

RE-WESLEYANIZING NAZARENE HIGHER EDUCATION

Paul Merritt Bassett

My highly esteemed colleagues:

You must know that the invitation to address you on this occasion came as a truly great and distinct honor. Preparing this essay came as a most laborious and exquisitely painful process. And now, delivering the thing comes as a frightening necessity, hot and humid. But it is not a moment from which I would back down for any price.

You see, I give deepest and most sincere thanks for the company that I am privileged to keep as an educator in the Church of the Nazarene. Think of our heritage as Nazarene educators--our company past. Consider this short list and you will delight with me, I'm sure--and recognize indebtedness: Munro, Shrader, and Gould; Larson, Howe, and McClain; Mackey, Carroll, and Snell; McConnell, Floyd, and Greve; Wiley, Winchester, and Culbertson; Culver, Sanner, and Vail; Thompson and Airhart; Earle, Reed, and Taylor; Ford and Mitchell. Now draw up your own list of present company (I would do it aloud, but I do not want to embarrass anyone) and rejoice again with me in the privilege we have as Nazarene educators.

To be sure, the mediocre, the weird, and the just plain daffy have dwelt among us. But each of our campuses has

known, and still knows, educators of outstanding ability and character who have modelled the meaning of Christian education. They have expressed authentic piety through genuine scholarship.

Our current generation clearly leads in technical preparation and in professional credentials, of course. And that expertise, incarnated in such diverse personalities, all so thoroughly Christian, makes each of us, and our students, and the constituencies that we serve even richer than Nazarenes even imagined just a generation back. How generously, then, we can repay our debt to our predecessors as their investment in their own futures, and how carefully, then, we will exercise stewardship of magnificent resources for the sake of Christ and his Church, and for the world that he yearns to save.

I must admit that scholaring consumes me, as I believe it does you. I am an educator precisely because I am a Christian. Scholaring is my expression of complete surrender to the will of God and of absolute love to God and to my neighbors. It is my "sacrifice of praise." It is my calling in Christ Jesus. It is not simply some way-station on some path to some main chance. Your calling and mine as educators has not the slightest hint of hireling ministry in it. We take it to be an all-demanding shepherd-life.

It is within this context of gratitude for being called to do what I love to do and called to do it in such superb company that this essay arises and is presented. And, it catches me up into teaching, again. Methodologically, it reeks of Socrates, of the heuristic. It resembles a half-attached muffler dragging across the pavement (not that I for a moment think that your minds are ripe concrete) throwing sparks. I hope it ignites thoughts, and even action. Or, more tamely, I hope to open some intellectual doors into rooms which you can investigate far more adequately than I.

Like Gaul, this essay has three parts, and, like De Gaulle, an introduction and a conclusion. First comes a historical note on faith and learning in Nazarene higher education. Then follows a long-ish section on the unique contributions that Wesleyan theology can make to our task. And third, I want to float some practical suggestions for the re-Wesleyanizing of Nazarene higher education.

I do apologize to our brother and sister educators from such places as the United Kingdom and Trinidad and Tobago. Some of this account is provincial. If it does nothing to explain your educational development to North Americans, at least it may help to explain some of the things that some have attempted to impose upon you.

I. A historical note on faith and learning in Nazarene higher education.

The history of the attempt to relate vital piety and genuine learning in Nazarene higher education reads like a subtle and engrossing drama. Let me present a very cursory outline of it, with commentary.

In the first act in Nazarene higher education, back when we had at least three universities, a majority of whose students were seeking high school diplomas, few teachers held anything higher than a baccalaureate degree and many instructed in fields other than those for which they held a credential. What we still have of their lectures and syllabi, and of students' notes and memories, tell us that they leaned heavily on commonsense, and on pious and moralistic (terms used non-pejoratively) commentary on the academic material at hand. Students valued most the teacher who seemed to speak competently to both the academic and the moral dimensions of the topic.

The first act administrator was most likely an entrepreneur, an ordained entrepreneur, and handyman. He (there were no she's in chief executive's chairs, though the she's came to early and obvious prominence as teachers and even deans) usually gained his position on the strength of his work as a pastor and member of the governing board. More often than not, such persons "ran" the schools in much

the same way as they had "run" their congregations. Their outlook was essentially pastoral.

"Christian education" in this first act meant "educating Christianly". It carried an adverbial flavor. The school deliberately subjected manner, degree, and cause in any activity, curricular or extra-curricular, to the demands of Christian faith, ideologically and experientially. Being Christian was to modify whatever was done or thought.

All of this took place in a context deeply committed to patterns of cultural and religious expression and community learned in and shaped by North American revivalism. And that context harbored a deep ambivalence about the value of higher education. In fact, in the narrower context of the Holiness Movement, it sometimes took moral courage to suggest developing liberal arts institutions.

