Nazarene Manifesto - Chapter II

The Churches of Christendom Severally

Here we must consider the various denominations and their respective congregations. The statement of the Manual (paragraph 22) reads: "The churches severally are ... composed of such regenerate persons as by providential permission, and by the leadings of the Holy Spirit, become associated together for holy fellowship and ministries."

If there be such an organization-denomination, if you please-as is composed totally of unregenerate sinners, then you have no church, but at best a religious society, club, or congregation only. Regrettably, today we do have sects that are, for the most part, unregenerate in nature and company-departed from the truth, "giving heed to seducing spirits," and promulgating "doctrines of devils." Communism is surely a religion. One may even wonder how Unitarianism can call herself a church of Christ and yet reject His essential deity. Furthermore, we have seen the beginnings of such organizations as the Church of Satan, in these contemporary times.

But be it known for certain that Nazarenes do not comprise the total of those regenerate persons who have "by providential permission, and by the leadings of the Holy Spirit, become associated together for holy fellowship and ministries." We do surely contend that we are a part of that great company.

There are many denominations in whose congregations are found truly regenerate persons who are, by virtue of this new life in Christ, a part of the Church of God in general. To all such we, who are subjects of a like experience in the Church of the Nazarene, can say with Wesley, "If your heart is as my heart, then give me your hand"--yes, even the right hand of fellowship in a common body of believers and in the mystical body of Christ.

Surely we can see the providential hand of God in the raising up of most all of the old-line denominations, even though we may disagree drastically with many—even most of them—as to particular items of doctrine and practice. We are not so narrow-minded or ecclesiastically bigoted as to see the hand of God in only our own denominational history. These others have been mightily used of God in some time or other and in one way or another. There are today regenerate persons in their memberships. Hence a part of them is to be identified with the Church of God in general. So we may speak of the churches severally as being each, in part at least, a portion of the Church in general, even as we hope a great part of our own Zion to be.

Who would dare to question the active providence of God in raising up Luther and his followers, from whence came the denominations called Lutheran And surely no one dare deny the manifest operations of God's providence that resulted in the work of the Reformers: Calvin, Zwingli, and Knox, from which came such denominations as the Presbyterian and Reformed, with their emphasis upon the covenant and the atonement. And in spite of their early Anabaptist fanaticisms and vagaries, none can fail to recognize God at work in the raising up of a people called Baptists, with their insistence upon baptism as a moral Rubicon in which one renounces the world, the flesh, and the devil, and identifies himself with those who acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

We Nazarenes are sure that God had a hand in the conversion and calling of John Wesley and his associates, and that He gave providential permission and the leadings of the Holy Spirit to the organization and association of Methodist Societies for the promotion of scriptural holiness around the world. Nor would our brethren from New England want us to overlook the moving of God's Spirit in the Congregational churches associated together for holy fellowship and the special ministries involved in the promotion of holiness.

And what shall we say of the Disciples of Christ, the Friends, the Salvation Army, and the Evangelicals or the United Brethren

Is denominationalism totally evilAre we not correct in contending, with J. S. Whale, that "that which attaches a man to no denomination detaches him from all"? Is it not true that modern, so-called "interdenominationalism" with its emphasis upon the idea of a non-denominational fellowship has become a kind of association of Plymouth Brethren—comprising what might well be called the "interdenominational denomination" Thus we have only added another denomination to those of the modern church scene. Or, where this is not the case, we have merely a fading away into disintegrating independencies that flourish while the human leaders live and decay upon their death.

Whoever heard of any horse pulling a load, or plowing a furrow, until he was both harnessed and hitched—had some straps and restrictions, and was teamed up with others for like purposes So it happens that the Church of the Nazarene is not anti-denominational. We are aware—to some extent at least—of the unique contributions being made to the cause of Christ by each of the various denominations within Christendom-Catholic or Orthodox included, even though we may take exception to many of their forms of worship.

