The Reversal of the Great Reversal: The Church of
The Nazarene and the Pope, to the Present

by
Paul Merrill Bassett

Nazarene Theological Seminary
Kansas City, Missouri, USA

Timothy L. Smith has twice challenged the conventional wisdom concerning
the development of religion and culture in the United States and helped to re-
shape our understanding of it. In 1956, Revaluation and Reform taught
us that, far from waning and falling ineffective in the decades 1840-1860,
perfectionism "seemed ancient核查 to the drive toward social reform," and
the evangelicals, "far from disclaiming earthly affairs, . . . played a key
role in the widespread attack upon slavery, poverty, and greed." In 1962,
Calvinistic Holiness stood on its head the received wisdom and asserted that
far from being "religious revolts, geared to the spiritual needs of the masses," the
smaller Wesleyan denominations had as their hallmark, "loyalty to old
patterns, in doctrine, rules of behavior, forms of church organization, commit-
ments, and Sunday School and youth activities." What was new about them,
said Smith, "was chiefly their willingness to adopt experimental methods,"
most of them involving serving the poor. It was the older, not the newer,
denominations that abandoned their inheritance, a fact obscured by, "the
notion of sectarian rebellion on the part of the newer groupings from a churchly
'norm.' ..."

Smith's work, followed by the largely confirmatory studies of Dieter,
Jones, Lounsbury, and Dayton, helped Wesleyan/Holiness people to see
that a strong social conscience and social action are of the sect, not simply
of the core sects, of their theological and spiritual commitment. But Smith's
work appeared when it seemed to many of his earliest readers that evangelical
ivism in general and the Wesleyan/Holiness movement in particular lay in
the declarations regarding social action, and it seemed they had been there
since the 1920's at least. So they raised the question as to how that had
happened. 4

8. The Great Revival

Smith had anticipated this question in Called Up to Holiness. 5 But
his more considered response came as he studied North American evan-
elicism in general. The struggle with theological liberalism, intense and
nearly exclusive concentration on personal salvation, and pre-occupation with
a world-denying orthodoxy had created among evangelicals what Smith
called the Great Revival. 6

But did Smith believe that the Wesleyan/Holiness movement had
undergone that Great Revival? Certainly Smith believed that the Wesleyan/
Holiness people were evangelical, and he certainly saw a decline in
official, denomination-level interest in and support for social action after about
1920. But was this the Great Revival? Certainly that is the way that
others read him, including most holiness people. 7 Then letter, with his misquotation
except of Dayton, began to list reasons for the Great Revival that proceeded
to their denominational history. 8 And David Hocking, who popularized
Smith's phrase by making it a book title, certainly believed that Smith
meant to include the holiness people, for he used Smith's own data
and interpretation to show that the holinesses in particular exemplified
the Great Revival. 9

C. The Basis of Close Paper

But the data seem to show that if Smith meant to include the holiness
people, particularly the Nazarenes, in the Great Revival, he overstated his
case, especially for c.1925-c.1945. Certainly the documents which he
examined lead to his conclusion. But congregational-level materials
(as opposed to denominational-level or inter-church administrative level
materials) seem to say that in the period 1925-1950, the social conscience
of the holiness people flagged but slightly. And it may be seen as
well that the Wesleyan doctrine of Christian perfection undergirded and animated that conscience, as it had earlier.

After 1950, the social conscience of the holiness people did fade, but never to the point of reversal. By the 1970's, it rejuvenated and contributed in the 1980's in the renewal of denomination-level and movement-level schemes and ministries for the poor. And again, the Wesleyan doctrine of perfection guided that rejuvenation and renewal.

5. The Wesleyan/Holiness Movement and the Poor, c.1867-c.1920-1925

As noted, 

Timothy Smith's work stimulated what is now an entire generation of scholars, some within the Wesleyan/Holiness Movement, some outside of it, to test, expand, and refine his themes. By the mid-1970's, 

Helma Diehl, Charles Olwin Jones, Norris Hungerson, and Donald Dayton had confirmed their explanatory power for the last half of the nineteenth century or so, specifically as they applied to the Wesleyan/Holiness Movement.

For from being a "pie in the sky by and by," socially relevancy, sectarian backwater, the Wesleyan/Holiness Movement had created and supported numerous schemes, great and small, for alleviating the plight of the poor. The Wesleyan Methodist connection and the Free Methodists had led the way with their earlier commitment to radical abolitionism and then, after 1864, with their support of radical reconstruction. Their work for social activism sagged some after the middle 1880's but reformist fires still burned there. And now they were joined by the Salvation Army and what was to become the Christian and Missionary Alliance, later to add to their number the Volunteers of America, a Salvationist scheme. All these latter three worked prominently in the cities, in the slums. And the new Wesleyan/Holiness denominations that arose between 1880 and 1910 invested their limited funds heavily in the war on greed and poverty.