This latter was not generally true of the Nazarenes, or at least it was not true of their leaders. Nonetheless, even the most cosmopolitan of Nazarene leaders still tended to hold some ambivalence about even Christian higher education. Would it become a sorcerer's apprentice?

It seemed to those leaders that the best defense against the threat of substituting learning for piety was to make the "Christian" in "Christian education" adverbial. And their models for this process came from the frontier revival. They

feared criticism from believers much more than they feared criticism from learned worldlings, so in any rub between piety and learning, piety would have their support. But they tried to forestall such problems by christianizing everything to begin with.

In the second act in Nazarene higher education, we see developing an increasing percentage of educators with specialized graduate degrees from qualified schools. Administrators too, and their staffs, are becoming more and more specialized and specially prepared. Boards of trustees shift their criteria and now begin selecting administrators on the basis of managerial qualification rather than pastoral, though ordination remains quite important. The choice of faculty is left to presidents and deans as technical proficiency is given high priority.

Except in disciplines such as religion, languages and literature, and the fine arts, Nazarene higher education, in its second act, mutes the adverbial meaning of the term "Christian education" in favor of an adjectival, or even conjunctive one. Now "Christian education" means "education guided by technical experts who are Christian". The content of instruction and the perspective of the teacher as an academic specialist scarcely differ from the course content and intellectual perspective in that field in a secular school. And the folks in the Ad Building of Second Blessing College

do their work according to the same notions that guide the folks in Old Main at Siwash State.

In this second act in Nazarene higher education, Christianity tends to become simply one of the characteristics of the school. Perhaps the most striking characteristic, but still simply one characteristic. It plays little direct part in determining what is done or thought as the school expresses itself as school. Manner, degree, and cause for most activities can be defined and described without reference to faith.

Now, faith is not neglected in this act. Not at all! But instead of being determinant in all that is done, it is now considered to be a matter of "atmosphere". The mode is adjectival, not adverbial. The "Christian" in "Christian education" refers to a generally pious ambiance that one is to experience at the given school. Folks fervently pray that such an "atmosphere" will permeate all other characteristics of the institution. And, in the conjunctive mode, one hears talk of "Christian faith and. . .", as in "Christian faith and recent developments in sociology."

But the prayers that open class sessions, for instance, seldom relate to class content or even specifically to the life of the mind. Often, they are very tellingly introduced: "Before we begin, let us pray." In fact, data can be mustered that forces a most unwanted conclusion about the relationship

between faith and learning. The sermons, prayers, and music in chapel express either no relationship or even a negative relationship far more often than they express a positive one. So, the music teacher, attempting to develop broad musical appreciation and taste hears sincerity without skill or notoriety with indifferent skill, or slovenly use of skill publically lauded by persons whose opinions mean something to students. And even the dullest can guess that the number of styles of music officially approved for expressing the faith is many fewer than the figure he has been given in Intro to Fine Arts. The philosophy professor gets us to thinking about the faith, and the evangelist for the Fall Revival gets us to feeling guilty about thinking about much of anything, and does it with apparent authority-approval.

So, every-day academic life in act two develops a certain intellectual sophistication while the religious life seems to be tied to forms that may even deny the right to reflect, let alone the demand to love God with all of the mind. This, in turn, is exacerbated by an insistence on middle-class social behavior, imposed with but one stated reason--that it looks collegiate.

Students feel this as a tension, though they often fail to articulate that feeling or actually misstate it and act on the misstatement. Some abandon learning; others abandon faith, though both sorts continue to go through the

requisite motions. Only after graduation do they drop the hypocrisy. The first sort, often religion majors, now preachers, act as if they never attended a class in their lives. The second sort quit the Church, disillusioned. Another group continue to feel the tension but try to live with it by refusing to entertain serious thoughts about either faith or learning as it suits the needs of the moment. The majority feel the tension but develop callouses by putting religion in this box and the life of the mind in that box. Religion is for Sunday and for certain personal habits; the mind is for using to get ahead and especially for ethical and moral rationalization.

Faculty and administration struggle mightily with these things in this second act. But the very things that have gained the school, and them, a good reputation now come to bear in untoward ways. The faculty, highly specialized but still yearning to express the faith with integrity, power, and winsomeness, have had little or no experience investigating the religious or moral dimensions of their disciplines. Grad school did a grand job of honing some skills, but the development of the spiritual dimension was left to individual enterprise. And with too few exceptions, the local pastors and congregations to which the faculty attached themselves in those difficult and heady days lacked the heart and the in-

tellectual preparation to help them. In fact, the local church situation may have been spiritually damaging. And now, newly arrived on campus, in act two they often find themselves academically isolated. No one is there who belongs to their academic clan, still no one to help them work with the still pending questions of "integration". Nor do the local public exercises of religion seem to offer much aid. But seldom do students in a Christian college allow the teacher the luxury of sticking to strictly academic knitting. Temptations to respond are enormous--and he or she yields. Wise words may ensue, and often do. But so do words that lend themselves to the fires of suspicion.

