

THE ROLE OF DENOMINATIONAL PARADIGMS IN IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

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Conceptual paradigms, according to Thomas Kuhn, control even the more rational scientists' ability to accept and interpret evidence. On the one hand, our paradigms help us. They direct our attention to some things we might otherwise miss. On the other hand, they limit us. At the extreme the paradigms we hold may make us unable to perceive or accept important facts (1970, 150).

If the conceptual paradigms held in the church influence our interpretation, our ideals, and our strategies, it is important for us to understand them. Nazarenes undoubtedly use a variety of paradigms to make sense of our denomination and world. The best of these are probably derived from our faith. However, we are probably also influenced by the paradigms of the larger American culture. The most influential paradigm among Nazarene leaders, whichever that is, probably shapes not only our present realities as a denomination, but also our future identity. Therefore, it seems important to include in our discussions of Nazarene identity a consideration of the conceptual paradigms we use.

I have included a replication of the 1988 study of the corps of Nazarene pastors as an appendix to this paper. This 1996 analysis of our pastors is a description that addresses issues of tenure in service to local congregations, experience and turnover in the corps, the context in which Nazarene pastors serve, and the adequacy of the corps for the future. Of course, mere description is never adequate. Sociologists have been criticized for describing *what is* without helping us understand, or achieve, *what should be*. Some of the criticism is appropriate. Generating accurate data is often so demanding that the available resources are exhausted before the theoretical implications are made explicit. However, the criticism is not always justified. In fact, adding the insights of social theory to denominational discussions of significant issues has been central in the mission of the Association of Nazarene Sociologists of Religion (ANSR). We have not always been convinced that our vision of what should be has been adequately heard, but we have rarely been shy about offering it.

In this paper I want to continue our tradition of contributing to the discussion of what should be. I have two goals. First, I want to use a debate in the sociology of religion to stimulate our discussion of alternative paradigms which, I believe, significantly affect our sense of identity as a denomination. Then, I want to use the description of the 1996 corps of pastors as an example of the effect of paradigms on our consideration of three basic questions raised by the description: (1) "What do these facts mean about what is?" (2) "What should be?" and (2) "Given this present reality, what must happen if we are to move toward what should be?"

In March of 1993 the *American Journal of Sociology* published Stephen Warner's analysis of an important debate in the sociology of religion. 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.

One of the paradigms Warner reviewed deals with secularization. According to this paradigm, as modernization increases, religion becomes more marginal and is replaced by secular understandings and values. From this viewpoint it seems clear that we live in a post-Christian era in a society that is hostile toward the church. The demise of the traditional family is near. Without moral values, the criminal population increases so rapidly that we cannot build enough jails fast enough to house it. Churches must increasingly appeal to participants who are selfish consumers. We can no longer take the loyalty of our people for granted. Religious ideas cannot be authoritatively imposed. We should not use the Bible, the hymnal, or symbols like the cross since Americans have few, if any, Christian understandings. Warner's summary of recent research findings notes that between one-third and one-half of poll respondents have changed denominations in their lives. One-fifth of those raised Catholic no longer identify with that faith. The proportion of Americans claiming no religious connection, the "nones," has risen from 2%-3% a generation ago to 7%-9%. There is a growing shift from "collective-expressive" church membership to "individual-expressive" - voluntary and independent of other social ties (Warner 1993, 1075). This paradigm appears to be the dominant understanding both among social scientists and in the church.

The other paradigm deals with the vitality of American religion. It views the church and individuals as free agents who are able to make choices. It is not deterministic. It tends to see the church as an independent variable, able to influence the society. While few, if any, would argue that all is well with our society or with the church, from the viewpoint of this paradigm it is clear that religion has not become marginal to American society. Warner points out that Jimmy Carter's confession as a born-again Christian and Jesse Jackson's public prayers were surprising and particularly difficult to understand for those who looked at our society from the secularization paradigm (Warner 1993, 1046). The emerging paradigm sees as significant the fact that from 1776 to 1996 church membership has increased from about 10% to about 60% (Warner 1993, 1049). The research literature suggests that more than 90% of Americans believe in God, 70% believe in an afterlife, 70% claim church membership, and 40% attend weekly (Warner 1993, 1046). While families need help, the divorce rate peaked more than a decade ago and has been slowly declining. Indeed, in this election season politicians have found it expedient to announce their support of families and morality in the media because so many voters are committed to these issues.

