

Secularization Within the Church of the Nazarene

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Most Nazarenes believe the denomination is becoming more secular. January 1999 ANSR Poll results indicate that a majority of Nazarene lay members (53%) and pastors (61%) agree with the statement, "The Church of the Nazarene in the U.S. and Canada is becoming more secular." Similar proportions of lay members (53%) and pastors (60%) agree with the statement, "Most Nazarenes I know are becoming more secular."

Nazarene leaders worry that the church is no longer the vital spiritual force that it was a few decades ago. We allow culturally conditioned adaptations of the Special Rules. We revised the rule on movies. It was difficult to find an evening worship service on Super Bowl Sunday, at least in some areas of Colorado in 1999. But, perhaps most telling is the fact that the denomination now tolerates both a seminary and an association of sociologists.

There is a general pessimistic mood among us. In fact, both Nazarenes and Americans seem to believe most things are getting worse. At the close of this century the idea of continual deterioration is much easier to accept than the idea of continual progress. We live in a culture that likes to describe itself in terms of aftermath: post-Vietnam, post-Watergate, post-industrial, post-literate, post-denominational, post-intellectual, post-Christian, and post-modern. While we recognize the importance of hope, we are inclined to despair. We still talk about dreams, but we often sound more like Nebuchadnezzar than like Martin Luther King, Jr. King said, "I have a dream," and he gave us a vision of a better society. Nebuchadnezzar said, "I had a dream ... [but] The thing is gone from me" (Daniel 2: 3-5, KJV).

In the context of pervasive pessimism what do Nazarenes understand and believe about the future of religion in society? What is the state of secularization within our denomination? And, what is the role of the church in a secular, pluralistic society?

Secularization Issues for the Church of the Nazarene

Secularization is one of those confusing words where we all have a definition in mind, but our definitions may not agree. It has been used to describe the loss of the church's control of territories and governments (Peter Berger 1969, p. 107). It is also used in reference to the movement of functions, like welfare or education, from the church to other social institutions (Barbara Hargrove 1979, p. 26).

However, in this paper we are concerned primarily with a declining trust in religious explanations. According to Stark and Bainbridge, "Secularization, then, means to become worldly. More specifically, modern writers use the term *secularization* to mean the erosion of belief in the supernatural — a loss of faith in the existence of otherworldly forces" (1985, p. 429). If the sacred is equated with the unexplained — the mysterious — additions to human knowledge reduce the domain of the sacred. "In such a frame of reference it is easy to see why science should be taken as the enemy of religion, and it may be taken as evidence of highly advanced secularization that we attempt to use the techniques of social science to study religion. Truly, is nothing sacred?" (Hargrove 1979, p. 27).

Some understand education and science to be primary causes of secularization. However, many Nazarene scholars no doubt agree with Robert Bellah who argues that integration of science and religion is possible and desirable. He says, "I start with the assumption that the relation between religion and social science is complex and in some ways organic. This is in conscious contrast to one view of secularization that there is only a mechanical relation between science and religion, namely, the more of one the less of the other, and that with the rise of science in the modern world religion has been steadily declining" (1970, p. 237).

Bellah calls for something like the dialog and integration of science and religion which Nazarene scientists and theologians have been attempting. This dialog and integration will not be easily accomplished. Bellah writes, "When I speak of integration I do not mean some kind of fantastic syncretism of science and religion. They have different purposes, different limitations, different modes of action. But they are both part, and I would argue a necessary part, of every culture and every person. They need to exist in some vital and healthy whole in which each is integral. This means not simply a tacit agreement to ignore each other but open interchange between them with all the possibilities of mutual growth and transformation that that entails" (1970, p. 244).

With this understanding, it seems particularly important that our meeting this year brings together Nazarene sociologists and Nazarene Theological Seminary.

An important sociology of religion debate regarding secularization is going on which raises issues that may be important in a Nazarene dialog about science and religion. In March of 1993 the *American Journal of Sociology* published Stephen Warner's analysis of that debate. The fifty-page article, including twelve pages of references, reviewed the "vast, rapidly growing literature" regarding what he described as a paradigm shift in process. He describes secularization theory, identified with the early work of Peter Berger, as the older paradigm and suggests the newer paradigm, identified with the recent work of Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, is just emerging. Warner suggests that the older paradigm is based on the European religious experience and does not deal as well with American religion (1993, p. 1045).

Not all social theorists agree with Warner, of course. In fact, Nazarene sociologists undoubtedly take opposite sides in this debate. Disagreement among Nazarene sociologists is neither surprising nor significant. However, this debate presents an opportunity for a discussion between Nazarene sociologists and theologians in which the implications of Wesleyan-Arminian theology will inform and guide our evaluation of both secularization and rational choice theories. This seems especially important since our theoretical and theological understandings influence our thinking about the role of the church in a modern, pluralistic society.