Yet it is right here that we encounter human systems and organizations, and here is where there arises a certain dualism in the notes and attributes of the church generally and organizationally considered. It is because the church is composed of human personalities that we must say that it is both one and many, that it is both holy and only nominally so, that it is both universal and provincial. Or, as Wiley lists these notations: the church has both "unity and diversity," "holiness and imperfection;" it is both "Catholic and local," "visible and invisible," "militant and triumphant;" "Apostolic and Confessional." It is likewise because of its being composed of human members that its type of organization may be papal, congregational, episcopal, or presbyterian. And for a similar reason each denomination spells out its conditions for membership and stipulates wherein authority in the church is vested.
THE PRINCIPLES OF DENOMINATIONALISM

What, then, are the constituting principles of denominationalism? We are bound to recognize the validity of each of the five principles discussed below though we object to a denominationalism which is based upon any one of them singly. In brief, they may be listed as:

1. Institutionalism

2. Dissent

3. The Personal Principle

4. The Voluntary Principle

5. The Spiritual Principle

1. Institutionalism

True to the Reformed tradition, we look upon the visible church as a living community of believers. The church has therefore an objective givenness as an institution to which every individual believer should belong. Such an institution must develop and apply its necessary agreed statement of belief and ecclesiastical discipline. In doing this, its form of government must avoid the "high-church" malady of clerical dictatorship, and the "low-church"archy of private individualism. A valid and a working balance must be struck between authority and tolerance. Conformity to traditions must not become totalitarianism. Concern for "the inner light" must not become the canonization of private opinion under the category of a divine oracle. Authority imposed from without must not stifle vitality expressing itself from within.

Hence the institution must provide for both order and ardor, uniformity and spontaneity. Its worship must be both individual and social, corporate and private, formal and free. There must be the liturgy of an order of worship combined with "the liturgy of the Holy Spirit." One is stipulated; the other is spontaneous. We cannot regard the church as less than an institution of worship. It is a Christian society, organized for the expression of its faith through creeds, liturgy, preaching, witnessing, and sacraments. It is the institution that has been raised up by God for the provision of probational training in brotherhood.

Moreover, it is a prophetic community, aimed at transforming individuals and societies in accordance with the divine will. And while membership in the visible institution does not guarantee membership in the kingdom of God, yet no one is a proper candidate for membership in the visible church until he belongs to the Church invisible. Hence, as such an institution, it is composed of the people of God, living and worshipping together in a spiritual fellowship. But this also means that it must ever be more than a mere institution. For, as George W. Forell so aptly states it:

Whenever the church is merely institution, organization, machinery--apart from people--it is no longer truly church. And whenever the church is only a collection of individuals who like each other, who meet because they like each other--it is no longer church . . . It would not be too difficult to give examples of protestant churches which have much more in common with a well-run corporation like the General Motors corporation than the New Testament Church. Sometimes machinery for machinery's sake accumulates, and when the church meets, it seems more like a stockholder's meeting. The Protestant Faith would assert that a church which is merely an efficiently run corporation designed for the preservation of its organizational life is no longer a Protestant Church. Conversely, when the church becomes a group of likeminded individuals who have a good time together, who belong to the same race, the same nationality, the same income group, the same educational level, sometimes the same family-a group of individuals who meet because they enjoy each other's company--we see another aberration from the Protestant concept of the church.[3]

As an institution the church must have and exercise the right of admission to, and expulsion from, its membership. The unworthy must not be admitted and the worthy must not be excluded. Moreover, the church must defend itself against the destructive influence of unclean members and false doctrines. This calls for standards of faith and conduct, together with a clearly formulated methodology of church discipline. It likewise calls for a good degree of wholesome self-criticism on the part of the church. Hence it becomes the duty of every church to make a formal statement of its articles of faith and its ideals for conduct. It must also establish the authority of these and state who shall administer the same.