In the second act in Nazarene higher education, this is often where administration and the Board of Trustees enter and an adversarial relationship between administration and faculty arises. Attuned to constituency concerns that are usually quite appropriate, administrations and Boards in this second act seldom saw it to be their place to explain to their publics the inner character of liberal arts education. Better to build buildings and hire faculty that make "good copy" . But this creates its own problems, for money comes to the institutions for building only when the institutions have the confidence of givers. Something needed to be said about the nature of Christian liberal arts

education, including something about the process involved, to that generation, for most of them did not have college educations. But instead of this the choice was to keep on building and adding programs--a process that could be carried through without reference to the faith, and a process that demanded constituency support but could move ahead whether the faculty liked it or not. All of this only helped entrench the notion that the mode of the term "Christian education" is adjectival. The Christianity of the matter could even be looked upon as the "plus" in education on this or that campus--not the heart and soul of education, but a "plus".

An untenable situation crept over our campuses, and awkwardness in the relationship between faith and the learning process. But, in testimony to the profound, if imperfectly developed Christian faith of our faculties and to the profound, if imperfectly developed commitment of our boards and administrators, revolution did not occur. Instead, while we remain in many ways in act two, the outline of act three is beginning to appear. That is to say, we are for the most part offering education by specialists who are Christian, but some changes are making themselves felt.

It seems to me that our move to act three would be helped a great deal by changing our perspective. Our current way of talking about Christian education, while it recognizes

the problem with which we have been working will not produce the solution that we need. Indeed, it will perpetuate the problem.

Such themes as "Faith and Learning", which guided the last meeting of Nazarene educators in higher education, and the current theme, which adds another element to the stew—"Faith, Learning, and Living"--tend to keep us thinking in precisely the wrong direction. (Please hear me here as loyal opposition, not as enemy.) Of course, the idea is to relate and unite the two or three elements. "Integrate" is the buzz-word. But (again, I hope you hear me as loving critic, not as boor) that language misleads us.

Christian education cannot be a matter of "faith and learning", and certainly not of "faith, learning, and living". It is a matter of faith, faith, and faith--sola fide. Learning and living must be engulfed by faith; learning and living must be mastered by faith ("I believe in order to understand."); learning and living will express faith and faithfulness. Christian education is faith expressed precisely through learning and living. To believe is to learn and to live; truly to learn and authentically to live are to express faith. Integration is not the desideratum; permeation, or even absorption, would be better descriptions, but to either must be added the notion of expression. All of this is to say that we do not seek somehow

to bring faith and learning and living into fruitful union; rather, we seek to make learning and living expressions of belief and of nothing but belief. It is to say that we seek to make learning and living integral to loving God with all of our heart and soul, mind and strength, and neighbor as self. The emphasis is removed from faith as doctrinal content and learning as cognitive content to faith and learning as comprehensive processes involving all aspects or levels of human activity. Relating doctrine to intellectual conclusions from various academic disciplines becomes a second order process. Important indeed, but second order. First, however, one tries to ascertain how the very process of forming the conclusions can be made an expression of believing, of loving God and neighbor absolutely. Then one moves to those intellectual conclusions, testing them in two ways: as valid products of the given academic discipline and as expressions of absolute love to God and neighbor.

Our first commitment, our only absolute commitment, is to the sovereign God as He has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. Nothing is permitted equality with that commitment. All else will either be totally encompassed by that commitment and totally mastered by that commitment or shucked immediately without a backward glance.

Talk of a balance between the spiritual and the academic falls completely out of place. None of us wants a

balance, some sort of equilibrium, here. We want a learning that expresses faith, a spirituality that demands all that we can be, intellectually. Talk of integration of faith and learning or of faith, learning, and living, also finally falls out of place. None of us wants an integration, some sort of marriage in which each partner pledges allegiance to the other but maintains a sort of personal identity. We want a learning that arises from faith and is accountable to it, a learning that demands all of us that we can be spiritually.

Here, then, is where we begin to describe act three in Nazarene higher education. We are ready for it. It seems to be imminent.

And here at last I can establish the thesis for this essay. It is that the uniquely Wesleyan character of our Christian faith has created among us the capacity for taking the lead in Christian higher education for the foreseeable future.

Now, please do not hear this as triumphalistic or as mere puffery or cheerleading. It is a statement of possibility and of hope anchored in the past, in a realistic assessment of our resources, and in an attempt to read the present situation critically. Above all, it is a statement of the dimensions of our stewardship as Nazarene educators.

And here it is that we must consider the unique resources

for higher education that are offered by our Wesleyan theological heritage.

