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Why These Schools?

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Historical Perspectives on Nazarene Higher Education

Each religious movement breeds its own folklores, and a folklore whose truth is often assumed is that Nazarene colleges were founded to train ministers. This folklore has some merit, for certain Nazarene colleges did originate from a desire to train Christian workers—though not ministers exclusively. But in other cases the folklore is not true at all. Some Nazarene colleges began with the intention to establish a liberal arts college, while others emerged from schools founded originally to educate grammar and high school age youth. In the case of the latter, the focus was on educating a Christian laity and forming the identity of Nazarene youth in a way that integrated basic educational achievement with moral and spiritual training rooted in certain theological understandings. Thus, any generalizations about the purpose of early Nazarene colleges must be broad enough to take into account different intentions—training Christian workers and educating a Christian laity.

Training Schools for Christian Workers

The origins of present-day Point Loma Nazarene College offers a place to begin. It is commonly asserted that Phineas Bresee was the college's founder, and in a larger sense that is true. But if being a founder means being the initiator, then Bresee is not its founder. On this point, there is agreement between Timothy L. Smith (the late dean of Nazarene church history), Carl Bangs (author of the first critical biography of Bresee), and Ron Kirkemo (author of the first critical history of the college). The initiators of the school were not ministers but laity who—in Smith's words—persuaded "a reluctant Bresee to support the venture. Interestingly enough, the leaders were women, as had been true also in the missionary, youth, and publishing work" of Bresee's wing of the Nazarene movement. ⁽¹⁾

Bresee's reluctance about the undertaking is understandable. As a Methodist minister, he had performed yeomen service on behalf of Simpson College in Iowa. He chaired the conference committee that recommended that Simpson become a four-year institution, and he raised the money used to build key buildings, including College Hall, now the college's primary historic landmark. He served on Simpson's board of trustees for 16 years, including a term as board president. In the opinion of some researchers, Bresee was the virtual savior of that institution during its gravest hour of financial peril. ⁽²⁾ In Los Angeles, he was a trustee of the University of Southern California, where he worked closely with president J. P. Widney to save that school's College of Liberal Arts. ⁽³⁾ He also had experience—though less direct involvement—with two early Methodist seminaries: Garrett Biblical Institute in Chicago (now Garrett Evangelical Seminary) and Maclay (now Claremont) School of Theology in Southern California. ⁽⁴⁾

Here was the nub of the problem: the lay women envisioned a simple Bible college, and this idea did not fit Bresee's notions of a church-related school. Smith notes that "Bresee consented rather grudgingly to the venture, but promised little or no assistance." The women secured funds from their husbands and went ahead. Under principal Mary Hill, Pacific Bible College opened in 1902 with 42 students from 7 states. At the end of the year, Hill left the post and returned to China, where she had been a missionary. She took many of the students with her. ⁽⁵⁾ The school continued under Leora Maris' leadership. Smith notes that "Bresee was slow in overcoming his reluctance" toward the project.

His basic attitude did not change until the spring of 1906. Then, his rising enthusiasm was tied directly to the \$30,000 gift offered by businessman Jackson Deets. Between them, Bresee and Deets laid plans for Nazarene University, an institution composed of three basic parts: an Academy (high school), a College of Liberal Arts, and the Bible school. In

1909 land was purchased in Pasadena and a new campus was laid out. In spite of crushing debt that hampered the school for years, it survived. A grammar school was added and existed until 1929—the same year the Bible College became part of the College of Liberal Arts.⁽⁶⁾ The Academy remained part of Pasadena College well into the 1950's.

Although the intentions of the lay women were oriented toward the Bible school model, the basic vision for the college changed once Bresee accepted personal responsibility for the college. In only five or six years, a school for training Christian workers had become the basis for projecting a Nazarene liberal arts college in southern California.