Terminology tends to interfere with our consideration of ideas. For example, the label "old" paradigm suggests a negative evaluation and the "new" paradigm's use of economic terminology does not make it more attractive to many Christians. If I use "free-will," rather than rational choice or market competition, to describe one of the paradigms, the label is more acceptable to some. However, the corresponding use of "determinism," rather than secularization, to describe the other paradigm is probably less acceptable among Wesleyan-Arminians. Furthermore, Kuhn's description of paradigms suggests that neutrality is not likely for any of us. All of us operate within some paradigm which influences our opinion of competing paradigms. Still, it seems valuable for us to discipline ourselves toward neutrality and honest evaluation of the impact of denominationally accepted paradigms on the identity we develop in the future.

Stephen Warner makes six key points:

1. The secularization thesis is the accepted wisdom. However, this paradigm does not easily explain many of the recent research findings (Warner 1993, 1048), or the reality that “religion in the United States is and has long been (a) disestablished, (b) culturally pluralistic, (c) structurally adaptable, and (d) empowering” (Warner 1993, 1074).
2. The emerging, free will paradigm starts with the reality that during the rapid modernization of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century the proportion of the American population involved in churches increased greatly. The Second Great Awakening was not a nostalgic return to a previous situation of widespread religious participation. Instead, it was the result of strenuous, and largely successful, “efforts of early 19th-century revivalists to bring into religious fellowship the masses of common people who had been ignored by colonial religious establishments (Warner 1993, 1049-1050).

While the new paradigm often uses economic imagery, it is not defined by it. Instead, the key concept in understanding American religion, for this paradigm, is the government’s disestablishment of religion and the resulting opportunity for a variety of religious groups to carry out evangelism and other ministries.

3. Diversity is the normal pattern in American religion. Religion is the “preeminent voluntary associational form in our society.” Warner quotes Timothy Smith, “Immigrant communities . . . were not transplants of traditional institutions but communities of commitment and, therefore, arenas of change. Often founded by lay persons and always dependent on voluntary support, their structures, leadership, and liturgy had to be shaped to meet pressing human needs” (Warner 1993, 1059-1060).

The old, secularization paradigm suggests that the mobility of modern society will cause religion to decline. However, religious institutions have actually flourished in this most mobile of societies. Warner summarizes the relevant research.

- A. While “geographic mobility is inversely correlated in the short run with religious participation,” “transatlantic migrants invigorated American religious life in the 19th century and at least some of the post-1965 immigrants are doing so today.”
 - B. Churches “located in growing communities—particularly suburbs—have a better chance of growing in membership than those in stable or declining areas.”
 - C. “[D]enominations grow when they ‘plant’ new churches and decline when they do not.”
 - D. It has been found that “members of old and stable churches tend to have all the friends they want, but that new churches are likely to have many members whose demand for church-based friendships are not yet satiated.”
 - E. Urbanism can promote religious communalism rather than homogenization. “Locations with high rates of in-migration thus offer attractive markets for aggressive religious organizations.” (Warner 1993, 1064)
4. Because Americans refuse to establish a state religion, structural adaptability is characteristic of our religious institutions. Rather than long-term centralization and bureaucratization, “the institutional history of U.S. religion is better seen as an alternation of centripetal and centrifugal tendencies.” We tend to alternate between a concentration of material and human

resources in a central headquarters and a decentralized emphasis on relatively autonomous congregations and blurring of denominational identities. During the centrifugal phase “fewer clergy confine their training to denominational seminaries” and support beyond the local congregation tends to go more to cross-denominational, special purpose groups like People for the American Way or Focus on the Family (Warner 1993, 1065-1066).