Secularization — Extinction vs. Self-Limiting

The future of religion in society is one important issue raised in the debate. At one extreme, secularization theory has predicted the extinction of religion. "Thus, in starkest form, the question about the evolutionary fate of religion is a question about the fate of supernaturalism. To the question put this way, the answer must be that the evolutionary future of religion is extinction. Belief in supernatural beings and in supernatural forces that

affect nature without obeying nature's laws will erode and become only an interesting historical memory. ... the process is inevitable" (Wallace 1966, pp. 264–265).

Peter Berger takes a similar position. He asserts that secularization ultimately eliminates the efficacy of religion in society. He says, "Religious developments originating in the Biblical tradition may be seen as causal factors in the formation of the modern secularized world. Once formed, however, this world precisely precludes the continuing efficacy of religion as a formative force. ... historically speaking, Christianity has been its own gravedigger" (1969, p. 128).

On the other side of the debate, several have argued that trends in American society will not extinguish religion or even make it marginal to society. Robert Bellah writes, "My conclusion, then, runs about as contrary to so-called secularization theory as is humanly possible. It is my feeling that religion, instead of becoming increasingly peripheral and vestigial, is again moving into the center of our cultural preoccupations" (1970, p. 246).

Barbara Hargrove says, "There are many indications that the final result of the secularization of Christianity may be a resacralization of secular life. Parallel trends appear in the scientific world, where scientists on the frontiers of knowledge find themselves not so much expanding the realm of profane manipulation, perception, and control as entering into new worlds of unpredictability and wonder. Not only through a counterculture reacting against the strictures of a desecralized world, but through institutional structures within that world, the holy seems to be coming into a more central place in modern culture than would have been expected" (1979, p. 28).

Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge argue that, "Sometimes the pace of secularization speeds or slows, but the dominant religious organizations in any society are always becoming progressively more worldly, which is to say, more secularized. The result of this trend has never been the end of religion, but merely a shift in fortunes among religions as faiths that have become too worldly are supplanted by more vigorous and less worldly religions" (1985, p. 2). Furthermore, "*Secularization, even in the scientific age, is a self-limiting process.*" (1985, p. 454, emphasis added). The nature of God and the spiritual needs of people lead to renewal rather than extinction of religion.

This issue raises some important questions for Nazarenes. Does the Nazarene theological heritage lead us to the pessimistic conclusion that religion, and the Church of the Nazarene, will inevitably become at best marginal to society and perhaps extinct? Or, is our theology more optimistic? Is our heritage more consistent with inevitable demise or with the position taken by Stark and Bainbridge that secularization is a self-limiting process normally resulting in revival or the formation of new religious movements?

Social Influence — Coercion vs. Conversion

The nature of religious influence in society is a second significant issue raised by the secularization literature. This issue is summarized well by Thomas F. O'Dea in the context of his discussion of the five dilemmas that recur when religion is institutionalized, that is, when the sacred is embodied in profane structures. He calls one of those dilemmas "The Dilemma of

Power: Conversion vs. Coercion." He argues that as a religious group becomes institutionalized, its interests become intertwined with social and political interests. Furthermore, since religious commitment is weak and vulnerable in some individuals, there is a temptation for religious leaders to use social and political authority to coerce desired commitments and conduct (1970, p. 250).

This dilemma is part of the secularization debate. Although economic terminology is used on both sides, the central issue is the role of government. The debate might be expressed as a contrast between a norm of *coerced monopoly* and a norm of *competitive pluralism*. However, a basic issue, perhaps *the* basic issue, is whether religious affiliation and practice will be decided based on coercion by the government or decided by individuals independent of governmental assistance or interference (Warner 1993, p. 1053).

Secularization theory as presented by Peter Berger sees a religious monopoly and government coercion into religious allegiance as the natural condition from which we have deteriorated. Warner emphasizes the point that for Berger, "the *modern* American market situation is a degenerate one of 'loss,' 'rupture,' 'deprivation,' 'fragility,' 'tenuousness' and 'crisis,'" in contrast to the "durable traditional situation" (1993, p. 1053). For Berger, the protestant reformation started a process that resulted in multiple, competing religious groups. The "traditional coercive support" of the state was no longer available to any single religious group (1969, p. 131).

One result of viewing monopolistic coercion as the norm is a focus on the disruption that religious organizations face as they adjust to the circumstances of pluralism. "Yet it has been nearly two centuries since religion in the United States could be coercively imposed. Very few of the hundreds of religious organizations flourishing in the United States today — arguably only the Episcopal church (Swatos 1979) — have had to adjust to a pluralistic situation. Most of them [including the Church of the Nazarene] were born to it" (Warner 1993, p. 1054).

The other side of this dilemma is "Conversion" — influencing society to adopt Christian beliefs, values, norms, and practices through effective evangelism. O'Dea reminds us that, "the propagation of the religious message of Christianity has involved an invitation to interior change. This interior 'turning' or 'conversion' is the classical beginning of the religious life for the individual. ... Christians, both Catholic and Protestant, agree that the act of acceptance must be voluntary, involving such interior turning" (1970, p. 250).