Trevecca College was another institution that began as a training school for Christian workers. It was the child of J. O. McClurkan, formerly a Cumberland Presbyterian minister. In 1898 McClurkan joined others in founding the Pentecostal Alliance, a nondenominational group in Nashville, Tennessee. Most of McClurkan's associates were Wesleyan-holiness folk, but McClurkan's own theology was oriented toward the Keswick holiness position. He was a friend and admirer of A. B. Simpson, the Christian and Missionary Alliance founder. Indeed, for its first three years the Pentecostal Alliance virtually functioned as the Christian and Missionary Alliance South, sending its workers to Nyack, New York, for training at Simpson's Bible college there.

But in 1901 the Pentecostal Alliance reorganized as the Pentecostal Mission and drifted away from Simpson's influence. At the same time it launched the Pentecostal Literary and Bible Training School. The Bible college plan was clearly the model with which McClurkan originally worked. The students became the fly in the ointment. As Mildred Wynkoop notes, some of the graduates wanted more training than the simple Bible and ministry-oriented curriculum offered. "They wanted regular college training . . . McClurkan was pushed by his students into a new level of education."⁽⁷⁾

By 1910 the transition toward a liberal arts model had begun. It became a four year college and was renamed Trevecca College for Christian Workers—soon to be simply Trevecca College. C. E. Hardy, who had a medical degree from the University of Tennessee and taught part-time at the college, helped in the transition to the four year plan. Beginning in 1910, Trevecca offered courses leading to three four-year degrees: A. B., B. S., and B.L.⁽⁸⁾ Upon McClurkan's death, Hardy became the school's second president, serving in that capacity three times between 1915 and 1936, for a total of sixteen years.⁽⁹⁾

The desire to train Christian workers also lay behind the origins of a school in Pilot Point, Texas, established by the Holiness Church of Christ in 1905. After the Holiness Church of Christ merged in 1908 with the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene, the school was renamed Nazarene Bible Institute and became an official institution of the church's Abilene District. In 1911 it was moved to Hamlin, a town in western Texas near Abilene, its curriculum was upgraded, and it was renamed Central Nazarene University. It struggled for the next twenty years and merged in the early 1930's with the Nazarene college at Bethany, Oklahoma.

Similarly, Mattie Hoke founded a Bible school in Hutchinson, Kansas, in 1905. An early catalog described it as "A Bible College and Theological Training School for Evangelists, Pastors, Missionaries, Deaconesses, and other Christian Workers. . . . Our object: The training of Christian soldiers for the battlefield in home and foreign lands."⁽¹⁰⁾ Originally it taught Bible classes and remedial high school work. It was supported initially by a local holiness congregation and later by the Kansas and Nebraska Districts of the Church of the Nazarene. It began offering college work in the 1920's but continued to nurture a "Bible college" identity throughout the remainder of the decade. In 1940 its financial situation overwhelmed it and it merged with the college at Bethany.⁽¹¹⁾

A Different Model of Development: Liberal Arts Colleges

from the Word "Go!"

While these colleges originated as training schools for Christian workers, other early Nazarene colleges did not. Northwest Nazarene College was started by Eugene Emerson, a businessman who visited Nazarene University in Pasadena in the winter of 1912-13, shortly after Bresee's college had cast its lot firmly for the liberal arts path. Emerson returned home to Idaho, determined to organize a similar college there. It opened the next year. In 1917, H. Orton Wiley went to Nampa as the school's second president and remained for a decade. Wiley also brought to the campus Olive Winchester, a graduate of Radcliffe College, the University of Glasgow, and a *magna cum laude* graduate of the Pacific School of Religion. Winchester became academic dean and vice president and remained at the school until

1936, with a short break to attend Drew University, where she earned her doctorate. Between them, Wiley and Winchester put Northwest Nazarene College on a solid academic footing that allowed it to develop into one of the premier Christian colleges of the Northwest. [\(12\)](#)