II. Characteristics of the Wesleyan perspective that bear on Nazarene higher education.

The first characteristic that one would mention is the Wesleyan understanding of prevenient grace. You see, we really do believe that whatever the empirical evidence seems to say, human beings really are free to choose either to obey or to disobey God. This freedom, we believe, does not come as original equipment, as it were, but comes as a divine gift from Almighty God. And, we further believe that God continually calls all persons to use that power to respond to the invitation to be saved and to keep on being saved.

The notion of prevenient grace preserves the biblical declaration that we are saved by grace alone, and it preserves the biblical declarations about our human moral responsibility. It shows sin to be exceeding sinful and salvation to be exceeding righteous. What could be more heinous than freely abusing the gift that enables us to choose rightly? What more glorious than freely setting it to choosing the Way, the Truth, the Life? Well, such is Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace.

Now, what do these things say to us as educators? One point to be made is that if the Holy Spirit has so gifted

us and our students with prevenient grace, you and I are never teaching in a morally neutral context. As long as we are talking about God's creatures, God's world, the products of mental and physical processes that are part of God's creation, we believe ourselves to be talking about God's own work. But we cannot speak of God's work without involving God. So God will be speaking in it all, trying to get us and our students to box our compasses with God as true north, as it were. Such is the seriousness of God's purpose that he will exercise every opening we give him to draw people to himself.

This does not mean that we should spiritualize everything in the spirit of the New England Primer or the old Baltimore series of Roman Catholic elementary textbooks. An over-eagerness to jump to some spiritual point may trivialize both the realities of God's creation and those of the Gospel.

We simply go about our teaching in the calm confidence that today, the Spirit is calling us and all of our students to himself and will use our work to do it. We are confident that God is taking today seriously and taking us and our students seriously. For that reason, we approach our disciplines with discipline and reverence, for they are and they will be means of grace.

Our students do not come to us with moral/spiritual tabulae rasae. For a lifetime, Almighty God and they have

engaged in moral/spiritual conversation, conversation that they could, can, did and do understand. Our engagement with them, then, comes in the context of a life already filled with fundamental decision-making. And, unless we are trivializing what we do as educators, we may count on the fact that the Holy Spirit will use what we do as educators to forward that conversation. Each of our disciplines offers its own angle of vision and data as an instrument in the conversation--some more obviously, some more subtly, than others. So, we teach day to day in the confidence that much more is going on than learning atomic weights or how to parse or what makes Velazquez a great painter. Through these comes something of the divine call to follow Christ, and they become part of the student's response to that call as well.

Of course, most of our students have already made the fundamental spiritual choice. They are Christian, however immaturely. That choice was probably made at Church. But there is continuing choice to be made. Prevenient grace still beckons.

Henry Zylstra helps us here: "If it is at Church that we make our choice for Christ, it is at school that we keep making that choice always more humanly and practically and culturally significant. Citizenship in the kingdom requires this kind of education." (Testament of Vision)

Here functions prevenient grace, the capacity for

choosing good and evil, but beyond that, prevenient grace calls on us and our students to choose between even good, better, and best. And once the good is known and recognized, that is, once one says, "This is good, or right, to know", learning turns moral or immoral, depending upon the decision made. And a life-style that is empty, poor, trivial, no matter how satisfactory to me as a creator of grade-books, no matter how outwardly conformable to Christian behavior, is a life-style saying "No" to grace.

Of course, that which we teach will not save. But insofar as what we teach is related to people and things in God's creation--now made so tawdry by Satan--the question of the God-with-human-beings and humans-with-creation relationships is not far away. And if we are not raising the question of how human life relates to this "stuff" and how this "stuff" relates to that "stuff", our students are raising it. And it is our confidence that the source of that question is the Holy Spirit itself, for one of the Spirit's basic ways of drawing us on is to get us to raise the question of meaning, which is the question of relationship.

Here, you and I may be privileged deputies or agents. There is no unattached datum in the wide universe. Everything is somehow, somewhere tied to everything else and it is in the process of education that the connections are made. This too

is a work of the Spirit. Our students are in the process of being urged on, divinely urged on, to seek meaning, to fit together the pieces of the great puzzle. And they are constantly beset by the Evil One, who tries to get them to misrelate and then to believe that they have related properly. The Spirit still sends "light", even in this situation. And the student is ever in the process of responding to that light.

So, whatever we teach, and whomever, we are not at work in a morally neutral context. That student is being asked to decide. Prevenient grace is at work, beckoning that student to morality and to salvation, but giving that student perfect freedom to choose otherwise.

What you and I teach will not save the student. But we hope that since it occurs in a context in which the Spirit has already raised the issues of reconciliation with the Father, has already raised the issue of relationship to nature--human and material, what we teach will not trivialize the Spirit's work.

Here, then, we warn ourselves against making our discipline the end rather than a means of grace. Here, then, we seek to relate, for ourselves, what we are doing with our means of grace to the means of grace offered by others.