Many of the leaders of these groups openly advocated socialism, most notably and strikingly Catherine Booth and B.F. Haynes - the latter, at the close of his career editor of The Herald of Holiness, the Nashville official weekly.
While such persons as Ohio's political king-maker, Marcus Hanna, were
taking the elitist stance of being "baptist, lone, and Republican," and
supporting labor's right to organize only for reasons of political expediency,
most holiness leaders in the heyday of William era (1876-1912) took up labor's
cause as a just claim, opposed the war with Spain (many were pacifists, or
at least they opposed wars which had only political-economic causes and goals),
advocated prohibition because of John Barleycorn's clear relationship to poverty,
pushed for child-labor laws and food and drug acts, and opposed all
"secret, oath-bound societies" as contradictions of "justice for all," or, at
least, "avenues of injustice for none." 

Smith and others have told the story of Wesleyan/Holiness social
involvement in this period with thorough documentation. So it need not be
repeated here. However, given the thesis of this paper, it may be well
to recall some specific data for the Church of the Nazarene from its
beginning to about 1920-1925.

The Church of the Nazarene reports 1928, the year in which it became
a national (as vs. a regional) denomination, as its real date. In reality, it
is the product of a series of mergers of independent Wesleyan/Holiness
associations, some of whose congregations date from the late 1880's. The
series of mergers continues, but the fundamental character-shaping mergers,
as it were, took place from 1885 to 1915. During that period, no fewer
than eleven associations merged into one. They took the name of the dominant
association, a west-coast denomination which had grown out of the work of
the First Church of the Nazarene, Los Angeles, California.

Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene had chosen its name at its founding
in 1895, to reflect the character of Christ, the "Lamb Nazarene," whose
ministry was to the poor. P. F. Breaze, its founding pastor and then
General Superintendent of the developing denomination, insisted that
the Nazarene mission was to preach holiness to the poor. In that
day, preaching to the poor meant active engagement in alleviating
their poverty. So, from its earliest days, Breaze's congregation, and
then its sister congregations from San Diego to Seattle, went on house-to
home, house-to-house visitation to do what needed to be done in clothing, feeding, nursing, financially aiding, cleaning, comforting, repairing, educating and befriending the poor. They visited the jails, nursing homes, "old age" homes, "poor farms," orphanages, and "poor wards" in hospitals as well. They created special ministries to Indian, Chinese, and Japanese immigrants. And they developed systems of care for chronic women and children, alcoholics, and unwed mothers and mothers-to-be. Sometimes before 1900, influenced by the example of the German Methodists in the United States, Breece established the office of deaconess as an official ordained ministry, but cautioned his people not to think for a moment that these released anyone else from ministry to the poor.

What Breece was doing in Los Angeles, J.O. McLeerkan was doing (quite independently of Breece) in Nashville, and Nazarenes or something-would-be Nazarenes were doing in New York City, in Chicago, in Providence, in Cincinnati, and elsewhere. Accurate figures are hard come-by, but by 1919, with a total membership of about 25,000, the Church of the Nazarene was sponsoring 32 "rescue homes" for unwed mothers and mothers-to-be; 6 homes for orphans, neglected, abandoned or delinquent children; 15 "rescue missions" for the urban poor, especially the homeless; and about a dozen schools aspiring to be liberal arts colleges, established primarily for the education of the poor. In 1920, Nazarenes in the Northwest United States established a hospital and nurses' training school at Nampa, Idaho. In the period 1920-1935, the denomination built and staffed hospitals in Europeoland, China, and India; and built and staffed clinics in China, India, Guatemala, and Mozambique. All of these facilities were located in densely populated but difficult to reach places where medical services were non-existent or primitive. Important to all of their medical work was the Nazarene Medical Missionary Union, organized in 1924, in southern California, and an apparently loosely organized association of Nazarene physicians in the Middle West.
Bearing in mind "Chinese peculiarities" (especially the dreaded "faces," which was implicitly understood to mean with social welfare issues not counting towards "foreign" statistics), I wish to ask welfare officials: what steps are being taken to prevent the spread of this problem? And when it comes to the Chinese general public, should they be encouraged to participate in anti-

There is also a geographical prejudice against which it was to seek. Is it possible to encourage and the general public to be more helpful, especially in places where a clear plan to aid in an effective manner, or to work with the Chinese public to encourage and assist in whatever way possible to assist in anti-discrimination efforts.