5. While the “older paradigm expects religion to be increasingly privatized and invisible” and therefore not likely to play a positive role in social change, “religious involvement in the United States has historically been one way that groups have improved their lot.” Religious beliefs have given courage and direction to social movements.
6. Finally, the new voluntarism has some benefits for the church. Warner summarizes recent religious research to show that while civic disengagement certainly characterizes many modern Americans (we don’t even join bowling leagues anymore, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 1, 1996, page A10), denominational switching “is decreasingly likely to mirror upward social mobility and to represent instead genuine religious change.” “Conservative churches that expect high levels of involvement are organizational beneficiaries of such switching patterns.” Furthermore, “irreligion in the United States replicates itself across generations less effectively than active religious preference. Though the proportion of ‘nones’ has roughly tripled since the 1950s, nones tend to generate additional nones less efficiently than Protestants, Catholics, and Jews do their own kind” (Warner 1993, 1077). And, “it should be borne in mind that religious individualism and denominational switching characterized earlier periods of U.S. history, particularly the ‘awakenings’ that took place around 1800-30 and 1890-1920. . . . The latter period saw the rise of the Holiness, Pentecostal, and fundamentalist movements, the recent visibility of which has so greatly altered the profile of late 20th-century U.S. religion” (Warner 1993, 1079).

TABLE 1*

Schematic Comparison of New and Old Paradigms

	New	Old
Paradigmatic situation	Competition	Monopoly
Best historical fit	Second Great Awakening	Medieval Catholicism
Place and time	U.S. early 19th century	Europe, 500-1500 C.E.
Master narrative	Revival and routinization	Linear secularization
Master process	Mobilization	Differentiation
Secularity threatens	Irksome demands	Implausible beliefs
Elite prototype	Entrepreneur	Prebendary
View of pluralism	Constitutive	Degenerative
Social base	Social groups	Whole society
Typical organization	Denomination, congregation	Universal church, parish
Function of religion	Solidarity, morale	Explanation, meaning
Identity	Contested	Taken-for-granted
Recruitment	Emergent, achieved	Primordial, ascribed
Today's figures	Stark, Finke, Greeley	Berger, Lechner, Hunter
Classic texts	"Protestant Sects" and <i>Elementary Forms</i>	<i>Protestant Ethic</i> and <i>Division of Labor</i>

*Reproduced from Warner's table, page 1052

Warner concludes that recent research "is more compellingly framed in terms of the newer paradigm." The nascent paradigm itself is the self-conscious project of only a few scholars . . . and they do not form a solidary group but a loose school of thought with a common focus on the distinctive institutional parameters of the U.S. religious system – particularly the combination of disestablishment and institutional vitality – as the analytic norm for the study of religion" (Warner 1993, 1080-1081).

NAZARENE PARADIGMS

It may be that the paradigm debate does not impinge significantly on issues of interest to Nazarene sociologists of religion. What Warner describes as a paradigm shift in process may not affect our thinking. And, if these paradigms do not affect those of us who think sociologically, Nazarene leaders are probably even less interested in them.

However, as I listen to discussions in our church, it seems to me that we Nazarenes tend to understand the church and our role in society from the viewpoint of something like the secularization paradigm. It sounds to me as if we are convinced that Christianity has become marginal to American society and, perhaps, that the decline of our denomination is inevitable.

We have not yet reached the condition of Elijah in the desert who seems to have evaluated his society with something like a secularization paradigm (I Kings 19:10). But we have some perceptions in common with his. Most of us are deeply committed to the faith. We sincerely

want our part of the kingdom to thrive. However, we seem dangerously close to being convinced that the condition is beyond hope.

Actually, conditions really may be hopeless. Secularization may be inevitable. Denominations may be limited to about one hundred years of effective ministry. Certainly there is much in our situation to prompt despair. Perhaps it is time to downsize and retreat into a few fortresses. On the other hand, God is still at work in his world. Warner's review of the research results of historians, economists, as well as sociologists finds a great deal of evidence of God's faithfulness. Some religious groups are flourishing. Where the church is being what Nazarenes have always believed the church should be, the evidence suggests she is thriving.