In fact, Warner argues that American religious history is characterized more by effective evangelism than by a coercive monopoly. "[T]he Christianization of the United States was neither a residue of Puritan hegemony nor a transplantation of a European sacred canopy but an accomplishment of 19th century activists" (1993, p. 1055).

Most Nazarenes would probably agree with O'Dea that "some relation between the functionally essential values of society and the ultimate sanction of religion is requisite." However, most would also agree with him that "substituting external pressures for interior conviction" is detrimental both to the nation and to religion (1970, p. 251). Still for many Nazarenes, governmental authority to coerce belief, allegiance, and ethical practice appears to be an appealing alternative to the demands and fruits of the evangelistic mission of the church.

This issue raises some significant questions for us. Does Wesleyan–Arminian theology favor control of government in order to increase coercion to Christian beliefs, values and norms? Or, is vigorous, effective evangelism more consistent with our heritage?

Beliefs — Trivial vs. Vital

The secularization literature raises a third issue of importance for the church. Can rigorous standards of belief and practice be maintained in a pluralistic society? Peter Berger reminds us that, where there is a “cessation of coercion,” all of the “churches are ‘on their own’ in having to enlist the voluntary allegiance of their respective clienteles” (Berger 1967, p. 131). “As a result, the religious tradition which previously could be authoritatively imposed, now has to be *marketed*. It must be ‘sold’ to a clientele that is no longer constrained to ‘buy’.” “What happens here, quite simply, is that the religious groups are transformed from monopolies to competitive marketing agencies” (Berger 1967, p. 138).

Describing our heritage of sincere evangelism as “competitive marketing” is offensive to most Nazarenes. It seems to make our deep commitment to the evangelistic mission of the church merely selfish and manipulative. It impugns the motives of ministers and diminishes the decisions of converts.

From our beginning we have ministered in cultures where no religious monopoly existed. The gospel has always been proclaimed by Nazarene ministers in contexts where other denominations and religious groups were also working. We were, and are, deeply concerned that unbelievers would come to a saving knowledge of Christ. While there are disturbing exceptions, our concern generally has little, if anything, to do with a preoccupation about “selling” and “market share.” Nevertheless, many of us are concerned that in our desire to bring new people into the church, compromises may be made.

Bryan Wilson compared secularization in Europe and the United States. Although his understanding of American religion seems weak, he raises an important concern. He says, “Whereas in England secularization has been seen in the abandonment of the Churches — as in other European countries — in American it has been seen in the absorption of the Churches by the society, and their loss of distinctive religious content” (1969, p. 138).

In order to achieve and preserve unity with a diverse society and within diverse congregations, doctrinal distinctives are minimized. Hargrove summarizes Wilson’s position, “As beliefs become less important to members of the English churches, as they are likely to do in a secularized society, the members simply quit attending the churches that hold them as important. Secularization of beliefs is accompanied by a significant reduction in ritual participation. In the United States, on the other hand, trivialization of beliefs has occurred at a more central point — within the churches themselves” (1979, p. 57).

Perhaps evidence of this may be seen within the Church of the Nazarene in the number of pastors who describe their congregations as made up of people who really don’t have much connection with or understanding of the denomination. And, it may be seen in those members who describe themselves as Nazarenes with a small “n” — members, but not very Nazarene. Of course, both the members and the pastors may be referring just to organizational factors

rather than significant beliefs, values, and norms. However, it seems likely that some of the disassociation with the denomination involves a “trivialization” of belief.

For example, when Nazarenes were asked in the Fall 1996 ANSR Poll to indicate their opinion of the Promise Keepers movement, large proportions of both laity (94%) and pastors (90%) said their opinion was positive. Respondents were then asked how important each of several factors were in forming their opinion. As indicated in table 1, for both lay members and pastors the two reasons least often indicated as important were “The tradition of the church or churches you personally identify with” and “The role of theology and church doctrine”.

TABLE 1

Proportions Saying Various Reasons Were Important* In Forming Their Opinion of The Promise Keepers Movement

| | Lay Members | % | Pastors | % |
|--|--------------------|----------|----------------|----------|
| The role and use of Scripture | 211 | 97.2 | 219 | 94 |
| The immediate effects on Promise Keepers participants and their families | 211 | 97.2 | 209 | 90 |
| The Long-range effects on Promise Keepers participants and their families | 208 | 97.2 | 204 | 88 |
| The Long-range effects on Promise Keepers participants and their churches | 204 | 94.9 | 201 | 88 |
| The immediate effects on Promise Keepers participants and their churches | 203 | 94.4 | 205 | 89 |
| The role of human reason (perception, comparison, inference) to understand and interpret information | 142 | 68.6 | 167 | 73 |
| The role of theology and church doctrine | 118 | 55.1 | 162 | 70 |
| The tradition of the church or churches you personally identify with | 110 | 51.4 | 116 | 50 |

Source: Fall 1996 ANSR Poll *Choosing “Very Important” or “Important” where choices also included “Somewhat Important” and “Not Important”

In addition, many Nazarenes are concerned that commitment to vigorous outreach evangelism, however it is programmed and whatever it is called, will result in compromise and trivialization of the essentials of our heritage. In terms of traditional secularization theory, this is a concern that in a competitive religious market churches must compromise in order to attract fickle consumers.