The Chinese public in its challenge and the social welfare boards of the various districts, which were implicitly understood to work with social welfare issues as well as social welfare workers, should be encouraged to participate in anti-discrimination efforts.
school was to raise funds strictly from within its assigned area, free
of interference from any other school.\footnote{34}

This scheme seems to have been in the background of the thinking
of denominational administrators from 1919 onward—not as a clear
model in all cases of social welfare work, but as a kind of paradigm.\footnote{35}

In 1929, upon administrative recommendation, the administrative
structure of the denomination was simplified, as many boards were
now reduced to committees and amalgamated, and made answerable
to the General Assembly through a General Board which met annually.\footnote{36}

By 1928, then, the five committees considering social welfare issues
had been reduced to three; and in 1932, to one.\footnote{37}

This narrowing of structure radically reduced the accessibility of
the hundreds of institutions to consideration in denomination-level
meetings, and denomination-level literature now tended to pick up
only denomination-level causes. Some did attempt widely disseminated
newspapers and newsletters, but these were discouraged by

general-level leadership, and depended, at any rate, on the public-
relations skill of their editors.\footnote{38} In turning to their respective districts
for support, some found sufficient help for a time, but the Great
Depression wrote "finis" to all but a few very hardy cases.\footnote{39}

Other leaders took their toll as well. From 1915 onward,
leadership devolved upon individuals scarcely aware of the problem
of urban society, in any first-hand way. Feeling very deeply the

need to "take the course" of their predecessors, they understood
that course in terms dictated in large part by the modernist-
fundamentalist controversy—a controversy barely begun in the
time of these predecessors.\footnote{40} Their predecessors had assumed that the

role purpose of the Church of the Nazarene was to proclaim "full
redemption," and their predecessors had seen social action as a

haltingly agreed that this way of doing just that. The new leadership,
thought that was so;

but it could not really feel that it was so. And rather than
turning to their own past for their model, they looked at
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II. The Church of the Nazarene and the Poor, c. 1920-1925 to c. 1930

Until the 1950s, when the military and business styles of leadership captured the field in North Atlantic culture, the General Superintendent of the Church of the Nazarene governed primarily by force of character rather than by position or law. The trouble almost all of the initiative and most of the authority for developing and sustaining the day-to-day life of a congregation in the hands of the pastor and the people themselves. And it was under this circumstance that the Nazarene ministered to the poor for almost a half-century. General officers might, as private persons, be interested in such ministries; but, except for the activities of the foreign missionaries, general officers took little or no official interest.

This lack of official interest gives the semblance of accuracy and validity at where congre-
to the idea of the Great Reversal. But if one looks where the day to
gather in rural their
day life of congregation day to day energizes the idea of a Great
Reversal becomes incomprehensible.

It is true that one by one the rescue missions, rescue homes, orphanages and the rest closed. Local, or even district support simply could not sustain them. But now pastors and people did what they could, even in the depths of the Great Depression. Until the post-war building boom, most of the older, experienced in the larger cities Nazarene congregations remained where they had been for a generation, serving both the poor around them and those who had moved "out" but still came back "in" to worship—and to serve. Older "flourishing churches in Los Angeles, Detroit, Cleveland, Chicago, Kansas City, Dallas, Denver, Seattle, Columbus, and elsewhere, continued active programs of feeding and clothing and legally defending the poor, providing shelter for the indigent and homeless, and protecting and finding professional help for the abused and abusers right up to the end of World War II, when nearly full employment momentarily alleviated considerably both poverty and its effects.
often, these inner-city congregations were among the largest on
their districts, which gave them a larger voice in district policies
and which made them models for others to follow. 55

In each of the congregations named, and in several dozen
others, had long had in their memberships significant numbers of
professional people—physicians, attorneys, teachers—who had
and they had followed in their parish track
originally joined those churches (or their parents had joined) in
order to be of direct assistance to the poor. 56

Most of these, and at least 200 other congregations that one
could document, regularly paid the tuition and fees of their own
young who needed aid in order to go to college—in the Great Depression. 57

Often, these funds came through the local church treasury but were
actually large gifts from individuals or several individuals associated
for the purpose who wished to remain anonymous. In Chicago First,
Indianapolis First, Columbus First, Pasadena First, and Nashville First,
then is evidence that as much as $15,000 a year was distributed

by the pastor on behalf of anonymous donors in the years 1932–33
alone. 58

During the Depression the denomination did scale back its
“foreign” mission work, but proportionally, it reduced very slightly. 59