Likewise, Eastern Nazarene College was started in 1900 with the stated idea of providing education in three areas: four year high school, college program, and Biblical seminary. [\(13\)](#) In its first year it offered high school and seminary courses. A grade school was added in the second year. It seemed that the school's bright hope would be frustrated by the moral failures of its first president, but the school's sponsors—the Association of Pentecostal Churches of America (a denomination despite what the name suggests)—managed to save it from going under. Struggling finances limited its basic curriculum for nearly two decades, and it offered theological, commercial, grade school, and high school courses until 1918. But in that year a new curriculum was unveiled with a liberal arts degree at its heart. Fred Shields and Bertha Munro played key roles in articulating the vision of a college well-grounded in the liberal arts tradition. [\(14\)](#)

Texas Holiness University (est. 1899) and Illinois Holiness University (est. 1908) were also begun by groups who intended liberal arts institutions from the outset. Both were started on a nondenominational basis by individuals associated with local camp meeting associations. Both sets of sponsors were influenced by the success of Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky, which operated as a holiness college with strong Methodist ties but was not directly accountable to any Methodist conference. They were also related to similar colleges starting in Indiana (Taylor College) and Iowa (John Fletcher College). The colleges in Texas and Illinois also shared another tie: each had A. M. Hills as its founding president. A graduate of Oberlin College and Yale Divinity School, Hills had served for several years as a Congregationalist pastor. He believed strongly in a broad classical education within a Christian context.

Texas Holiness University was sponsored by the Holiness Association of Texas. It was located at Peniel, a small holiness community just outside Greenville. The college's early history appeared very bright, but the association disbanded in 1910 after many of its members united with the Nazarenes and no longer needed the association to network together. The college became a Nazarene institution the following year, supported by the Dallas District. Its close proximity to Pilot Point, Texas, was a factor in pushing Nazarene Bible Institute to the western half of the state. In 1920 Peniel College (as it had been renamed) merged with Oklahoma Nazarene College in Bethany, Oklahoma.

While ministers played a key role in establishing Texas Holiness University, Illinois Holiness University was a product of lay initiative. Its first board of trustees included only one minister. Even before president Hills could arrive to take charge, the trustee founders moved Miss Mary Nesbitt's grammar school to a site adjacent to the proposed campus at Olivet, Illinois. High school classes were added and Fred Mesch took over as principal. Hills arrived the next year and began developing the college curriculum. Thus, like many other holiness colleges, grammar and academy departments were conducted along with college work, and a Wesleyan-holiness community sprang up around the school. Families, children, high school students, college students, church, campmeeting—all were part of the social and religious environment. [\(15\)](#)

From Grammar School and High School to College

A third pattern lay behind the development of Arkansas Holiness College and Oklahoma Holiness College. Both were founded by women as schools for children. Both gradually added higher levels of education until college work became part of the institutional mix.

Fannie Suddarth's school opened in Vilonia in 1900. It reportedly had Free Methodist connections but became an institution of the Eastern Council of the Holiness Church of Christ in 1906. After the Holiness Church of Christ merged with the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene, the school at Vilonia functioned as an institution of the Arkansas District after 1908. Arkansas Holiness College never really prospered and never had a very large faculty. It merged with the college at Bethany in 1931. [\(16\)](#)

The roots of Oklahoma Holiness College are connected to the Oklahoma Orphanage founded in the late 19th century by Mattie Mallory. Early in the 20th century, Mallory used her inheritance to buy property north of Oklahoma City. She named it Beulah Heights and relocated the orphanage there from downtown Oklahoma City. A college graduate and trained teacher, she soon was running a school for orphans and for the children of holiness families who voluntarily

located at Beulah Heights. In 1906 Beulah Heights Academy and Bible School opened. Three years later C. B. Jernigan moved to Oklahoma City as the first superintendent of the Oklahoma–Kansas District and won the Beulah Heights folks to the Church of the Nazarene. Before the end of 1909, the property had been sold and the proceeds used to purchase new land west of Oklahoma City, where the community of Bethany was planted. The town began as a holiness colony with the orphanage, college, a church, and a home for unwed mothers as the focal points of ministry. A Methodist minister, H. H. Miller, became president of the college, now renamed Oklahoma Holiness College. [\(17\)](#)