Stephen Warner asserts that “the concept of a competitive religious market entails neither that religious organizations pander to the lowest common denominator of spiritual commitment nor that religious consumers constantly compare competing suppliers’ responses to their fixed demands.” When a religious group is ineffective in serving its members or potential converts, it can change “the distribution of its effort, not its basic teaching.” Indeed, “research indicates that recent denominational growth and decline patterns are largely explained by patterns of new church plantings.” If the ideal in secularization theory is “the religious monopoly inaugurated in Europe by Constantine in the 4th century,” the ideal in the

pluralistic American society “is the furious competition to evangelize North America in the 19th, the revivalism of the Second Great Awakening and later” (1993, p. 1057–1058).

Effective evangelism and ministry require the church to be near enough to people geographically and culturally that they can be reached. But, it need not compromise its doctrine and heritage. In fact, Dean Kelley argues that reducing the demands of the faith to attract new members is counterproductive. Contrary to the expectation that catering to weak commitment would result in growing denominations, he found that it was strict churches that grew during the period of his study (1972).

There has been considerable concern within the Church of the Nazarene that the ratio of new members to total members indicates a real threat to our ability to transmit the beliefs, values, traditions, and norms of the church. Table 2 summarizes this ratio and other membership patterns over the last four decades. The ratio of total members to new Nazarenes in the previous decade is presented in the fourth column from the left. It has dropped from 63% in the sixties to 47% in the nineties. It was about 1980, when the ratio was near 60%, that many became alarmed that with so high a proportion of the membership having joined in the previous decade, doctrines and traditions were at serious risk.

However, as the right column indicates, the more serious problem appears to be retention of new members. Since the equivalent of about 70% of the new Nazarenes are lost within each decade, the threat of a large proportion of the members being new in any decade is overstated. Furthermore, this ratio has declined steadily from 63% three decades ago.

TABLE 2
Membership and New Nazarene* Patterns by Decade

| Decade | New Nazarenes | Total Members | Total/New Ratio | Net Gain | Members Lost |
|---------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| 1959–1968 | 238,532 | 376,611 | 63% | 76,601 | 161,931 |
| 1969–1978 | 288,247 | 475,422 | 61% | 98,811 | 189,436 |
| 1979–1988 | 284,180 | 561,182 | 51% | 85,760 | 198,420 |
| 1989–1998 | 301,396 | 635,070 | 47% | 73,888 | 227,508 |

*New members by profession of faith and from other denominations

**New Members minus net gain. Some of this loss was undoubtedly older members, however in most organizations the newest members are the most likely to withdraw. Our longitudinal study of New Nazarenes who joined in 1989 suggests the newest members are also the most likely to withdraw from Nazarene congregations.

Nevertheless, the issue of trivial vs. vital belief is significant and raises some important questions. Does Wesleyan–Arminian theology teach us about the legitimacy or importance of outreach evangelism? How would our heritage suggest we deal with the manipulation and compromise of some clergy and lay leaders? Is it possible to carry out a vigorous evangelistic initiative without trivializing beliefs? How has the Wesleyan tradition avoided trivialization and taught the doctrines of the church to new converts?

Secularization Indicators about the Church of the Nazarene

Theodore Caplow, observes that, "Because secularization involves the soft facts of changing consciousness as well as the hard facts of changing social arrangements, it is a difficult trend to prove or disprove objectively." However, he proposes that if secularization had been underway in Muncie, Indiana between the Lynds' studies in 1924–1935 and the Middletown III studies in 1977–1981, "it should have all or most of the following consequences:

1. A decline in the number of churches per capita;
2. A decline in the proportion of the population who regularly attend religious services;
3. A decline in the proportion of weddings and funerals held under religious auspices;
4. A decline in religious endogamy, that is the tendency to marry within a religious denomination;
5. A decline in the enrollment of religious schools;
6. A declining proportion of the labor force engaged in church occupations;
7. A declining proportion of the labor force engaged in church occupations;
8. The dwindling of new sects, and of new movements in existing churches;
9. Increasing attention to secular topics in sermons and liturgy;
10. A decline in the more emotional forms of religious observance;
11. A decline in private religious devotions" (in an address called "Looking for Secularization in Middletown" published in McNamara 1984, p. 107).

While there are obvious differences between an analysis of secularization within a community and a denomination, this list suggests some of the indicators we might usefully examine. Unfortunately, data are not readily available for all of these areas. However, it is possible to look at several similar measures.

Distribution of Ministry — Planting New Churches

The number of congregations per capita has declined slightly in the last twenty years. It has gone from about ten churches per 1,000 members at the close of the 1978 assembly year to about eight churches per 1,000 members at the close of the 1998 assembly year. Another way to describe this reality is that the average (mean) membership size of Nazarene congregations in the United States and Canada was 97 in 1978 and it is now 126. This does not appear to be evidence of secularization. In fact, it might be an indication of spiritual vitality and organizational improvement.