2. Dissent

Now, since the methods and modes of ecclesiastical government are not a matter of divine appointment, but are largely a matter of human invention and growth, there must be another basic principle acknowledged in our denominationalism, namely, the privilege of dissent and withdrawal. In short, one must be permitted to associate or disassociate himself with the visible institution of his choice. Therefore a church established by the state which makes it necessary for the sake of citizenship in the state to be likewise a member of the establishment is invalid.

In relation to the church, mere schism is to be deplored, and tolerance is to be manifested, both by its members and by its administrators. Wesley notes that numberless books and arguments have appeared dealing with this problem of schism, while all the while the accused and the accusers have failed clearly to define the term.[4] He pleads that it be defined in a true scriptural sense. He would also remind us that it is "not a separation from any Church (whether general or particular, whether the Catholic, or any national
Unity is the condition for the oneness of the Church. There are some cases where the quest for organizational unity has only promoted evil consequences.

Following their principle of conscientious dissent, Protestants have generally been suspicious of those who insist that organizational unity is the condition for the oneness of the Church. There are some cases where the quest for organizational unity has only promoted evil consequences.

At this point let us recall that it was the saintly James Arminius who gave to the world his famous oration "On Reconciling Religious Dissensions Among Christians,"[5] which is just as valid for today as when he gave it on the eighth of February in 1606.

Here the Church of the Nazarene agrees with Augustine’s dictum:

In essentials—unity,
In nonessentials—liberality,
In all things charity.

Sectarianism is the generic term covering manifestations of the liberty of the individual conscience. The sect-type of church has had, and still has, great and precious importance. Whether, therefore, the group be "come-outers" or "put-outers," it must be admitted that it is no part of true religion to seek to compel religion. It should be adopted freely, and not by force. Those of us who recall the times when "holiness people" were "read out" of the membership of the "old-line" churches must not fail to concede to others that toleration which we sought and claimed should have been extended toward ourselves. Let us recall the fact that the High Calvinists of the Netherlands were no sooner emancipated from the persecutions of the papacy-loving Duke of Alva of Spain than they turned in harsh intolerance and slaughter upon the remonstrating Arminians and, in the name of Christianity, instituted one of its blackest historical pages in that travesty of justice known as the Synod of Dort.

But no sectarian can justify the divisive practices of mere schismatics. As Wesley has noted: "A breach of brotherly love . . . brings forth evil fruit. . . . It opens a door to all unkind tempers, both in ourselves and others. It leads directly to a whole train of evil surmisings, to severe and uncharitable judging of each other."[8] Simply because the Visible Church is composed of humans, and thus cannot escape evil consequences.

At this juncture these words from Dr. A. M. Hills seem extremely pertinent:

But the ill consequences . . . do not terminate in the heart. Evil tempers cannot long remain within, before they are productive of outward fruit. . . . so he whose heart is full of prejudice, anger, suspicion, or any unkind temper, will surely open his mouth in a manner corresponding with the disposition of his mind. And hence will arise, if not lying and slandering . . . bitter words, tale-bearing, backbiting, and evil-speaking of every kind.

From evil words . . . how many evil works will naturally flow! Anger, jealousy, envy, wrong tempers of every kind, do not vent themselves merely in words, but push men continually to all kind of ungodly and unrighteous actions. A plentiful harvest of all the works of darkness may be expected to spring from this source; whereby . . . souls . . . may be turned from the way of peace, and finally drowned in everlasting perdition."[9]

While it must be admitted that a constructive and conscientious critic may be one of the best guardians of the church’s purity and polity, we must acknowledge the wisdom of Wesley’s words: "Do not rashly tear asunder the sacred ties which unite you to any Christian society. . . . Take care how you rend the body of Christ by separating from your brethren."[10]

Following their principle of conscientious dissent, Protestants have generally been suspicious of those who insist that organizational unity is the condition for the oneness of the Church. There are some cases where the quest for organizational unity has only promoted…
further disunity. Hence the quest for organizational unity must also seek to foster that inner life of evangelical freedom where love operates in the name of grace. The real oneness of the Church is that of faith, hope, and love, which characterized the primitive Christians.