Jernigan's role as an organizer cannot be understated in evaluating the success of the college at Bethany. As district superintendent, his efforts at church planting were outstanding. There were five Nazarene congregations when he came to the Oklahoma–Kansas District as its first superintendent. By 1911 the Kansas District had enough churches to become a separate district, while in Oklahoma alone there were 63 churches and over 1700 members. By 1912, Oklahoma was the only state outside California with more than one church district. Jernigan's efforts paid off handsomely for the college at Bethany. As its church base swelled, the college's financial problems proved less threatening than those at other institutions. As Timothy Smith wrote, the college at Bethany "grew slowly but substantially. It eventually outdistanced and absorbed the schools at Hutchinson, Kansas, Peniel and Hamlin, Texas, Vilonia, Arkansas, and Des Arc, Missouri. Bethany became the Nazarene center for the whole Southwest." [\(18\)](#)

The Sifting Time

In 1915, the General Assembly created a General Board of Education to develop a coordinated strategy for Nazarene higher education. (The later became the Department of Education under the unified General Board). Over the next fifteen years, two names stand out in the ongoing work of the board: J. B. Chapman and H. Orton Wiley. In 1922 Chapman addressed his board colleagues and outlined the philosophy that would prevail:

It was originally the plan to call every school we started a "university" . . . It was our ultimate aim to have universities and our schools were named according to our vision of future developments. But I am, personally, convinced that we should definitely abandon the idea of building any universities, that we should drop these names from our schools and that we should have at least a twenty–five year holiday in the matter of university talk. . . . [Moreover,] it is my conclusion that we . . . cannot permanently maintain academies and they do not meet our need, that a special Bible school does not meet our needs and that we should express ourselves on this conviction. . . . That the College, with the necessary fitting school and Bible department[,] is the school that we need and will build. [\(19\)](#)

This advice would prevail—not simply because it was wise but because it also fit with prevailing trends. During the 1923–24 academic year, Nazarene colleges reported a total of 1643 students. Over one thousand of these were in grammar and academy programs. The report showed 351 four–year college students, 663 academy students, 174 students in "Bible college" programs, and 339 grammar school students. [\(20\)](#) Five years later, there were 1548 students. Grammar school registration had declined sharply—several colleges had closed these departments. "Bible college" registration had declined to 125 as ministerial students moved away from two and three year Bible courses to enter four year liberal arts degree programs. Academy registrants had declined to 507. Only four year college students showed an increase—to 679. [\(21\)](#) Eventually the four year liberal arts college ruled.

Why These Schools?

At a time when the Bible college movement began to spread across America, early Nazarene colleges adopted a different course. Regardless of the primary aims of a particular school's founders, all were moving (with varying degrees of success) toward the liberal arts college model by 1920. What factors account for that?

The underlying Methodist identity of early Nazarenes came into play. Methodism was not only the cradle of the Wesleyan–holiness movement. It was also the largest Protestant denomination in America in the second half of the 19th century. Moreover, Methodism had continually generated new models that other evangelicals had adopted.

Compared to Congregationalists, Baptists, and the Presbyterian and Reformed churches, Methodists were relative late comers to the establishment of solid colleges. But by 1850 nearly each Methodist conference was supporting one or more colleges. At the time Bresee became involved with Simpson College in Iowa, Methodists in that state were trying

[\(22\)](#)

to support five different schools. Not all survived. The way in which early Nazarene districts in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Arkansas each supported its own college reflects a version of the Methodist pattern of a school for each annual conference.