Church planting may provide a better indication of secularization in our denomination. Warner's review of the literature suggests that secularization in society will be more likely if the church fails to plant churches and thereby extend the ministry of the church into areas of spiritual need. Secularization has not been as extensive in America as in Europe at least partly because evangelical Protestants have given special attention to people at risk (1993, p. 1057–1058).

Bill Sullivan observes that in the Church of the Nazarene, "most of our churches are located in non-growth areas. Our congregations were established in those sites many years ago. At that

time, those locations were populated by young families with school-age children. Now those communities are filled with 'empty nesters' and senior citizens" (1998, p. 1). Table 3 examines churches organized. If this is an indication of secularization, the Church of the Nazarene is more secular than it was in earlier decades.

| TABLE 3 | | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|----------|
| Churches Organized by Decade | | | |
| | Number | Existing in | |
| Year | Organized | 1998 | % |
| Early years | 259 | 114 | 44% |
| 1910-19 | 1,393 | 331 | 24% |
| 1920-29 | 1,500 | 670 | 45% |
| 1930-39 | 1,476 | 738 | 50% |
| 1940-49 | 1,448 | 865 | 60% |
| 1950-59 | 1,558 | 1,004 | 64% |
| 1960-69 | 670 | 482 | 72% |
| 1970-79 | 422 | 335 | 79% |
| 1980-89 | 653 | 558 | 85% |
| 1990-99 | 467* | 316 | 97%** |

* Projected

**Of churches already organized during the 1990s

Participation

In the Church of the Nazarene it has been expected that most members will participate in most Sunday morning worship services during the year. In a church where membership is restricted, it is also expected that most Sundays there will be children and new Christians attending who have not yet joined the membership. In addition, evangelical congregations would hope to welcome unbelievers, potential converts, to their worship services. Therefore, it might be expected that the size of the worship attendance could be larger than the formal membership — a ratio greater than one hundred percent. As table 4 indicates, over the last twenty years this ratio has declined in churches of all sizes. To the extent that participation is an indication of secularization, the Church of the Nazarene is more secular than it was in 1978.

| TABLE 4 | | | |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Percentage* of Members Attending | | | |
| Worship on an Average Sunday Morning | | | |
| Number of | 1978 | 1988 | 1998 |
| Members | | | |
| Under 50 members | 131% | 124% | 115% |
| 50-99 Members | 101% | 92% | 87% |
| 100-249 Members | 94% | 85% | 79% |
| 250 or More Members | 87% | 78% | 77% |

*Ratio of Sunday morning worship attendance to church membership at the beginning of the assembly year.

Enrollments in Nazarene Schools

If secularization is taking place in the Church of the Nazarene, it might be expected that there would have been a decline in enrollments in the church’s schools. However, according to pastors’ reports of enrollments in the elementary and secondary schools of the church, summarized in table 5, enrollments have increased slightly over the last decade. If enrollments in Nazarene schools are an indication of secularization, the denomination is less secular than it was a decade ago.

| TABLE 5 | |
|---|-------------------|
| Enrollments in Nazarene K-12 Schools | |
| Year | Enrollment |
| 1989 | 9,730 |
| 1990 | 8,676 |
| 1991 | 9,200 |
| 1992 | 8,979 |
| 1993 | 9,743 |
| 1994 | 10,317 |
| 1995 | 10,774 |
| 1996 | 10,442 |
| 1997 | 10,577 |
| 1998 | 10,617 |

Source: General Secretary’s record of pastors’ reports

Nazarene Ministers

Caplow suggests that if secularization is occurring in a community, there should be a “declining proportion of the labor force engaged in church occupations” (in McNamara 1984, p. 107). Following that reasoning, it might be expected that attitudes toward careers in ministry would be an indication of secularization in the Church of the Nazarene. The more secularized we have become, the more negative the attitudes would be.

In the Fall 1991 ANSR Poll Nazarenes were asked, “How would you feel if your child or grandchild told you that he or she wanted to be a Nazarene minister?” As table 6 indicates, the response was quite positive rather than negative.

| TABLE 6 | | | | |
|---|--------------------|----------|----------------|----------|
| Nazarene Attitudes* toward Careers in Ministry | | | | |
| | Lay Members | | Pastors | |
| Response | N | % | N | % |
| Very happy | 115 | 68% | 180 | 70% |
| Happy | 36 | 22% | 57 | 22% |
| Neither happy nor unhappy | 10 | 6% | 13 | 5% |

| | | | | |
|--------------|---|----|---|----|
| Unhappy | 4 | 2% | 4 | 2% |
| Very Unhappy | 4 | 2% | 1 | 1% |

*Responses to the question, "How would you feel if your child or grandchild told you that he or she wanted to be a Nazarene minister?"