3. The Personal Principle

Closely related to the principle of dissent is the personal principle. True religion is always intensely a personal matter. Christ's Church is made up only of His believing disciples who consciously take Him as Master and Lord. Hence a merely nominal Christianity is a contradiction in terms. Being born in a so-called Christian nation does not make one a member of Christ's Church. Each must be born from above into this fellowship. We must elaborate the obvious: Does any man go to the dentist by proxy? So all human thought and belief, like human life itself, are inherently and inescapably personal. Of course we may find it necessary when traveling abroad to remind our foreign friend that not all Americans are Christians. But this is only to admit that mere nominal religion becomes the enemy of the genuine in all ages and lands.

In speaking of the freeman's revolt against the claims of an exclusively mediatorial priesthood, Whale notes: "The path to the mercy-seat is so narrow that two cannot walk abreast there."[11] So we Nazarenes have always insisted that personal faith and discipleship is a fundamental presupposition to church membership. Moreover, that "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord," is always a personal experience and state of grace.

The danger lies in pushing this personal principle to the extreme. One cannot by reason thereof declare himself independent and unneeedful of the brotherhood of believers. To seek to do so would be ultimately to reduce Christianity to a merely atomistic individualism which would destroy the church. Let all so-called "splinter groups" take note! Religion is also inescapably social in its lived-out expression and practice. Each of us may be a priest of God, but the universal priesthood of all believers does not eliminate the need for gathering ourselves together (Heb. 10:25). The fact remains that the true church is a faithful people, gathered together by the Spirit of Christ and according to His Word, submitting themselves to Him in all things. We may therefore agree with Henry Barrow that:

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The true . . . Church of Christ is a company of faithful people, separated from the unbelievers and heathen of the land, gathered in the name of Christ, whom they truly worship and readily obey as their own King, Priest, and Prophet; and joined together as members of one body, ordered and governed by such offices and laws as Christ, in His last will and testament, hath thereunto ordained.[12]

Since each person is a priest in his own right, there is really no qualitative difference between pastor and people. Rightly do we regard our teaching-ruling elders very highly in love for their work's sake. But since we too are joint heirs with them and with Christ, we remind them that they are never to consider themselves lords over God's heritage. And having reminded them of this, we must hasten to admit that one of the clear notes of a true church is its right and power to discipline itself, and its elders are those duly appointed for the exercise of this power. Yet, even here, they may only direct and must never dominate.

All members of the Church of Jesus Christ are directly responsible to Him for maintaining His authority in the Church, and this responsibility cannot be shifted to the ordained minority. Just as surely as all members must be Christian, so surely must all members acknowledge the supreme authority of Christ over their consciences and conduct. Whenever and wherever we are gathered together in His name we will also recognize the authority of His presence. Where every individual believer seeks supremely that which seems good to the Holy Spirit, there too will be realized "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

4. The Voluntary Principle

Paragraph 23 of the Manual states that: "The Church of the Nazarene is composed of those persons who have voluntarily associated themselves together according to the doctrines and polity of said church." But here let us admit, in agreement with R. W. Dale, the fact that:

when Christian churches are described as voluntary societies it is not meant that Christian people are at liberty to please themselves whether they will form churches or not, but that churches are to be formed

in free obedience to the authority of Christ—not by the power of the State.[13]

It is a historical achievement of the sect-type of churches—this vindication of the right to freedom of worship. The voluntary principle rejects the idea that one's monarch is the supreme head of the church, as conversely it also rejects the concept of the head of the church as a monarch over its members. In our rejection of the church-state we not only assert that the church must be pure (the personal principle), but we also assert that it must be free (the voluntary principle). Uniformity is not, therefore, axiomatic and neither is conformity automatic. No magistrate of the state or the church can compel either.

