

It is my understanding that in the course of discussing "The Church and Its Educational Task" I am to integrate both my thoughts concerning the subject and my reflections on the nature of my educational encounters with one Nazarene College and Nazarene Theological Seminary and that I am to do this with my present graduate studies at Emory University as the ground of a partial perspective. Keeping this scheme in mind, I will attempt to project primarily on a theological basis what I consider to be the educational task of the Church of the Nazarene.

At one place Karl Barth excuses what he believes to be an error in the thought of Paul Tillich by saying: "I believe that Tillich is doing his best within his limits. He had very poor teachers in Germany. At a certain point he ceased to go forward and ever since he has been going 'round and 'round in his Schelling Philosophy."¹ The point of this vignette does not have to do with arbitrating a settlement to this running battle; rather, it is to remind each of us of the monumental significance attached to the quality of instruction received by a student in his intellectual Odyssey.

All possible factors being assayed, that instruction along with the composite ethos, which is the instructor, will to a considerable degree determine the extent of the intellectual, spiritual, and emotional progress to be made by the student throughout life. The same is true with regard to the possibility of the individual's contributions toward the advancement of his church, his society, and

his given profession.

It seems pertinent then that we seek to get at the educational task of the Church of the Nazarene by attempting to formulate an elemental philosophy of education from the standpoint of the total instructional ethos emitted or generated by the professor. It is hoped that such a position will encompass the total educational task of the church without respect to individual departments, i.e. maybe we can find a "universal." Without attempting to parochialize this position, it does seem to me that such a philosophy in the Church of the Nazarene, must be predominantly theological in character.

Those of my professors in Nazarene schools who have epitomized what I believe to be the proper attitude toward the educational task of the Church of the Nazarene are rather adequately portrayed by Sydney E. Ahlstrom's description of Reinhold Niebuhr: namely, they, like Niebuhr, embodied "an unqualified respect. . . for all genuine scholarly, scientific, and artistic endeavor, including those pursuits that created theological problems. Indeed, their opposition to obscurantism of every sort was an essential feature of their effort to transcend the futile quarrels of the Fundamentalist Controversy. For this reason the full implications of historical, sociological and psychological investigation became a major concern."²

Wedded to this spirit was what I have been taught to term a "Wesleyan Catholicity." My professors had adopted and evinced a wholesome grasp on their tradition, a tradition set in motion by Wesley in "The Character of a Methodist" (Works, VIII, 340-47) in

this statement: "As to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think."³ Having mastered in theology and in experience "those roots of Christianity" they went on to "seek that community of Christians which is constituted by faith and love."⁴ The spirit engendered by such discipleship and tutelage, with regard to the educational task rose far above a crippling, pedantic obscurantism on the one hand (a philosophy which equates indoctrination with education) and a careless iconoclasm on the other. Within the womb thus provided, the embryo developed in the ethos of the philosophy voiced by Dr. A. Elwood Sanner: "There is no necessary conflict between diligent scholarship and vital piety." In this atmosphere the challenge raised by Ralph Waldo Emerson in the "Divinity School Address" to the Harvard graduates was admirably answered by these professors. Emerson said: "... . let their doubts know that you have doubted, and their wonder feel that you have wondered."⁵

In these representative spokesmen there was envisioned a knowledge of the educational task of the Church of the Nazarene which embodies the following factors: (1) a credible education must of necessity deal openly and unimpaired with the issues pertinent to the given subject; (2) the spiritual and intellectual welfare of the student is too precious a resource to be dealt with carelessly or callously; leading from this, (3) a recognition that graduated levels of attainment in the spiritual and intellectual life of the student must play a determinative role as to when given issues are to be introduced; (4) an evident commitment both theologically and experientially to the pivotal elements of our

Wesleyan Heritage; (5) a voiced and explicated confidence that this tradition can "carry the freight" of today's world; and following from this, (6) a comprehensive determination to address that faith to contemporary society.

It seems to me that a denomination could choose, in the interest of denominational preservation, rigidly to define the precise limitations as to what shall and shall not be discussed in the classrooms of its educational institutions. I believe however that to elect such an option will most assuredly consign that denomination to obsolescence. This would be to revert to a posture from which Post-Vatican II Catholicism is seeking to disentangle itself.

Were the Church of the Nazarene to embrace this posture, it would betray its high heritage; it would be to choose an alien spirit, a truth not missed by Dr. Timothy Smith in Called Unto Holiness.

However, it is my contention that the rejection of this option does not mean that we must desert our Confession of Faith. Without apology we stand within what Tillich has called the "Theological Circle."⁶ As a denomination we have made a Confession of Faith, and it is in no way a betrayal of an allegiance to a high education pursuit to confess that we intend faithfully to represent that Confession. To be more precise, we believe that this Confession of Faith is germane or integral to that pursuit.