The number of students preparing for, or open to, careers in ministry would be another way to measure attitudes toward ministry. In 1990 Willis Snowbarger, in the office that has become the commissioner of the International Board of Education, initiated a survey of the career intentions of students on the campuses of Nazarene colleges. The institutional research director at Mount Vernon Nazarene College developed a survey instrument.

This study was conducted annually on each of the Nazarene campuses in the United States for several years. While the proportion varied slightly each year, about one-third of the students of all faiths responding to the survey indicated that they were planning for, or open to, careers in ministry. In the context of the twenty-seven career categories listed on the survey, "Ministry through the Church" was more likely than any other single option to be indicated as the student's first career choice. This response is more consistent with spiritual and institutional vitality than with advanced secularization in the denomination.

A third indicator of attitudes toward ministry is the pattern of additions and attritions from the corps of Nazarene ministers. Table 7 summarizes this data. If secularization is an increasing problem, it might be expected that losses would outnumber gains. Instead, gains have outnumbered losses. Over the decade reported in this table, 2,539 Nazarene elders and 288 deacons have been ordained in the United States and Canada. More than 5,000 newly licensed ministers and 300 ministers recognized from other denominations have been added to the corps. In comparison almost 4,000 ministers have been lost — 1,373 died and 1,457 retired.

In fact, in the last decade the Nazarene ministerial corps has probably not increased by the more than 1,500 suggested by table 7. Ministers with district licenses who failed to apply for the required annual license renewal may lapse from the corps without being formally removed. The current initiatives from Pastoral Ministries to nurture the call, improve educational preparation, and enhance mentoring are undoubtedly important in helping licensed ministers survive. Still, these losses are among Christians who have already answered God's call and committed themselves to ministry. Secularization does not appear either to be preventing significant additions to the corps or to be rapidly depleting the corps of ministers available for service.

TABLE 7

Patterns in the Corps of Nazarene Ministers in the United States and Canada

| Type | 1989 | 1990 | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | Totals |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| Newly Licensed | 465 | 480 | 502 | 492 | 506 | 534 | 518 | 550 | 499 | 533 | 5,079 |
| New Ordained | 248 | 253 | 265 | 258 | 258 | 239 | 251 | 240 | 282 | 245 | 2,539 |
| New Ordained Deacons | 28 | 31 | 28 | 17 | 32 | 37 | 36 | 19 | 32 | 28 | 288 |
| Recognized | 49 | 33 | 32 | 32 | 22 | 43 | 39 | 29 | 17 | 21 | 317 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Restored | 13 | 27 | 20 | 25 | 23 | 22 | 21 | 19 | 13 | 12 | 195 |
| Total | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Additions* | 514 | 513 | 534 | 524 | 528 | 577 | 557 | 579 | 516 | 554 | 5,396 |
| Deceased | 128 | 121 | 119 | 146 | 152 | 141 | 154 | 161 | 103 | 148 | 1,373 |
| Retired | 166 | 199 | 133 | 139 | 137 | 156 | 137 | 143 | 110 | 137 | 1,457 |
| Removed | 77 | 88 | 83 | 105 | 93 | 96 | 101 | 95 | 145 | 117 | 1,000 |
| Formal | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Attritions** | 371 | 408 | 335 | 390 | 382 | 393 | 392 | 399 | 358 | 402 | 3,830 |
| Net Change in Corps*** | 143 | 105 | 199 | 134 | 146 | 184 | 165 | 180 | 158 | 152 | 1,566 |

Source: General Secretary's annual summary of ministerial assignments

*Total does not include newly ordained elders, new deacons, and restored ministers on the assumption that they were added to the corps earlier as newly licensed ministers. On the other hand, losses both by retirement and death are included in the total attritions although it seems likely that some of the losses by death had already been counted in some previous year as losses by retirement.

**Attritions by failure to renew a district license are significant and are apparently not included in the formal record.

***Total additions minus total formal attritions. In each year the net change was an increase.

Nazarene Per Capita Giving

Giving is another measure of participation. As table 8 indicates, when adjusted for inflation, giving per participant has increased slightly over the last twenty years in all congregational sizes except the smallest category. If the financial commitments of participants are an indication of secularization, it would appear that there has not been either great deterioration or improvement in the last two decades.

| Number of Worshippers | 1978 | 1988 | 1998 |
|----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Under 50 | \$1,120 | \$595 | \$611 |
| 50-99 | \$624 | \$616 | \$629 |
| 100-249 | \$664 | \$701 | \$726 |
| 250 or more | \$730 | \$803 | \$808 |

*Total contributions, adjusted for inflation, divided by average Sunday morning worship attendance.

Denominational Loyalty

Denominational loyalty may be an indicator of the influence of the church in members' lives and therefore a measure of their secularization. As table 9 indicates, two out of five lay members (43%) and three out of five pastors (62%) say they cannot imagine a time when they will not be a Nazarene. An additional one-fourth of lay members (25%) and one in five

pastors (19%) indicate that if they were to change denominations, it would be to another holiness denomination.