We Nazarenes claim a certain autonomy for our denomination, and each of our congregations claims for itself a similar autonomy, as do also the individual members within our churches. Any local congregation may, if it chooses, withdraw itself from the main body of the Church of the Nazarene, just as any individual member may withdraw himself from any of the local congregations. However, in the case of a congregation it may not withdraw from the parent denomination property built with money raised in the name of that denomination. [14]

There are no "birthright" Nazarenes. Even the experience of the new birth does not make one a member of the denomination. We have therefore stated in the Manual (paragraph 28):
The membership of a local church shall consist of all who have been organized as a church by those authorized so to do and who have been publicly received by those having the proper authority, after having declared their experience of salvation, their belief in our doctrines, and their willingness to submit to our government.

Note the use of the word "willingness." We have further spelled out this voluntary principle in paragraph 26, sections 1 and 2. For, although we are agreed on the necessity of a superintendency which shall foster and care for churches already established, and . . . shall . . . organize and encourage the organizing of churches everywhere. [yet] we are [also] agreed that authority given to the superintendents shall not interfere with the independent action of a fully organized church. Each church shall enjoy the right to select its own pastor. . . . Each church shall also elect its delegates to the various assemblies, manage its own finances, and have charge of all other matters pertaining to its local life and work.

It will be evident that our church has considerable confidence in the spiritual maturity and competence of the ordinary member and humble believer. This is in keeping with the Reformation principle which believes that those who are in Christ Jesus should not remain always under tutelage as babes in Christ, but should be growing in grace so as to vindicate their freedom and responsibility as God's adult children-led of the Holy Spirit and seeking that which seems good to that same Spirit. And it is for exactly this reason that it is stated in our special rules (paragraph 39) and in our government (paragraph 64) that: "local churches in selecting their church officers are directed to elect only such as are clearly in the experience of entire sanctification."

Of course our ministers are expected to preach frequently and clearly on this state and experience of grace so that members of their congregation may enter into it both joyfully and willingly—and, let us add, intelligently. Thus, the only kind of hierarchy our church recognizes is that of spiritual maturity in contrast with immaturity and lack of experience in the things of God. Pastors, therefore, may well take guidance and admonition from the sanctified laymen of the church, and of course it is expected that laymen shall submit themselves to their duly elected leaders in the Lord. On the Day of Pentecost, all had the right to prophesy, and yet all spake only "as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4).

5. The Spiritual Principle

Our discussion has thus brought us to the inescapable consideration of the spiritual principle which must ever govern our Zion. Our primary emphasis rests upon the indwelling Spirit, Word, or Light. This is the true Pentecostal principle. Men are both justified and sanctified by grace alone on God's part, and by faith alone on man's part. No pastor or priest can be exclusive purveyor of God's grace in forgiveness and cleansing.

We recognize, on the other hand, the dangers of radical individualism, or that private opinionatedness which fails to give due respect for the united conscience of the brotherhood of believers. He who would contend that God reveals His will for the church to him alone is nothing more than a religious bigot. The net results of such an attitude could be at most a society of religious anarchists. The history of the Church of Jesus is marred with "splinter groups" given over to frenzied spiritual emotions, gathering themselves into dissident groups of "super-saints," and giving themselves to unwise activities not so saintly. To quote Luther, the great rebel of the Reformation: "There is nothing more poisonous, more hurtful or more devilish than a rebellious man."

On the other hand, we must surely revere the awakened and regenerate-sanctified conscience of man as the dwelling place of the "inner light," and sanctified judgment induced by the Spirit of God. Here we come to the great Arminian-Wesleyan principle of tolerance, which would allow, and even insist, that it is the duty of every human soul to guide itself freely by the light of God's Spirit and the revelation of God's Word. In that divine cloister of the human heart, God speaks His holy will for each man individually. Let him indeed be a man of God's Word. In that divine cloister of the human heart, God speaks His holy will for each man individually. Let him indeed be a man of the inward word. But let him also distinguish between what may be God's personal will for himself privately and what may be God's will for the brotherhood of believers publicly and collectively. But even in the application of this spiritual principle, let us beware of the extreme of asceticism on the one hand and that of antinomianism on the other.