America is not yet thoroughly Christian, of course. In fact, our culture may destroy itself. Perhaps nations cannot remain great beyond about two hundred years. This election season with our politicians pandering to voters' selfish fears and interests does not give most of us much reason for hope. On the other hand, the colonies, and the plantations, and the frontier were evidently not thoroughly Christian either, except perhaps from a nostalgic viewpoint.

The emerging paradigm, as Warner summarizes it in table 1, has some elements which are very comfortable for Nazarenes. Our roots are in the second great awakening. We believe spiritual awakenings are God's work, not human manipulation, but we also believe God chooses to work through his people. The new paradigm's expectation of a cyclical pattern of revival and routinization fits our understandings of the church as well, although we have usually emphasized them in reverse order – routinization followed by revival. While we see ourselves as part of the universal church, Nazarenes accept the validity of denominations and of considerable diversity within our denomination. The idea of unquestioning loyalty and the ability to authoritatively impose religious ideas may be appealing, but we have always believed that individuals must be convinced of their need to repent and believe. Evangelism involves convincing sinners, not coercing them by law and government.

If there has been a shift in Nazarene identity, perhaps it is because we came to accept the secularization paradigm. The free will paradigm is, it seems to me, a better fit with our beliefs and heritage.

The problem with paradigms is that they limit our ability to see. When what we see is determined by where we stand physically, we are able to gain a new perspective merely by moving to a different place. However, when what we see is shaped by our conceptual framework, it is much more difficult to move back, or aside, into a new framework. As N.J. Demerath III recently wrote, "Any truly successful social theory has the capacity to nullify its critics by simply applying the theory itself. You don't believe in the dominance of class divisions and the relations of production? Your false consciousness is showing. You find sex and the libido overrated as sources of explanation? Remember what I told you about repression. You find that postmodernism strays disturbingly from the truth? You weren't listening; truth itself is one of the great unraveling fictions of a bygone age" (Demerath 1996, 25).

So, we will not easily step back from our conceptual paradigms and examine their implications for the development of our identity as a denomination. Indeed, my ability to illustrate the need to examine our paradigms is severely limited by my own paradigm. Still, the attempt seems important. Furthermore, in the choice between competing sociology of religion

paradigms, the emerging, free will oriented, paradigm seems both more compatible with our heritage and more likely to produce a thriving church in the future.

THE EXAMPLE OF THE CORPS OF PASTORS

As a practical example, let us look at the ways these paradigms may influence our understanding of the description of the current corps of Nazarene pastors. The four issues addressed in the study are: (1) tenure in service to local congregations, (2) experience and turn-over in the corps, (3) the context in which Nazarene pastors serve, and (4) the adequacy of the corps for the future needs of the church.

Tenure

What is the ideal pastoral tenure in service to a local congregation? The average tenure of currently active Nazarene pastors is three years and three months. This has not changed since 1988. Is this ideal? Too short? Too long? Three years and three months is considerably shorter than the popular wisdom that the most effective years of ministry in a congregation begin about the seventh year. However, it is considerably longer than John Wesley's standard of one year. Wesley seems to have thought long pastoral tenures weakened the development of a strong laity. He said, "This has always shown that the people profit less by any one person than by a variety of Preachers" (Wesley 1872, volume 7, page 208).

From the viewpoint of the old paradigm pastors have, or should have, authority of office. Their role includes the responsibility to establish and shape a community of faith. The health of the church rests primarily on their effective exercise of the role of pastor. While some lay members may have their own vision of God's will for their church, most will, and probably should, rely on the pastor's vision and authority.

From the viewpoint of the free choice paradigm laity are actively involved in decision-making and community formation. While unquestioned authority of office and organization may be more comfortable, the mere fact that the message must be compelling in order to be believed should not be particularly troublesome for Nazarenes (Romans 1:16-17). We believe in the priesthood of all believers and for us that has meant that lay members should be involved in the formation of the church – the decision-making at all levels.

