of prolonged and close attention to a subject until it is understood both in itself and in its relation to other subjects” (1918). This thought was developed prior to the current technological revolution and information society we are accustomed to. In today’s environment, prolonged attention to one subject may be lost for undergraduates. The newer emphasis on degree completion and modular courses offer survey studies of a single subject, but how does one begin to understand how subjects relate to another? This is the key to a liberal arts education, in which the curriculum offers a generalized study of several areas of study in history, the arts, science, religion, and literature prior to entering specialized professional studies. Wiley wrote that the “liberal arts” were “a pre-requisite for a complete life” (1947). The complete life of which he wrote can be interpreted as a symmetrically balanced character developed through a liberal arts curriculum as well as a life devoted to God and as a follower of Christ. This was the “distinctive feature” of Pasadena College and, generally, of a liberal arts education in a Christian setting.

Conclusion

The Church of the Nazarene early in its history endeared itself to liberal arts education as a denominational priority. This study provides a beginning to understanding this priority through H. Orton Wiley’s influence in nurturing liberal arts education in Nazarene colleges during the first half of the 20th century. Some of the ideals promoted by Wiley should not be lost at the beginning of the 21st century. These ideals should not be overlooked, especially the following:

- The liberal arts curriculum was the forum for developing a lifestyle commensurate with a theological commitment to holy living.
- Spiritual emphasis and professional studies were added to the curriculum to offer Nazarene students a solid foundation for lifelong learning.
- The development of the laity was as much a priority as ministerial education.
- There was a strong interest in displaying a global picture of human need and understanding beyond one’s insulated religious culture.
- The goal of Christian education was a dual one of establishing a theological identity within and pursuing a missionary vocation toward the world beyond.

These ideals are avenues of exploration for those committed to higher education in the Wesleyan holiness tradition, particularly with the Church of the Nazarene.

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