TABLE 9

Nazarene Loyalty* to the Denomination: Anticipating the Future

| Response | Lay Members | | Pastors | |
|---|-------------|--------|---------|--------|
| | N | % | N | % |
| I cannot image a time when I will not be a Nazarene | 96 | 43.20% | 149 | 61.80% |
| I am committed to the Church of the Nazarene but might attend a church in another holiness denomination someday | 56 | 25.20% | 45 | 18.70% |
| I am committed to the Church of the Nazarene but might attend another evangelical church someday | 36 | 16.20% | 32 | 13.30% |
| Although I am a Nazarene now, I could easily see myself attending a church in another denomination | 20 | 9.00% | 13 | 5.40% |
| I don't really think of myself as Nazarene | 14 | 6.30% | 2 | 0.80% |
| Totals | 222 | 100% | 241 | 100% |

*January 1996 ANSR Poll responses to the question, "Which one statement best describes you?"

A second question in the January 1996 ANSR Poll asked how important their Nazarene membership would be if their circumstances changed substantially and they were searching for a new church home. As table 10 indicates, while few lay members (10%) and pastors (20%) said they would only consider Nazarene congregations, most lay members (74%) and pastors (75%) say they would first consider Nazarene churches and then consider others only if there was not a suitable Nazarene church. This indication that there is still considerable denominational loyalty among Nazarenes may be an indication that secularization is somewhat limited.

TABLE 10

Nazarene Loyalty* to the Denomination: Contemplating a Life Change

| Response | Lay Members | | Pastors | |
|---|-------------|--------|---------|--------|
| | N | % | N | % |
| I would only consider Nazarene churches in my search | 22 | 9.90% | 48 | 19.80% |
| I would first consider Nazarene churches in my search and then consider others only if there was not a suitable Nazarene congregation | 165 | 74.30% | 181 | 74.80% |
| I would consider Nazarene churches in my search along with other churches | 34 | 15.30% | 13 | 5.40% |

| | | | | |
|--|-----|-------|-----|-------|
| I would probably not consider attending a Nazarene church | 1 | 0.50% | 0 | 0.00% |
| I would definitely look to attend a church of another denomination | 0 | 0.00% | 0 | 0.00% |
| Totals | 222 | 100% | 242 | 100% |

*January 1996 ANSR Poll. Lay members were asked, "If you were to move out of state, and the place you moved to had many churches from which to choose, which of the following would most nearly describe your search for a new church home?" Pastors were asked, "If you were no longer pastoring, and moved to a place that had many churches from which to choose, which of the following would most nearly describe your search for a new church home."

The Role of the Church of the Nazarene in Secular Society

There is considerable debate within our denomination regarding the appropriate role of a holiness church in a secular, pluralistic society. Some would argue that the church should gain substantial control of government in order to coerce belief, allegiance, and Christian practice. Others argue that the church should withdraw from society forming some sort of protected enclave. A third alternative would be some form of constructive engagement. There are historical and contemporary examples of these three approaches.

Political Dominance and Coercion

Wouldn't it be nice to go back to the pre-secularization days when the Pope ruled the empire and kings were subordinate to religious authorities. Political domination in order to coerce ethical behavior and perhaps orthodox belief is very appealing to many Nazarenes. Perhaps Constantine in the fourth century provides a model of this approach to the role of the church in a secular society.

O'Dea asserts that there is a genuine dilemma here. There is an important overlap between government and religion such that some form of mutual support is important to both. Responsible religion requires involvement in the other institutions of society since religious values must be lived out in the culture. Effective government needs the support of religion since shared values are necessary for the continued life of society (1970, pp. 250-251). Responsible Christians and their churches must be involved in making the society better, more Christlike. There seems to be a recurring temptation, however, to achieve political dominance in order to substitute morality by coercion for morality based on internal conviction.

This raises important questions. What does our theology and tradition suggest regarding this approach to the appropriate role of the denomination in a secular society? In the Wesleyan tradition has the church normally worked to secure control of government in order to coerce religious allegiance, beliefs, values, and norms?

Devout Seclusion

When H. Richard Niebuhr wrote about the relationship between Christ and culture, he observed that this question of the appropriate relationship between Christianity and culture is an enduring one. Christians throughout the centuries have struggled with it and have produced no single Christian answer. In fact, he identifies five answers that Christians have adopted. One of the answers he describes is this second possible role for the Church of the Nazarene in secular society — isolation. Niebuhr called it "Christ against culture." Groups which have taken this position have urged their followers to "come out from among them and be separate" (Niebuhr 1951, pp. 2, 40–41, 45–82; II Corinthians 6: 17). Perhaps the Israelites in Egypt provide an ancient example and the American Amish a current example of this approach to the role of the church in a secular society.

In some sense, Christians have always been resident aliens in whatever country or time they have lived. Our citizenship is in the Kingdom of God and we are, therefore, never natural citizens of any merely human society.