Nor should we fear to submit that Confession to the endeavors of the academy, for it is our knowledge that it can "carry the freight." Vance Havner has said that "one does not defend a tiger, one just turns him loose."⁷

Let me now attempt to frame some specifics which I believe should characterize the educational task of the Church of the Nazarene.

We may say first that the educational task of the Church of the Nazarene is one of diligent scholarship—not in name only—but in fact. The classical tenets of the academy should be no strangers, nor feel themselves strangers, in our halls. If the task of education be undertaken by the Church of the Nazarene, then the Church must wholeheartedly adopt an educational philosophy which comports with that pursuit. While the whole of our educational task breathes the spirit of our Wesleyan Tradition, the theology of the Church of the Nazarene has no right and no obligation to prejudice a physical or historical, sociological or psychological, inquiry.

Secondly, having solidly affirmed the above, the educator in the Church of the Nazarene, administrator or professor, should clearly understand that he or she stands within a clearly defined theological tradition, a tradition which has borne and will bear the weight of theological scrutiny. If that tradition is inimical to his or her own position, then scholarly honesty, it seems to me, calls for a recognition of that antipathy and a consequent departure on the part of the scholar.

As Tillich has so clearly stated, we need not think it necessary to defend such a position against the detached philosopher who stands outside the theological circle. The Church is existentially involved—with the whole of its existence—in the love for its OBJECT from which it receives saving and therefore personal truth.⁸

Third, the Church should demand of its scholars (and its scholars should demand of themselves) a policy of instruction in

which an ethos of learning is generated wherein the total sphere of the human person is enhanced, an ethos in which issues raised will be so discussed as to take into full account those multifarious factors involved in spiritual, intellectual, and emotional growth. That is to say, such an ethos should serve to bring the student into a full-orbed, "first generation," native and productive relationship to Jesus the Christ.

In so doing the educator in the Church of the Nazarene will guard against the twin errors mentioned above, i.e., a narrow sectarian parochialism on the one hand and a careless iconoclasm on the other. The former precaution should insure honest questioning and the opening of channels of communication which can make for needed change in the life of the Church and thus insure dynamic, wholesome growth. The latter precaution should guard against recalcitrance against the Church of the Nazarene on the part of professor and student alike. It seems that, for instance in the teaching of religion courses in our colleges, these precautions should militate against a wooden-headed Fundamentalism—a fight which is not ours—on the one hand and on the other hand, against any professors' introduction of issues in such a way as to belittle or impugn the theological standard of the church. It seems to me that basic maturity will rule out the holding of the church in contempt while supposedly carrying out the educational charge of the church. The Nazarene classroom is hardly the place for a professor to exhibit his frustrations or to parade his supersession of the Church of the Nazarene!

Finally, the educational task of the Church of the Nazarene, it seems to me, is that of producing not recluses from society, but

people whose education has been of such a nature as to make them culturally alert and capable of what Tillich has called "correlation," i.e., the ability to address the claims of the Christian Gospel to the existential questions and needs of the human community. George Allen Turner has said as much.⁹ But "correlation" means that we have faithfully listened to the existential needs arising from the human community—not fifty-years ago but TODAY. Our attention and concern must be as TODAY as the 'drug culture' and the meaningless syndrome of automation, as Today as the cry that all men be given their rightful place in the human community and as Today as the often blurred but nonetheless understandable longing for Jesus who is the Christ, the Hope of New Being. If the Gospel we preach and the Gospel we teach as twentieth century Wesleyans does not adequately answer to the calamitous needs of the human community, then, I submit, it is questionable whether we can justify our existence as a denomination and consequently the existence of our educational institutions. Such "listening" as called for above must be an integral part of the Nazarene classroom; and if we are successful, then we can affirm with St. Paul that "God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself."

Such a posture will mean a disavowal of what the Roman Catholic theologian Eugene Bianchi has called "Rift Theology," (a rigid separation of the world and the Church) and will mean an avowal of what he has called Shalom, reconciliation, as the true mission of the Church.¹⁰

Footnotes

¹Raymond K. Anderson, "Barth on Tillich: Neo-Gnosticism?", The Christian Century, (December 9, 1970,) pp. 1477-1481.

²Sydney E. Ahlstrom, Theology in America, (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1967), p. 81.

³Albert C. Outler, John Wesley, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 92. (Wesley Quoted)

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Divinity School Address," Delivered before the Senior Class at the Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, on July 15, 1838.

⁶Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, V. I., (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 24,25.

⁷Vance Havner, Pepper and Salt.

⁸Tillich, op. cit.

⁹George Allen Turner, The Vision Which Transforms, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1964), pp. 269-326.

¹⁰Eugene Bianchi, Reconciliation: The Function of the Church, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969),