Of course, we cannot forever be taking the time and the energy to show how all of this relates to all of that. But

we can continually be sensitive to the fact that this is precisely what the Spirit is doing and that the Spirit is calling for moral responsibility in the face of it. And we learn to expect, and help our students learn to expect, that there should and do come moments of luminous breakthrough, when even the most mundane datum becomes a vehicle of spiritual decision-making.

Especially important here is our understanding that the Spirit seeks, in the words of Scripture, "to guide into all truth." The Spirit continually conducts a sorting process, a process of separating truth from error, morally perceived. These days, one suspects that this sorting process concentrates on calling us and our students to understand the difference between trivial and significant, and between profane and holy.

Here, we teachers would exercise critical judgment, but to do so demands breadth on our part. After all, we got our graduate degrees by making a mountain of some small issue for a year. But in the longer run and in the broader reaches of life it was not so small. What we did was to master broad ranges of learning and aim all of it at one small problem. Successful confrontation with that small problem then gave us license to teach "in our field", as we say. But sad to say, learning has too often ceased with that confrontation and the reception of the license.

In our classrooms sit students who need help in dealing with both the ranges and the tiny problems, often not knowing the difference between them.

But even here, we believe that the Spirit plants a holy discontent, ever raising the issue of relative importance in the call to reconciliation. In such a context, you and I, also being drawn on by prevenient grace, that grace which makes us free to choose, must help the student develop sensitivity in structuring the priorities of life.

This brings us to the second characteristic of the Wesleyan perspective that bears on Nazarene higher education. It is what some call the dual foci of the pessimism of nature and the optimism of grace.

First the pessimism of nature. Wesleyans are convinced that where grace is rejected we may expect the worst of folks. Of course, evil sometimes dresses well, so the worst may appear in the garb of wisdom and truth. But where grace is not allowed to have its way, we know, as an article of faith, that evil will work and work vigorously.

Educationally, then, we may believe that the worst may be made of even our best ideas and efforts. And, more tragically, sometimes our unworthy ideas will be slicked up and sold for treasure. Cosmic evil works intelligently, aggressively, and personally. So, we can count on this: beside the usual

problems of ignorance and faulty communication, the Enemy is out to wreck the entire enterprise and will find willing accomplices among our peers and students. Now, obviously, not all opposition to our best ideas or to the best that our civilization offers is the work of cosmic evil incarnated. We ourselves do occasionally come up with notions that are plumb wacky and interpretations and attitudes that could be improved upon by just about any laboratory animal. It is not the sole fact that a particular idea or activity is opposed that indicates the workings of evil. Rather, we can be sure that evil is at work always and seeks instruments of expression, subtle and longterm, obvious and shortterm, clever and crude. And perhaps even worse, we shall be making some people too clever for their own good or for the good of society.

The full recognition of such data as these has driven some of our colleagues out of education. Some have gone into other occupations, others still carry educational titles and draw salaries from educational institutions--and even appear to teach--but they have ceased to educate; safety and lack of intellectual adventure mark them. And, truth to tell, most of us must admit that sometimes the temptation to fear is quite strong. The fact is, the act of teaching, real teaching, is an act of moral courage.

An act of moral courage, but an act that does give birth to far more than despair and Pyrrhic victories. There is another side of the Wesleyan understanding and that is that divine grace does all that it can short of coercion to help our student to say "Yes!" to the will of God and to the truth about himself or herself and about the world. The Spirit of God is at work to woo us and our students to absolute love of God and neighbor. And we Wesleyans-- here is our point--we Wesleyans believe that real transformation can take place to the point that any student, and any and all of us for that matter, really becomes Christlike. We are utterly optimistic about the power of sovereign grace to break through "sin and nature's night" and make us fully God's.

You and I as teachers may provide that student with some critical intellectual instruments. The Spirit works to urge that student to pick up those instruments and to use them entirely to the praise and glory of the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer. So, our optimism of grace looks beyond any triumphs and trophies that we can call our own. We know that our own work is transformed by that grace, and that it may become an element in the transformation of the student who, in turn, may help transform the world. We set absolutely no limits on what grace can do. And we

fully expect that even here, in this life, in this earth, it will do "exceeding, abundantly, above all that we can ask or think, according to the power (now) at work in us."

Yet another of the characteristics of the Wesleyan perspective that bears on Christian educating is the commitment to what has been called the Protestant Principle. Put negatively, the Protestant Principle systematically prohibits anything human to hold any place of ultimacy. So, in education, no way of seeking truth, no way of organizing knowledge, no organizational structure, no idea nor ideal, no person nor group of persons, no custom, no habit, nothing at all that is human is to be granted ultimacy. We systematically forbid it. This is a first principle. Put positively, the Protestant Principle systematically puts forward the absolute sovereignty of God--but not some bare sovereignty. It is the sovereignty of God as it is expressed in the Gospel that we put forward systematically. It is God's sovereign will to redeem (and we understand this in the profounder sense, not simply in the sense of one's being saved); and the Gospel, as the expression of that will, comes to all human beings where they are. So, no human situation is ultimate; the Gospel can manifest itself anywhere.