For this paradigm, the church is more likely to thrive when pastor and people join together in ministry. When C. Kirk Hadaway studied renewal of plateaued churches, he found that "Goal setting and evangelism are the two most important actions a church can take to grow off the plateau." He also found that "Breakout growth tends to occur with a new pastor and it tends to occur rapidly if it is to occur at all." (Hadaway 1991, 191).

From within the free choice paradigm it seems more clear that laity are, and should be, active participants in the vitality of the church. Pastors and denominations cannot, but also probably should not, impose their will indiscriminately on congregations. Community and vision might be expected to exist prior to the arrival of a pastor. Lay leaders undoubtedly also use particular paradigms to make sense of their situation. When the pastor's paradigm and the church's paradigm are the same, a longer, more productive ministry together seems likely.

Neither of these paradigms would support irresponsible pastors who are unwilling to face and solve the problems experienced in every ministry assignment. Nor would either paradigm

support irresponsible churches who abuse and discard pastors. Surely many pastors and congregations would benefit from longer tenures of pastoral service. Still, the clear relationship some have assumed to exist between long tenure and congregational vitality does not seem to be supported by the evidence, and may, as Wesley seems to have feared, detract from the ideal of a priesthood of all believers.

Seen from the old paradigm three years and three months average tenures are probably just one of the unfortunate results of the deteriorating nature of the church. Seen from the new paradigm length of tenure is probably an issue of strategy, with which Wesley would have been comfortable, regarding the role of the laity and the partnership of pastors and people in the vital ministry of their church.

Experience and Turnover

Is the relative inexperience of the corps of pastors inevitable? What causes the median pastoral experience among current pastors to be ten years and eight months? Why is it that nearly one-third of the current pastors have taken their first ministry assignment since the 1988 study?

In an increasingly hostile environment, as understood by the secularization paradigm, it may not be surprising that there appears to be a relatively high level of turnover among Nazarene pastors. As religion becomes more marginal in society, it may be harder to serve as a pastor. Ministers may be more inclined to burnout quickly, or to find some avenue of ministry more socially acceptable.

According to the free will paradigm, however, religion is not more marginal now than it was throughout most of our past. Indeed, the proportion of Americans who think of themselves as Christian has evidently increased significantly over the last two hundred years and remains very high.

Still, we are in the decentralizing phase of the ongoing alternation between centripetal and centrifugal tendencies. Many Americans are frustrated by big government and most other large organizations. The current American anti-institution sentiment probably influences our willingness to trust each other as well. Too often these days I hear sound ideas rejected without, as far as I can tell, much rational discussion or negotiation. Ideas and strategies are too little too late, or too much too soon. They may be astute, but they didn't come from the right person or the right level of the organization. They are top-down when what we need is bottom-up; or bottom-up when we need top-down. Or they are too denominational – these days God is working through this or that para-church group. Perhaps some of our turnover is explained by the absence of a strong support system.

Context of Ministry

Is the smaller church something of value or an unfortunate problem? In the future should seven out of ten Nazarene pastors serve congregations that average fewer than one hundred in worship? With the urbanization that characterizes modern America, will there be any need for churches in small towns or rural areas? Should we strengthen large regional churches? Or create more neighborhood churches? Or both? Are bi-vocational pastors an ailing relic of the past or a strategic part of the future?

Viewed from the secularization paradigm it seems clear that America will no longer tolerate small communities of faith. Neighborhoods have given way to urbanization and mobility, so neighborhood and rural churches must give way to regional centers. Individualism is supreme; group loyalties are gone. Sacrifice is out; self-indulgence is in. It is too expensive to build what it takes to attract secularist consumers of religion. It is probably time to reduce the number of churches.

During the fifties in my area of the country we were consolidating schools, closing small town hospitals, expanding the role and size of government, replacing Mom and Pop shops with supermarkets, and moving to the cities – doing in the other institutions of society what some are suggesting the church should do now. Bigger institutions were obviously better. One-room and parochial schools obviously could not offer an acceptable range of instruction. Mom and Pop's prices were too high, and they didn't have the selection we needed. Small hospitals could not provide the latest equipment and procedures.