Experience suggests that there is considerable discomfort and threat in the status of "alien". The taken for granted privileges of citizenship are denied to aliens. Therefore, aliens are inclined to form isolated colonies in which they celebrate their home culture and avoid rejection or contamination through association with the natives. Missionaries have struggled with this reality for many years. Some missionaries have isolated themselves in fenced compounds where the American culture, or some American subculture, could be preserved.

Our question is, does our heritage suggest that the church should withdraw from secular society?

Cultural Engagement

A third alternative for the role of the Church of the Nazarene in society would be some form of engagement with the culture. This is like Niebuhr's description of the conversionist answer to the appropriate relationship between Christianity and culture. He called it "Christ the transformer of culture." Describing this approach, Niebuhr says, "The men who offer what we are calling the conversionist answer to the problem of Christ and culture evidently belong to the great central tradition of the church. Though they hold fast to the radical distinction between God's work in Christ and man's work in culture, they do not take the road of exclusive Christianity into isolation from civilization, or reject its institutions with Tolstoyan bitterness" (1951, p. 43, 190).

While we are not theologians, this approach seems most appropriate to us. Jesus teaches that Christians are to be salt and light in the world (Matthew 5: 13–16). In John 17: 15 he prays not that we would be taken out of the world, but rather that we would be kept from evil while we are in the world.

Jesus seems to have disappointed some of his followers by refusing to seek political dominance in order to impose his teaching. His example and teaching do not seem to support protected enclaves for his followers.

Wesley's culture seems to have been somewhat less than authentically Christian. His approach appears to have been neither political dominance nor separation.

Does the Nazarene heritage suggest that our response to American secularization should be constructive engagement with society rather than political dominance and coercion or devout seclusion?

Conclusion

Undoubtedly secularization has affected the Church of the Nazarene. All of our history has taken place without the "sacred canopy" of a coercive religious monopoly in which our theology might have been the taken for granted understanding of reality. As we enter the twenty-first century, the Church of the Nazarene in the United States must deal with a secular, pluralistic culture.

Within the denomination there appears to be a widespread mood of pessimism. Many appear to expect a triumph of secularization and the eventual extinction of the church. We have considered some indicators of elements of secularization within the Church of the Nazarene. While there is certainly some evidence of secularization, there are also reassuring signs.

For us, the issues raised and the questions they suggest about our Wesleyan–Arminian theology seem more important than the empirical indicators. Our ability to state the questions is limited. However, perhaps the questions we have suggested are enough to increase the dialog between Nazarene sociologists and theologians. We asked:

- Does the Nazarene theological heritage lead us to the pessimistic conclusion that religion, and the Church of the Nazarene, will inevitably become at best marginal to society and perhaps extinct? Or, is our theology more optimistic? Is our heritage more consistent with inevitable demise or with the position taken by Stark and Bainbridge that secularization is a self-limiting process normally resulting in revival or the formation of new religious movements?
- Does Wesleyan–Arminian theology favor control of government in order to increase coercion to Christian beliefs, values and norms? Or, is vigorous, effective evangelism more consistent with our heritage?
- Does Wesleyan–Arminian theology teach us about the legitimacy or importance of outreach evangelism? How would our heritage suggest we deal with the manipulation and compromise of some clergy and lay leaders? Is it possible to carry out a vigorous evangelistic initiative without trivializing beliefs? How has the Wesleyan tradition avoided trivialization and taught the doctrines of the church to new converts?
- What does our theology and tradition suggest regarding the appropriate role of the denomination in a secular society? In the Wesleyan tradition has the church normally worked to secure control of government in order to coerce religious allegiance, beliefs, values, and norms? Does our heritage suggest that the church should withdraw from secular society? Or, does the Nazarene heritage suggest that our response to American secularization should be constructive engagement with society?

Several years ago I (Ken) was invited by the local Methodist pastor to join the ministers fellowship in Eshowe, Natal, in the Republic of South Africa. As we became acquainted, this group of Lutheran, Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Methodist ministers asked me to tell them about the Church of the Nazarene. I tried to briefly describe our history and theology. When I had finished, someone asked one of the secularization questions, "Why all this splintering of the Christian community? Particularly in the colonies, why are we always starting new branches of the faith?" I felt some corporate guilt, but as I recall it, I wasn't very defensive. I said something like, "That's a good question, but don't ask just me. Why did you Methodists splinter from the Anglicans? And, why did you Anglicans and Lutherans break off from the Catholics?" At that point we began what I remember as a very open and helpful discussion. Finally one of the Roman Catholics summarized our discussion in a way that has continued to challenge me over the intervening twenty-five years. He said, "I think God is always faithful to renew His church. Some of the time we allow that renewal to take place within the church. Some of the time we refuse to allow His renewal, so God goes around us to bring renewal through a new group. But, God is always faithful to renew His church."

"Western intellectuals have misread the secularization of these groups as the doom of religion in general. But it is foolish to look only at sunsets and never observe the dawn: the history of religion is not only a pattern of decline; it is equally a portrait of birth and growth" (Stark and Bainbridge 1985, p. 3).

It appears to us that Nazarenes may need a reminder of the importance of expecting the dawn.

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