The uniquely Wesleyan twist to the Protestant Principle comes where we believe that God actually grants us an experience of grace in this life which enables us to submit com-

pletely to that divine sovereignty and to love God absolutely and neighbor as self. God's absolute sovereignty, we believe, can be a practiced and beloved reality. The destruction of all other putative sovereignties can be done by grace here and now. The Protestant Principle is not an ideal only for us. It may be a grand operational fact.

Now, what does this mean educationally? On the negative side, the meaning seems obvious. None of our disciplines, including theology, holds the last word. None of our ways of organizing knowledge, none of our ways of organizing ourselves for its propagation is ultimate. None of our ideas, not even any of our doctrinal propositions, whether in chemistry or theology, is ultimate. No specific method for reaching truth is the method for reaching truth.

This says that we investigate and present ^a ~~the~~ vast ^{broader} welter of human findings and opinion on this and [^] ~~that~~ than may be offered by some others. But we do present it. And it says, too, that where we find each other or our students making an ultimate of any method, opinion, or dogma, we will seek with all charity to point away from that idol to the Truth.

Being Christian, we have already found the Truth. But explication is forever necessary, and explication is always carried out in some specific human context. So, while we systematically refuse to canonize or idolize any explication,

we do take every explication seriously and submit it to critical judgment, for it stands at the intersection of divine revelation and the vast multitude of human needs. We give fair and full hearing to every serious attempt to define the human situation, including the aesthetic attempts, because these attempts arise from a sense of need. But we canonize none of them at all, for they are all, after all, human reflections, human expressions, human inventions. They are indeed manifestations of the workings of prevenient grace; they express in grand variety the human "Yes" or "No" to God's call to God's self, and in this light they are of immense importance. But they hold no ultimacy. We must hold ourselves and our students accountable here.

But let me put the matter in a Wesleyan mode, here. While the academic enterprise seeks to show that no human reflection holds ultimacy, the Wesleyan analytical spirit should differ from some others. We do seek to find the flaws and chinks and weaknesses, but we recognize also that there may be in any given notion, or theory, or work of art, some manifestation of the Gospel, however inchoately expressed. We believe that the Gospel, that great expression of divine sovereignty, may be manifested anywhere. We usually take personally the phrase "where sin abounds, grace abounds the more", or the phrase "grace has gone deeper than the stain

has gone." But these apply as well to the absolute sovereignty of God in the life of the intellect--even the sinful intellect. True, there are scientific and literary, philosophical and artistic efforts that lack any redeeming value. But could it be that these speak of the refusal of their creators to say "Yes" to God? Could they help our students and colleagues see something that we all need to see? The Wesleyan's confidence in the penetrating character of the sovereign will of God, of the Gospel, disposes us to assume first that there is some positive value in almost any serious intellectual effort. Lack of value must be proven, not assumed.

These uniquely Wesleyan characteristics, then, bear on our educational enterprise. I deeply regret that we lack time to show how each of these is especially poised to help us exercise leadership in contemporary higher education. Here's where I hope I have been especially heuristic.

III. The Contemporary Situation and the Wesleyan Opportunity

Now, let me quickly describe in outline the contemporary religious scene as it has to do with Christian higher education. I believe you will see why it seems that we have both the opportunity and the responsibility to take the lead.

First, the Holiness Movement, of which we are, of course, a part, currently shows a deep concern to return to its original commitment to involvement in social issues. Our students

are taken by the "servant" motif. Here in the midst of the "me generation", the narcissistic culture, we find and feel pressure to "do something." The theological and personal religious bases may not be spelled out as well as we would wish, and mixed motives abound, but the concern for others is quite evident.

This comes at a time when most of what might be called evangelical or conservative Protestantism is backing away from social concern, except on selected issues, largely because its theological bases are too small to risk involvement. (Let me toss out the word "premillennialism" as a hint to get your mind started.) Wesleyanism has it written into its theological constitution, as it were, that it must take seriously any proposed solution to any social issue but must absolutize none. So, for instance, there are Wesleyan free enterprisers and Wesleyan non-Marxist socialists. Imagine what a fruitful response to societal needs we could make if we could let these and other perspectives work and think in mutual agapaic accountability.

Educationally, we may personally commit as we will, but in fact we believe that we must commit. That's a necessary element of absolute love to God and neighbor. And as teachers, we encourage free and vigorous examination of seriously posed alternatives as manifestations of the work of God in human

minds. This process has been cut off or curtailed in large segments of evangelical Protestantism because of its having identified certain political and social stances as being Christian and others as incapable of being Christian. We, on the other hand, do not accept any particular ideology as ultimate and we need not, must not, present them to students as ultimates. We are not seeking for the ultimate in social organizations, only for ways to make any social organization a means of grace.