Now in the nineties where I live we seem less convinced that bigger is better. The day of big government is over – maybe. Home schooling, the ultimate one room school, has increased in popularity. Some communities are moving to protect Mom and Pop stores. We have put up signs in our neighborhoods telling thieves that we watch out for each other, trying to convince them that we know each other well enough to recognize strangers. And we are not too sure we were not better off with a doctor and medical staff who really knew us and cared for us on the basis of that knowledge.

Actually, I am inclined to like big organizations. I have not lived in a town of less than one thousand for more than thirty years now. Unlike my father, I did not make any attempt to have my children educated in a small school. In fact, I have a fear that in our rush to return to smaller institutions we will destroy too much. Our rhetoric against large organizations, like the government, may convince too many of us that the large businesses, large civic organizations, and large churches must also go. When I get really sick, I want the largest, best equipped, best staffed hospital possible, however impersonal it may be. I am thankful for universities large enough that I could specialize in sociology of religion. I am thankful for our large churches. What we need, I believe, is balance. Large cities have significant advantages over small towns, and small towns have significant advantages over large cities.

Researchers applying the new paradigm remind us that “[D]enominations grow when they ‘plant’ new churches and decline when they do not” (Warner 1993, 1064). Undoubtedly many small churches should be merged or closed. The people have moved away. The church cannot carry out its basic functions. At the same time there are new, growing communities without a holiness witness. People still need of the good news of salvation brought into their communities and into their lives.

If we see the church as a dependent variable, at the mercy of forces in society, it becomes pointless to develop strategies to effectively carry out the great commission. However, if we see the church as an independent variable able to influence society, then we are presented with the challenge of understanding what God wants us to do and how he wants us to accomplish that.

The free choice paradigm recognizes the evidence that the American church has been more effective than many suppose. However, the evidence is also clear that not all churches are thriving. Obviously some approaches are more effective than others. But, there may be

problems with a Wesley-like development of methods to effectively evangelize. Einstein is quoted as saying, “Perfection of means and confusion of ends seem to characterize our age” (in McCullough 1995, 16). It is entirely possible that we will develop powerful techniques to accomplish selfish, unworthy goals. We have done that too often. Still, the problem of unclear or inappropriate goals is not somehow solved by using careless or ineffective means. We must know and carry out God’s will. Our mission must be God directed. However, along with identifying correct ends, it may also be important to prayerfully develop effective means to accomplish the mission.

In his tape series, *Embracing Chaos*, Tom Peters suggests the need to structure organizations toward smaller operating units. As he explains his consulting with effective companies, “this funny number is kind of popping up. It’s thirty-five, or fifty, or seventy-five, or maybe a one hundred, or sometimes one hundred and fifty. And incidentally there’s some marvelous anthropological research that has been done that says one hundred and fifty-three people, to be precise, is the maximum size unit to really get things done in an energetic fashion. Well, whether you happen to buy fifty or one hundred and fifty-three, what we’re talking about is a dramatic shift of the entire economy toward operating entities, whether they are stand-alones or part of huge institutions, like ABB, that are an awful lot smaller, an awful lot more entrepreneurial, an awful lot quicker and more energetic than we have seen in the past in enterprises of most any size.” (1993, tape 2).

The great awakenings were grounded in prayer and sound doctrine. But, they also included strategic deployment for aggressive evangelism. It may be that the best strategy for Nazarenes moving into the twenty-first century will be a combination of smaller and larger congregations, in rural areas as well as in urban centers, and served by a mix of bi-vocational and full-time pastors

Adequate Corps

Are we preparing enough ministers? Are Nazarene youth open to God’s call to ministry? Do Nazarenes have enough ministers, or is there a shortage of pastors? Is the preparation we are providing adequate? Are we preparing enough ministers for the particular types of churches we now have or should have in the future?