Montanism is the classic example of an overemphasis upon charismatic gifts, which opens the door to an unbalanced subjectivity. Right well might Pelagius fear the loss of faith, of a proper emphasis upon the will, and upon moral practice.

Let us never forget that the New Testament gives us our ideal for empirical Christianity. The gifts are for the edification of the body of believers; the graces are for the individual to profit withal. There is nothing wrong in believing in private revelation and a direct fellowship with God. It is a great and indisputable reality. But woe betide us if an overemphasis thereon should turn us into a mere set of "whirling dervishes." Yet, again, it were far better to have a living church rather than a lifeless one, even though it includes a few radicals, ranters, diggers, and enthusiasts who are sometimes apt to confuse noise with piety.

Here Whale's observation seems valid:

Men do not necessarily become separatists out of obstinacy and caprice, but often because conscience and high principle compel them; and . . . until modern Protestantism has rediscovered for itself a high theology of the church which, while true to its classic first principles, shall be demonstrably relevant to the need of the modern world, it will have no convincing answer to earnest, if fanatic, spirits who advocate "reformation without tarrying for any." For a living church men will pay the price even of sectarianism.[15]

We Nazarenes who are careful to remind the "oldline" churches that we were not "come-outers" but "put-outers" (excommunicated for our emphasis, or overemphasis, as they insisted, of this spiritual principle) need now to beware lest we in turn follow their example in excluding from our ranks those whose zeal and vigor could serve to revitalize our Zion. To this end enthusiasm must not be always suspect, prophesying must not be despised and squelched, lest we be found to quench the blessed Spirit himself. Let us not open the
door to that unbelief which knows no working of the Spirit but what is transmitted from a distant past through outworn, outward ordinances. Thank God Its blessed Holy Spirit is not under lock and key to any ancient or modern ecclesiasticism!

Always the recurring issue is that between order and ardor, between authority imposed from without and vitality expressing itself from within, between the correct uniformity of law and the dynamic spontaneity of life. Let us not overlook the fact that the same apostle who said, "Let every thing be done decently and in order," also said, "Quench not the Spirit." The church may surely be considered a great institution, but it is likewise a free association of believers.

Therefore, in charting our course between freedom and authority we must seek always the unity of the spirit. Mere individualism spells anarchy; collective ecclesiasticism spells regimentation. Neither is in the will of God for our Zion nor in what Sam Shoemaker so often refers to as "the stream of the Holy Spirit." No man is an island. Insularity is but an illusion created by the covering sea, since the islands are all part of one pelagic, submarine continent, united in the depths. So let it be among Nazarenes. We have our individualities given us by grace and race, but deep down in the ocean of that grace, if we are Christ's, we are one in Him. Let the majority recognize that the rights of the minority are real, and let us not despise the brave and courageous witness of some who sit in judgment on our denominational faults.

Many a denomination owes a great debt to its nonconformists. Let us remember that, if our liberty is to be real, then toleration must be its vital correlate. We who are of the questing mind must be open and tolerant, not losing patience with the slow response of the less enlightened. We who are the lovers of the good old status quo must also be tolerant of the experimenters and the innovators. A man filled with the Holy Spirit will show a genuine respect for the convictions of his neighbor. By all means let us seek to preserve the inner life of evangelical freedom where love is allowed to operate in the name of grace.

We shall do well to recognize the great dangers to church unity, which are: (1) individualism, or the arrogance of privacy; (2) sectarianism, or the divisive tendency; and (3) fanaticism, that simulated, spiritual superiority that doubles its effort after it has lost its aim.

[10] Ibid., p. 409.
[14] Any properly incorporated local Church of the Nazarene agrees in its "Articles of Incorporation" to be governed by the rules and polity of the parent denomination as established from time to time by its General Assembly—in which case, paragraph 120 of the Manual forbids trustees and/or a local church" from diverting "property from the use of the Church of the Nazarene." Cf., also paragraphs 168-69.