The difference between this point of view and that of the Fundamentalists and many neo-evangelicals is patent. In spite of their dogmatic premillennialism, they still demand a perfect earthly society. They simply cannot see society as a means of grace. It is an end in itself. Therefore, it is either good or evil.

A second factor in the current scene which calls for the presence of vital Wesleyan education is the fact that evangelicalism, which has its roots largely in the Reformed theological tradition, is showing signs of theological exhaustion and even collapse. It has always been a rather contentious tradition, but lately some of the skirmishes have taken on the characteristics of theological warfare. Much of the problem has to do with its traditional ways of talking about the nature and role of Scripture.

The commitment of the Reformed tradition to the authority of Scripture is laudable, of course, but its very way of talking about that authority has proven itself spiritually and intellectually untenable--at least in its more conservative forms. Christian faith simply cannot be reduced to belief in inerrant autographs of the biblical books. It is both too historical and too personal for that. Not personal simply in the terms of individualism, but personal in that at its base lies the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth, and at the heart of its role lies its addressing of itself to us as persons through the person of the Holy Spirit.

Here, our tradition has a strong and wholesome alternative view of the nature and role of the Bible. We believe in the authority of Scripture, but we have a way of doing it that demands the exercise of human reason and faith and does not force the Book to carry burdens that it was not written to bear. We believe that it is only in the Bible that we have the authorized account, as it were, of who and of what is truly ultimate. Scripture is no ultimate as a written document, though it is the ultimate written document. It is the ultimate vehicle of truth, but it is not the ultimate truth itself. We do insist that Scripture is binding for faith and practice. But this is not on its own authority. It is binding for faith and practice through the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, who makes the Bible true and binding upon those who would be faithful. Here is an understanding that brings all learning under biblical authority and legitimates it rather than placing it on the defen-

sive where it must prove its legitimacy again and again.

A third factor in the current situation which augurs for Wesleyan usefulness is the clear failure of secular education in values development and the very mixed record being written by the fundamentalists and other evangelicals in this matter. Here I only barely outline those aspects of the Wesleyan position that offer promise: the Wesleyan understanding that while the Bible stands supreme in spiritual authority, it is aided and abetted by reason, experience and tradition; and the Wesleyan instinct for the social even in a fallen world.

In insisting that authentic theologizing is grounded in love, Wesleyans, at their very best, have made ethical principle dependent first of all upon grace and not upon law. Their understanding of just how grace works has been gained by appeal to the entire "quadrilateral"--Scripture, reason, experience, tradition. Wesleyan ethics have been contextual, then. If one would understand that in the situation the Holy Spirit and the Church, grace and forgiveness, fallenness and sanctification are all present, then we may say that Wesleyan ethics are profoundly situational. The situation is one in which we believe we are being called to love God absolutely and our neighbor as ourselves, and one in which we believe God offers grace, through Christ's atonement, to see to the fulfillment of that call in the here and now. That puts the cookies on a very high shelf, ethically. But it is a position that is elegantly simple in the task of values-education.

The fourth aspect of the current situation which, it seems to me, gives heart to Wesleyans with a sense of vision is the strength of our academic faculties. They are as loyal to the

Church of the Nazarene as ever, and, more basically, loyal to the Lord who has called them. And they are skilled to an unprecedented level in their academic specialties. By and large, they are good teachers. They are well-connected, academically. All around the schools of the Church, one finds those whose teachers are, or were, the shakers and movers in their given disciplines. And we ourselves are beginning to make our own contributions to our fields at the highest professional levels. This is not an end in itself for us, but it does give us a platform in the wider academic world from which we may exercise the influence of our characters as well as our intellects.

This, in turn, has been creating another factor of great importance. Our teachers are now being sought out for their point of view. For the time being, this will remain at a professional level, except in religious studies where our people are already helping to shape theological agendas far larger than our own. It will not be long before some of us will be serving on the inner councils of our disciplines where the questions raised have implications far deeper than the sheerly professional.

Here, we shall stoutly resist the public relations use of such service if that use serves other presumptive absolutes. In this too, our concern will be absolute love of God and love of the neighbor.

We are no longer in a position to tolerate intellectual provincialism or slovenliness. We cannot program ourselves for mediocrity. We are, right now, being called to ranges of stewardship unenvisioned by our predecessors. This is a gift of grace, with grace accompanying to meet the challenge.

CONCLUSION

It was the thesis of this essay that a unique conjunction of events and the special theological characteristics of Wesleyanism which shape its perspective on higher education have placed us in a position to exercise leadership in church-related education for the foreseeable future. Of course, that thesis can be heard as a bit of wishful thinking, or as some triumphalist peptalk. I hope that it has come across as a declaration of realizable hope and as an assessment of the dimensions of our stewardship.