From the viewpoint of the old paradigm these questions may be irrelevant. If the secularization of society results in the decline of the denomination to the extent that we substantially reduce the number of churches, many of the established pastors may need to be helped in finding other assignments or new careers. And the departments or institutions now involved in ministerial preparation may need to redirect their efforts.

The influence of this paradigm on Nazarene thinking and planning may be one source of the widespread belief that Nazarene youth are unchallenged by, or disobedient to, God’s call to ministry. It may also be a cause of the belief that there we have a shortage of ministers. While there may be disobedience among our brightest and most Godly young people and a general shortage of ministers, the evidence to support this common belief is not obvious. Actually, the evidence presented in the attached corps of pastors study suggests a surplus rather than a shortage of ministers. The difficulty superintendents have in placing women as pastors, or the ability of congregations to reject the concept of circuit-riding pastors may also be evidence of a surplus. While empirical evidence of a shortage is not obvious, it does seem likely that it is

difficult to find ministers who are appropriately prepared for, and who can afford to serve in, many of the existing Nazarene congregations. This problem may seem like a shortage.

The free choice paradigm encourages us to observe that while all is not well, neither is all lost in this culture. The Church of the Nazarene has been, and should be, part of the effective ministry which has increased religious affiliation and commitment over the last one hundred years. It might also remind us, however, that centralization and decentralization tend to alternate in a cyclical pattern. The Church of the Nazarene, as well as the larger American culture, is in the decentralization phase of the cycle. During that phase “fewer clergy confine their training to denominational seminaries.” Especially in a time when the number of active churches is static or declining, young people may be prayerfully making the best of the limited options open to them when they prepare for a dual career in which some profession like teaching that supports their vocation of ministry.

CONCLUSION

Kuhn argues that, “The man who embraces a new paradigm at an early stage must often do so in defiance of the evidence provided by the problem solving. He must, that is, have faith that the new paradigm will succeed with the many large problems that confront it knowing only that the older paradigm has failed with a few. A decision of that kind can only be made on faith” (1970, 157-158). Accepting the emerging paradigm is not an act of great faith on my part. I think it is very similar to the paradigm that motivated and guided early Nazarenes. And I find Warner’s review of the research literature convincing. Indeed, the research I found most convincing at the latest Society for the Scientific Study of Religion/Religious Research Association annual meeting also supports the emerging paradigm.

Nor do I see myself as a stubborn traditionalist unwilling to accept the new realities. It may be that we are at a hinge of history where all that we have learned in the first one hundred years of the denomination, or the first two hundred years of the nation, or the first two thousand years of Christianity must be discarded because all is changed. I am just not convinced. I am not arguing that the American family is problem free. It is not. I just think our reading about dysfunctional families and alternative lifestyles should start as far back as the Old Testament. I am not arguing that many of the Americans who claim an affiliation with some Christian denomination are committed believers whose lives are deeply changed by their faith. Too many are not. I just suspect that a similar proportion of the Christians in the early American colonies also lived lives that were little changed by their faith. And I find it difficult to believe the American frontier was a place of widespread faith and virtue.

When I had finished writing this paper, I fulfilled an earlier commitment to critique a dissertation that will be defended next week at one of the evangelical seminaries. It was generally interesting and well done. However, I was disturbed by the fact that the secularization paradigm was assumed to be correct without question. It reinforced my conviction that the “old” paradigm dominates evangelical and Nazarene thinking.

I am convinced that the paradigm accepted by leading Nazarene thinkers and decision-makers will have a profound effect on the future identity of the denomination. Furthermore, I am convinced that right now our dominant paradigm is the “old,” secularization paradigm. I am afraid the influence of this paradigm on our future identity will be negative. When the situation is hopeless, the rules change – people and institutions behave differently. On the other hand, I

am convinced that the emerging paradigm is not only sociologically well supported, but also that it is more compatible with our heritage. The influence of this paradigm seems more likely to produce a thriving church in the future. If so, perhaps the Association of Nazarene Sociologists of Religion should have some role in bringing the evidence for the “new,” free will paradigm more strongly into the Nazarene consciousness.

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