This underlying Methodist identity of the early denomination was underscored by A. M. Hills (the former Congregationalist!) in a 1933 article published in the midst of the church's twenty-fifth anniversary celebration. The Church of the Nazarene, he said, is an extension of Methodism and reflects the Methodist heritage at different levels: theological scholarship, spiritual inheritance, pioneer leadership, evangelism, missionary endeavor, and education. The Christian college, Hills insisted, was vital for the identity of the Church of the Nazarene, for it promoted Wesleyan understandings of religion and it also promoted the experiences of God that characterize Wesleyan people. [\(23\)](#)

Interestingly, it was only after the Church of the Nazarene had aged and passed the 20th century mid-point that a concerted effort developed to establish a dedicated Bible college for the church. By that time Methodists were no longer reliably evangelical, and Methodist models of "how to be evangelical" had waned. Baptists, meanwhile, had surpassed American Methodists in numbers in the early 20th century, and Baptist influence—and the influence of their methods—was growing more pervasive in evangelical circles. The evangelical mainstream toward which Nazarenes increasingly have accommodated is always in perpetual transition. In the 19th century, Methodism exerted a large share of influence on American evangelicalism. In the 20th century, Baptists and then Pentecostals have exerted this influence. Martin Marty has written about the phenomenon of American Christianity's "baptistification" in relation to mainstream denominations, including his own Lutheran church. [\(24\)](#) In Nazarene life, baptistification has expressed itself in various ways, including a gradual shift among Nazarenes away from infant baptism—pervasive in the early life of the denomination—to a predominant practice of believers' baptism; in the sharp decline of women in church leadership, especially pastoral ministry; and, perhaps, in the shift from post- to premillennialism. Should we be surprised, then, if baptistification also influences later Nazarene thinking about education? that of separation from worldly influences. This was true in at least two distinct ways.

First, there was the creation of the Nazarene community. Nazarene colonies developed around many of the early schools, especially those in California, Texas, Oklahoma, and Illinois. Because these schools generally offered grammar and high school education along with college work, there are instances of families packing up and moving to these colonies with the primary intention of educating their children from grammar school through college in predominantly Nazarene environments.

Wherever Nazarene communities were created, prohibition was the rule of the day. Other social vices were also strictly prohibited. Thus, the immediate social environment in which students were educated was controlled through the influence exerted by the Nazarene population. When Bethany was incorporated in August 1910, its first city council was composed of "leading churchmen," the district superintendent, the college president, and the pastor of First Church. [\(25\)](#) Nazarenes wrote Bethany's "Blue Laws" and so dominated the local politics of both major parties that in the 1935 race for mayor those who opposed Nazarene influence had to run an independent candidate. The Nazarene on the Democratic ticket won overwhelmingly! [\(26\)](#)

But separation from the world also filtered into the subjects taught at early Nazarene schools. Early promotional materials for Nazarene colleges were not overtly reactionary. They rarely mentioned, or even implied, that these schools flatly rejected evolutionary theory and the higher criticism of the Bible increasingly shaping university and seminary education in America. Yet they promised Nazarene parents what surely appeared to be an intellectually "safe" education for their high school and college age youth.

As a sub-theme, Ron Kirkemo's history of Pasadena College contains the best account yet written of the development of science education at a Nazarene college. Kirkemo shows how the general framework of science education there had strong reactionary tendencies. Those who taught earth and life sciences at Pasadena in the '20's, Kirkemo writes, generally "were convinced [that] evolution in any form was a threat to Christianity." No science teacher at Pasadena College appropriated theistic evolution as a theological framework for science education until well into the middle third of the 20th century. (Roger Carlson, who joined Pasadena College's faculty in 1939 was the first teacher there to accept geological evolution.) [\(27\)](#)

Other patterns run through these stories of early Nazarene colleges. Two of the most striking are those of lay initiative

and female enterprise. At its heart, the Protestant doctrine of the priesthood of all believers asserts that all Christians are called to ministry through their baptism. At least a few early Nazarenes understood this and made educational enterprises the avenues of their lay ministry. Lay initiative at Los Angeles, Nampa, Hutchinson, Vilonia, and Oklahoma City paved the way for church colleges at these places. That some of these enterprising laity were also women should not be surprising, for women played increasingly prominent roles in other aspects of Nazarene life, including the ordained ministry, missions, and evangelism.