To make it more concrete, permit me to be so bold as to suggest a few modest steps toward its actualization.

First, it seems to me that we need to enter upon a thorough Wesleyanizing or re-Wesleyanizing process among ourselves--not at all in a parochial or provincial spirit and certainly not in an inquisitorial one. But in a spirit of gratitude for our heritage and for the wealth of resources that it offers us at the very deepest levels of intellectual and spiritual need and usefulness.

Could the Seminary, perhaps, or the Seminary in conjunction with the colleges, sponsor seminars or retreats at which qualified theological faculty could help newer college faculty especially (though it need not be limited to them) to appreciate the resources of the Wesleyan perspective in their work in our schools? These could not be off the cuff bull sessions but

Bassett

thoroughly professional colloquia. We are not talking of seminary degrees here but of the development of a perspective; of disposition, not dogma.

Along with this, we probably need to enter a thorough "liberal arts-izing" of our curricula. Some of this does go on from campus to campus with various levels of interdisciplinary conversation. And I am quite reluctant to make specific suggestions for any institution but my own. But it does seem to me that our graduates, the graduates of our schools, generally lack synthetic interests, critical capacities, and anything like the insight into the religious dimensions of their specialties that we would like for them to have. If we educators struggle to "integrate" faith and learning, we cannot expect that it has come naturally to our students.

Perhaps we need a journal on the order of the purposes of the Christian Scholar. Certainly we need more frequent conferences, both intra- and inter-disciplinary in which at least part of the time is given to the liberal arts, critical thinking, and theological dimensions of what we are up to. Perhaps we already have a cadre of teachers--an English prof here, a chemistry prof there, a business administration prof over there--who are doing quite well at helping their students develop synthetic interests and critical capacities in a Wesleyan mode. Would it be worth the while of College A to have that business administration prof come over from

College B, where he teaches, and work for a week with that department in College A in seminars, informal conversations, maybe lectures--whatever he or she is best at. That's not to say that none of the home team could do the job. It is to recognize that we do have some authentic experts among us who can teach us all a thing or two.

Third, it seems to me that we have a massive task before us in Wesleyanizing our constituencies. That is to say, educating them to understand just what it is that they have and may expect of their Nazarene institutions of higher learning. Choirs and other performing troupes, and development folks will continue to hold a large and very important part in getting our schools and their physical and spiritual needs before our people. But there are numbers of enterprises in which we as educators may engage to contribute directly to the spiritual and material welfare of our constituency beyond teaching their children and having taught many of them. For instance, in the area in which I live, financial investment seminars are all the rage. I wish I had a dollar for every letter I get inviting me to come, learn what I can do with the money that they think I have. Could our economics or business profs offer such seminars, held either on campus or in appropriate off campus areas, especially to our people but really to any who would be interested, and there help people develop a

deliberately Wesleyan understanding of financial stewardship as well? Could our educators in developmental psychology and education offer seminars in population centers in caring for the young, or the old, or any age, on the bases of a carefully wrought commitment to both one's academic discipline and the intellectual and spiritual perspective offered by our theological tradition?

Numbers of us are already deeply involved in direct help to the poor and the oppressed. This worthy work must continue. But it may be that a number of us could begin to invest the time and energy of preparation, travel and presentation demanded by the suggested schemes--and many more that come to all of our minds. It may mean some restructuring of curricula and of degree-program expectations placed upon faculty. But perhaps such projects are good ways to say that we exist to serve the people of God and stand to do it in ways that only we--thorough-going Wesleyan professional educators--can do it.

Fourth, it seems to me that we need somehow to make clear to ourselves and to our publics just what it is that we're up to. We are not campmeeting, we are not reform school, we are not "the welfare", we are not some sort of county fair. We are not buildings. Yet, somehow, we have let ourselves be advertised in such ways. And we have let it be a compliment when we are told, "Why, he or she sure didn't seem like a prof!" No one would argue for snootiness, I'm sure. But how can we help folks

understand that while we are "real people", we do in fact place at their disposal marvelous human resources that can help them to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?

Since the first time I read it, I've been attracted and inspired by the line written by Bertha Munro as she explained the philosophy that was to guide the production of the first college catalog published by ENC. It goes something like this: "It became the set purpose of President Williamson and I that the college should be better than the advertising."

Tooting our own horns is out of the question. But the fact is, you and I are in possession of resources in our theological tradition that place the possibilities of what may go in in the educational processes of our institutions beyond the capacity of ordinary language to convey it. We have a splendid heritage, our present finds us reasonably competent and intellectually healthy, our future may just be broader and grander, by the grace of God and for the sake of Christ, than we dare imagine.

To whom much has been given, of them much shall be required.

Presented at the Faith, Learning
and Living Conference
June 18-20, 1985
Point Loma Nazarene College
San Diego, CA