



The Church of the Nazarene

Introduction

Point of Origin

Church Organization & Law

Distinctive Points of Belief

The Nazarenes Versus Scripture

Weak Points in the Church of the Nazarene

Review Questions

References

Introduction: Although 2001 figures indicate that there are 1.4 million members of the Church of the Nazarene, those figures don't tell the whole story. A high percentage of the members of this rather small denomination are very devout and active. Headquartered in Kansas City, Missouri, the Church of the Nazarene has missionaries around the world. Nazarenes support liberal arts colleges in the Africa, Canada, Korea, and the United States, as well as 2 graduate seminaries and 41 undergraduate Bible/theological colleges worldwide. The church operates 2 hospitals, 63 medical clinics, 2 nurses training colleges, 1 junior college, and serves 69,100 children, outside the United States and Canada. (<http://www.nazarene.org/>).

< Point of Origin >

The Church of the Nazarene emerged out of the holiness movement of post Civil War America. The doctrines of John Wesley on personal holiness and sanctification had a great impact throughout much of North America in the 19th century. As a result, several independent holiness and Pentecostal groups sprang up in various regions. In 1907 & 1908, three of these regional groups merged to form the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene.

The groups that merged were the Association of Pentecostal Churches in America representing the northeast, the Church of the Nazarene from the West Coast, and a southern group known as the Holiness Church of Christ. In 1919 the word "Pentecostal" was dropped from the title of the church in order to distance it from the "Pentecostal" groups which speak in tongues, a practice the Church of the Nazarene does not endorse (Mead, 1980; Jacquet, 1989).

As one might expect, members of the Church of the Nazarene have much in common with Methodists. In fact, many of them adhere more closely to the original ideals of

John and Charles Wesley than the Methodists themselves do, particularly when it comes to personal holiness and morality. Wesleyan influence on the Church of the Nazarene is not only a natural result of the origin of the denomination, but also due to the fact that "two of the original 7 superintendents of the Church of the Nazarene were ex-Methodist ministers, and the Nazarene Manual has been called "a rewritten and modified Methodist Discipline" (Mead, 1980, p. 99).

< Church Organization and Law >

Local congregations are grouped into districts. In 2001, there were 12,799 congregations divided into 416 districts (<http://www.nazarene.org/gensec/who.html>). Each congregation elects its own pastor and sends delegates to the district assembly. The district assembly elects a district superintendent to a four-year term. Delegates elected by the districts meet every four years in the General Assembly. The General Assembly elects a general board to oversee the work of the denomination. The General Assembly is also "the lawmaking body of the Church of the Nazarene" (Knight, et al., 1976 p. 5). The church Manual is written under the auspices of the General Assembly.

The Manual is designed to bring about unity among church members in doctrine, ethics, and polity by putting in written form "the basic creed, structure and government of the church." The Manual states that to fail to follow its teachings is to "imperil one's own soul and mar the witness and fellowship of the church" (Knight, et al., 1976, pp. 4-5).

< Distinctive Points of Belief in the Church of the Nazarene >

1. Entire sanctification. The most distinctive thing about the Church of the Nazarene is its emphasis on what is called "entire sanctification." This term describes an act of God upon believers which follows their salvation experience. Believers are made free from their depravity and "brought into a state of entire devotement to God and the holy obedience of love..." (Knight, et al., 1976, p. 29). This experience is equated with the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" and the "purifying of the heart through faith" mentioned in Scripture. Therefore, devoutness, purity, and holiness are greatly stressed in the Church of the Nazarene. Church members are strictly warned to avoid such things as drinking, social dancing, lotteries and other forms of gambling, membership in secret societies (e.g. Masonry), and nonprescription drug use.

2. Original sin. The offspring of Adam are said to have been born with a corrupt nature as a result of the original sin; we are continually inclined to do evil and have no power to do good. Only the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which comes some time after the new birth, frees the believer from the depravity of original sin.

3. Justification. Pardon for sins is granted to all who repent and believe on Jesus Christ.

4. Baptism. Baptism is considered a "sacrament". It is administered to young children as well as adults. Sprinkling, pouring, and immersion are all acceptable modes of baptism. The meaning of baptism is a symbolic acceptance of the benefits of the atonement.

5. View of the Church -- Church membership. Nazarenes have a denominational view of the church. While they recognize that one who is saved is a member of the "Church of God", they teach that such an individual should associate himself with a denomination. They say, "the churches severally (i.e. denominations, SRK) are to be composed of such regenerate persons" (Knight, et al., 1976, p. 32). One can become a member of the Church of the Nazarene by confessing his faith and agreeing to the main doctrines of the church.

6. Worship. Churches have singing, prayer and preaching in their services. Instrumental music and choirs are also a part of the worship. Rituals are outlined in the church Manual for taking the Lord's Supper, receiving new church members, baptismal ceremonies, etc. Women are allowed to preach.

Cross-points

The following are some straightforward comparisons between the Bible and some of the official doctrines of the Church of the Nazarene.

Church of the Nazarene Manual – 1976

1. Church Law. "We do hereby ordain, adopt, and set forth as the fundamental law or constitution of the Church of the Nazarene the Articles of Faith, the General Rule, and the Articles of Organization and Government..." (Preamble of Constitution). But, "The provisions of this Constitution

The Bible

1. Church Law. "There is one lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy" (James 4:12). "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9). "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take anything from it, that you may

may be repealed or amended when concurred in by a two-thirds vote of all the members of the General Assembly..." (Church Manual par. 31).