It did close some of its mission schools but actually increased the
number of its clinics and hospitals and pressed ahead in other
ministries to the urban poor. Such ministry was standard practice

in mission work and such demands as did arise tended to
fall on deaf ears. 60

Church newsletters, board minutes, committee minutes, and
interviews all tell the same story: social welfare projects now bore
more modest proportions than some had borne earlier, and they tended
to be quite local and low profile—almost taken for granted— but they
were there, efficiently and in very large numbers. Local congregations
still intentionally, programmatically, contended with alcoholism,
the unique
homelessness, unemployment, immigrable problems of immigrants,

(Continued...
food and clothing distribution and health care. 62

So it was until the end of World War II or a bit later. Between
1944 and 1950, the denomination underwent a sea-change in administration
then
even more profound than that of 1915-1917. Not one of the general officers
(General Superintendents or Executive Secretaries of the various general depart-
ments) serving in 1950 had been in office prior to the 1944 General
Assembly, and between 1948 and 1952, five of the six Liberal Arts colleges in
the United States had elected new presidents. 63 World War II had deeply affected
the new leaders' understanding of administration and organization. They
took to the line and staff model, the military model, and took a much
stranger hand in influencing the electives of district superintendents (even
exercising much more often now their power to appoint in cases of
bureaucratic resignation) and of pastors in the larger churches, 64

Of the six general superintendents serving in 1952, two had
grown up in the very legalistic, rural, and intensely congregational
wing of the Wesleyan Holiness Movement and reacted quite consciously
against that background, especially in their rather autocratic administrative
styles. Two had served congregations which had retained something of
the older tradition of benevolence and ministries to the poor, but had
given most of their attention to the professional persons within
those congregations and had encouraged embourgeoisement. 65

Some of the old "first" churches now moved to the suburbs. And
the Herald of Holiness noted
such moves were an index of progress. There were those who stayed
just as well, but the flight to suburbs was on.

... Not helping matters was the tendency of leadership to applaud
relocation and construction projects and to promote those who, as pastors,
led them, and, at the same time to say nothing of the poor left
behind when First Church moved out. 66 Congregations with strong social
conscion traditions up to World War II, such as Kansas City, Leavenworth, First
and Chicago First, both moved twice since 1950 largely to remain
predominantly white. Neither left any effective witness when its
founders had expended their labors and invested their lives, but
...
denominational leaders pointed to them as models of progress and, at the same time, both congregations gained wide reputations for outstanding giving, even sacrificial giving, to what was becoming known as World Mission. 69 They surely did not sense the irony in their work.

On the other side of the ledger, Nashville First and Columbus (Ohio) First both remained in their original neighborhoods—which was termed a new wave of urban poor. And both continued to minister to the poor, but with varying success and with uneven support (i.e., moral support) from district and general leadership. 70

General leadership actively opposed several proposed social welfare programs developed by local congregations in the 1960s and 1970s with sharp warnings about walking away from the Nazarene tradition of soul-winning! 71 The most noteworthy case developed in Nashville, where the College Hill Church pastor led the way in planning and constructing several high-rise towers with relatively cheap apartments for retired persons. No general denominational funds were ever asked for; nor were district funds.

Nor was the project a legal or financial encumbrance on the local congregation. The corporation board, all Nazarenes, legally separated itself from College Hill Church, which left the several superintendents and district superintendents without jurisdiction. But they seem not to have recognized that in their attempts to halt the project by threatening the disciplining of the pastor and the clerical members of the project's board. 72

Of course, leadership did not always operate so heavy-handedly. In fact, its record regarding social welfare enterprises was mixed. The general leaders generally supported the philanthropic work of the missionaries, though they seldom approved the construction or development of any new project. And in the United States, they generally applauded small scale, local welfare projects. 73 But they never took any initiative even in suggesting enterprises that might be carried out under local auspices.

The mandate of the new Department of Evangelism,
established in 1956, and met the word reflective of the concern of
the first generation of Nazarenes that it was the mission of the new
denomination to preach full salvation to the poor. And yet,
ironically, it appeared to the denomination's long history of
commitment to "winnin' souls" as a first priority. 13

Viewed from this angle, the idea of the Great Reversal makes
sense of vast masses of data at last. And so it has seemed
most

most to many who have analyzed it.