The following statement appears in the current *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene: "Historically, Nazarene global ministry has centered around evangelism, compassionate ministry, and education?"⁽²⁸⁾ Though one may dislike letting the *Manual* have the last word, this statement provides an interesting perspective on Nazarene education. It suggests that Nazarenes have regarded education as an integral expression of their worship and as a basic part of their wider ministry in the world. Although initial aims may have differed from place to place, each Nazarene school that was started in the early years of the church expressed something essential about how local Nazarenes saw themselves. In some cases these initial aims expressed a dominant evangelistic and missionary impulse that called for the training of Christian workers. In other cases the new colleges expressed a cultural (or counter-cultural) impulse. But in both cases they expressed a sense of ministry in and to the world.

NOTES

- ¹ Timothy L. Smith, *Called Unto Holiness* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1962), p. 137.
- ² Carl Bangs, *Phineas F. Bresee: His Life in Methodism, the Holiness Movement, and the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1995) pp. 82, 110–112.
- ³ Bangs, *Phineas F. Bresee*, p. 186
- ⁴ Bangs, *Phineas F. Bresee*, pp. 112-113, 145, 149.
- ⁵ Smith, *Called Unto Holiness*, p. 138.
- ⁶ Ronald B. Kirkemo, *For Zion's Sake: A History of Pasadena/Point Loma College* (San Diego: Point Loma Press, 1992), p. 75.
- ⁷ Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *The Trevecca Story* (Nashville: The Trevecca Press, 1976), pp. 78-79. Quote on p. 79.
- ⁸ Wynkoop, *The Trevecca Story*, p. 79.
- ⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 94-95.
- ¹⁰ Kansas Holiness College and Bible School, *Twelfth Annual Catalog for the Year 1917–18*, p. 1.
- ¹¹ Redford, *Rise of the Church of the Nazarene*, pp. 204.
- ¹² Smith, *Called Unto Holiness*, pp. 282–287; and Kirkemo, *For Zion's Sake*, pp. 142–144.
- ¹³ James R. Cameron, *Eastern Nazarene College: The First Fifty Years* (Kansas City: Printed for Eastern Nazarene College by the Nazarene Publishing House, 1968), pp. 20–21.
- ¹⁴ Cameron, *Eastern Nazarene College*, pp. 136–137.
- ¹⁵ Carl S. McClain, *I Remember: My Fifty–seven Years at Olivet Nazarene College* (Kansas City: Pedestal Press, 1983), pp. 21–23.
- ¹⁶ Smith, *Called Unto Holiness*, p. 172; and M. E. Redford, *The Rise of the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, n.d.), p. 203.
- ¹⁷ Smith, *Called Unto Holiness*, pp. 226–227.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 227.
- ¹⁹ J. B. Chapman, remarks to the General Board of Education, February 15, 1922. Typescript. In the General Board of Education Collection, Nazarene Archives, file 604–13.
- ²⁰ "Attendance" report, Department of Education Collection, 1928–1932 Quadrennial Records, Nazarene Archives.
- ²¹ "Quadrennial Report: Statistics of Attendance, 1928–1932," General Board of Education Collection, Nazarene Archives.
- ²² Bangs, *Phineas F. Bresee*, pp. 81–82.

²³ A. M. Hills, "The Silver Jubilee Anniversary," *Herald of Holiness* (November 22, 1933): 10–11.

²⁴ Martin E. Marty, "Baptistification Takes Over," *Christianity Today* (Sept. 2, 1983) : 33–36.

²⁵ Leona Bellew McConnell, "A History of the Town and College of Bethany, Oklahoma" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1935), p. 21.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 22.

²⁷ Kirkemo, *For Zion's Sake*, pp. 96, 146–147. Of special interest is section on "Faith and the Scientific Mind," pp. 92–100.

²⁸ Church of the Nazarene, *Manual, 1997–2003* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1997), p. 23.

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