2. Mode of baptism. "Baptism may be administered by sprinkling, pouring or immersion, according to the choice of the applicant." (Article XIII)

3. Subjects and purpose of baptism. "Baptism, being the symbol of the New Testament, young children may be baptized, upon request of parents or guardians who shall give assurance for them of necessary Christian training" (Article XIII). [Thus, baptism is administered as a symbol to infants who are not believers, SRK.]

4. Giving. "The financing of the church shall be based on the plan of storehouse tithing, and the local Church of the Nazarene shall be regarded by all of its people as the storehouse. All who are a part of the Church of the Nazarene are urged to contribute one-tenth of all their increase as a minimum financial obligation..." (Par. 37.1).

5. Original sin. "We believe that original sin, or depravity, is that corruption of the nature of all the offspring of Adam..." "the atonement is graciously efficacious

keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you" (Deuteronomy 4:2).

2. Mode of baptism. "John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there" (John 3:23). "Both Philip and the Eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him" (Acts 8:38b). "...we were buried with Him through baptism" (Romans 6:4).

3. Subjects and purpose of baptism. "Repent and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..." "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized" (Acts 2:38a, 41a). "...men and women were baptized." (Acts 8:12; see 8:36-37). [Thus, baptism was administered for the remission of the sins of adult believers.]

4. Giving. "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity,; for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). [Note: "necessity" here literally means "compulsion"]

5. Original sin. "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness

for the salvation of the irresponsible and of the wicked shall be upon himself" for children in innocency" (Articles V & VI). (Ezekiel 18:20). "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 19:14, see Matthew 18:3-4).

6. Terms of God's Pardon. God "grants full pardon of all guilt and complete release from the penalty of sins committed, and acceptance as righteous, to all who believe on Jesus Christ and receive Him as Lord and Saviour." (Article IX).

6. Terms of God's pardon. "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). "He who believes and is baptized will be saved..." (Mark 16:16b).

< Weak Points in the Church of the Nazarene >

1. They claim the scriptures contain "all truth necessary to faith and Christian living," and then write a 383 page Manual to explain their faith. This is extremely self-contradictory. This contradiction is most clear when we look at the organization and government of the Church of the Nazarene. While paragraph 25.2 of the Manual states that the scriptures "contain all truth necessary," paragraph 27.1 says that, "We are agreed on the necessity of a superintendency which shall foster and care for churches already established" --yet, the Scriptures mention no such superintendency! In the New Testament, bishops (superintendents) were over only one local church; qualifications for bishops were not spelled out in a separate manual, but in the Scriptures themselves (see 1 Timothy 3; Titus 1; 1 Peter 5:1-2; Philippians 1:1). The concept of the Nazarene superintendent is just not contained in Scripture. Similarly, the Scriptures do not mention district assemblies, general assemblies, or any of the church agencies required by the Church of the Nazarene Manual.

2. Nazarene Articles of Faith are not contained in scripture, and yet the Manual says they should be. In the Manual, the fourth Article of Faith states that "whatever is not contained" in the Holy Scriptures "is not to be enjoined as an article of faith." Yet, the next Article of Faith talks about "Original Sin," and the tenth Article of Faith describes something labeled "Entire Sanctification"; neither of these things is contained in the scriptures. One can read the Bible from cover to cover and not find the actual phrases

"original sin" and "entire sanctification." The concepts are missing as well. Instead of the curse of "original sin" passing to all men, the Bible makes it clear that each man's own sins are the source of his spiritual dilemma (Ezekiel 18:20, Romans 3:10–23; James 1:14–16). Instead of God sanctifying us at some point after we have been born again, every indication in Scripture is that He sanctifies us (sets us apart for His work) at the time we are justified, born again, and redeemed (II Thessalonians 2:13–14; I Peter 1:2; I Corinthians 6:11; Ephesians 5:26). [Note: In 1 Thessalonians 5:23 Paul expresses his desire that "the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely." The context clearly shows that he is desiring that God would preserve their whole spirit, soul, and body until the coming of Christ. This comes nowhere near the Nazarene doctrine of entire sanctification.]

3. The Church of the Nazarene has written its own law. According the Manual, the General Assembly is "the lawmaking body of the Church of the Nazarene." But the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is the lawmaker of the church of Christ (James 4:12; Colossians 1:18). He empowered His apostles with the authority to bind and loose, not the General Assembly of the Church of the Nazarene (Matthew 16:19; 18:18). Any religion that admits to making up its own rules, instead of receiving its rules from God, is nothing more than human in origin, doctrine, and organization by its own admission.

Review Questions on The Church of the Nazarene

1. Out of what movement did the Church of the Nazarene arise? Who was the founder of this movement?
2. What other denomination is most similar to the Church of the Nazarene?
3. What do you think is the most distinctive belief of the Church of the Nazarene?
4. What is the biggest weakness of the Church of the Nazarene?

References on the Church of the Nazarenes

Jacquet, C. H. (1989). "Yearbook of american and canadian churches". Nashville: Abingdon.

Knight, J. A., Johnson, B. E., Taylor, W. H., Airhart, A. E. & Stone, O. (1976). "Manual/church of the Nazarene". Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House.

Mead, F. S. (1980). "Handbook of denominations in the United States". Nashville: Abingdon.

North, S. (1977). "Handbook on church doctrines". Oklahoma City, OK: OCC Bookstore.

Olbricht, O. D. (1972). "Studies in denominational doctrine (book two)". Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Company.

The Articles of Faith of the Church of the Nazarene can be viewed at their official website at http://www.nazarene.org/gensec/we_believe.html. Other basic information about them referenced in this lesson can be found at <http://www.nazarene.org/gensec/who.html>