But, in the last decade, Nazarenes observed, or could have
observed, some anomalies which, on reflection, would seem to
indicate that even in the 1960's and 1970's, when the Great
Reversal does seem finally to apply, the Wesleyan Social
movement still held, even with some vigor, among Nazarenes and
the course of events since the early 1980's would seem to confirm
it.


Nazarenes took contradictory positions regarding the social upheavals of
the 1960's and 1970's. Generally speaking, the administrative leadership of
the denomination took a defensive posture and blamed the troubles on leftist
influences in the media and in the educational system. 49 Law and order
could resolve the problems. 45 Almost no appeals for applying Wesleyan
notionology (which is also to say Wesleyan ethics) came from that direction.

Wesleyanism and social betterment were seen as two vastly different causes
and the church had to do with both one of them. 75

In the meantime, on the Nazarene college campuses and among
younger but experienced pastors, there arose a powerful and active
interest in the history of the denomination and in the movement of which
it is a part along with a re-imagining of a different in Wesley and Wesleyanism,
especially at the point of a genuinely Wesleyan doctrine of Christ incarnation,
in both
and among instances, the social implications surfaced rather quickly. 34

At Nazarene Theological Seminary, for instance, a significant number of
An independent, and therefore limited, follow-up study sought to test the role of the Wesleyan doctrine of Christian perfection in these enterprises. In something like 87% of them, that doctrine and its correlative experienced lay at the very foundation of the work. The purpose of the program was the proclamation of full salvation and the engagement in these programs offered opportunity to give living witness to the meaning of the preached word. Further, most believed that genuine sanctification could come only as one allowed the Spirit to work in perfect love.

Of the remaining 13%, almost all recorded some correlation of the activity to the doctrine and experience but were placed it at the very heart of the matter.

In 1985, the newly inaugurated general Office of Compassionate Ministries and Nazarene Theological Seminary jointly sponsored a conference on compassionate ministries. Anticipating an attendance of 60 or so, the sponsors were overwhelmed by 600 - teachers, pastors, and some students. General church leadership was conspicuous by its absence. And the house of prayer was closed.

... somehow, especially those with special investment in evangelism and church growth, solemnly warned that social ministries must not replace "earning results." But the denominational "headquarters" was now back in the game.

That conference galvanized those engaged in social ministries and led them to create formal and informal networks. And it suggested a number of persons who suspected that they had been working in near-isolation. Further, it created a desire to strengthen the theological foundations of such work - a desire that is, as yet, not being met with the energy which it deserves.

... pleasantly surprising and encouraging, though probably not of lasting consequence, was the number of leaders in social ministries who took part in the conference whose roots - including the yearning to bring the gospel news to the poor - were in the Church of the Nazarenes.

Richard Schubert, then President of the American Red Cross; Paul Rees, then Vice-President of World Vision International; Paul McClary, from
1975-1984 director of Church World Services; Tom Neer, director of the City of Hope, Washington, D.C.; Wallace Erickson, President of Compassion International; John L. Peter, President of World Neighbors; and Ray Knighton, who headed a group of medical persons who stood ready to take medicine, technical equipment and personnel anywhere on short notice. All spoke of serving the poor in terms that the first generations of Japanese/Japanese people understood and developed. Some said

...suffered at the hands of a generation of Japanese leaders who, however...

...well-meaning, had lost touch with the tradition’s true past and worst... The Lincoln Institute, others were converted and changed from the first of the Great Revival, and others represented the reurbanization of the

...leadership [sic] vision that was always there. They represented the whole range of denominational responses to the mandate to preach to the poor.

CONCLUSIONS

In 1975, the Commission on Faith and Order of the National Council of Churches, meeting in Berkeley, California, took an exciting... to worship with the Metropolitan Community Church of San Francisco. In reflecting about the service, several members of an AIDS church group of the Commission expressed surprise that one of the participating clergy was a homophile minister, a Negro, who was not himself homosexual. They compounded their surprise in learning that the denominational controversy homosexuality... and compounded it into more on learning that at least a half-dozen ministers in the inner city appeared by virtue of their activities to meet with homophile communities around them.

...Their surprise turned up in a publication collecting of their papers, and their surprise irritated several denominational officials who refused to publish the... publication came... long deeply ambivalent (at best) about such ministrations, this concern now and — publicity. So they promptly converted an opportunity to advocate and to lead into an occasion for denouncing and gay-bashing.

At present, this represents the absence of the denominational social conscience rather well: a re-urbanization of the original social vision, including... resources commitment to its legislative, theological foundation; re-entry of denominational offices into leadership... and, among the constituted leaders at the highest level the weakening of the Great Revival in the form of a Great Foundation.