

Crisis of Confidence in Authority and Denominational Self-Perception (Outline)

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I. Rationale for Investigation

II. Study Design

III. Findings

1. In your opinion, how strong is our sense of Nazarene identify?
 - very strong (2)
 - somewhat strong (8)
 - mildly strong (7)
 - somewhat weak (2)
 - very weak (0)
 - unsure (1)
2. In your view, is our sense of Nazarene identity getting stronger or weaker?
 - stronger (0)
 - remain the same (7)
 - weaker (12)
 - unsure (1)
3. In your view, is the direction we're heading (refer to #2) good or bad?
 - good (5)
 - neither good or bad (2)
 - bad (10)
 - unsure (2)
4. If a visitor walked into the "average" Nazarene church, how apparent would it be to him that it is (in fact) a Nazarene congregation?
 - very apparent (4)
 - somewhat apparent (11)
 - not apparent (2)
 - unsure (2)
5. When on vacation, how likely are Nazarenes to seek out a Nazarene Church to visit?
 - very likely (5)
 - somewhat likely (14)
 - somewhat unlikely (0)
 - very unlikely (0)
6. When they move to another location, how likely are Nazarenes to seek out a Nazarene Church to attend?
 - very likely (6)
 - somewhat likely (13)
 - somewhat unlikely (0)
 - very unlikely (0)
7. What are the most prevalent ways that the following perceive Nazarenes?

- A. People in secular society
 - 1. theologically
 - 2. socially
 - 3. politically
 - 4. educationally
 - B. Non-Nazarenes who consider themselves to be committed, biblical Christians (i.e. evangelicals):
 - 1. theologically
 - 2. socially
 - 3. politically
 - 4. educationally
8. Within our Denomination, how do we perceive ourselves?
- . Laity:
 - 1. theologically
 - 2. socially
 - 3. politically
 - 4. educationally
 - A. Missionaries
 - 1. theologically
 - 2. socially
 - 3. politically
 - 4. educationally
 - B. Pastors
 - 1. theologically
 - 2. socially
 - 3. politically
 - 4. educationally
 - C. Headquarters Executive
 - 1. theologically
 - 2. socially
 - 3. politically
 - 4. educationally
9. In your view, what is the most important identifying factor in our Denomination?
- 1st. _____
 - 2nd _____
 - 3rd _____
 - 4th _____
 - Do you think that the majority in the Denomination feels the same way as you?
 - yes (15.08%)
 - possibly (63.16%)
 - I doubt it (15.8%)
 - No (0%)
 - Unsure (5.26%)
 - Is this good in your opinion?
 - yes (61.11%)
 - possibly (0%)
 - I doubt it (0%)

- Unsure (16.67%)

10. In your view, what is the most important way our Denomination will change by the year 2000?

- 1st. _____
- 2nd _____
- 3rd _____
- 4th _____
- Do you think that the majority in the Denomination feels the same way as you?
 - yes (10%)
 - possibly (40%)
 - I doubt it (15%)
 - No (15%)
 - Unsure (20%)
- Is this good in your opinion?
 - yes (45%)
 - possibly (10%)
 - I doubt it (25%)
 - Unsure (5%)

11. In your view, what is the general perception of the authority structure of our Denomination?

. General Superintendency

- 0. (10.5%)
- 1. (47.37%)
- 2. (21.05%)
- 3. (21.05%)
- 4. (0%)

A. Directorship at Headquarters:

- 0. (0%)
- 1. (15.79%)
- 2. (47.37%)
- 3. (15.79%)
- 4. (15.79%)

B. Regional Directors:

- 0. (10.53%)
- 1. (21.05%)
- 2. (68.42%)
- 3. (0%)
- 4. (0%)

C. District Superintendents

- 0. (0%)
- 1. (42.11%)
- 2. (26.32%)
- 3. (31.58%)
- 4. (0%)

12. Is the perception of those in #11 getting better?

. General Superintendency

- Better (5.26%)

- Stay same (63.16%)
- Worse (26.32%)
- Unsure (5.26%)
- A. Directorship at Headquarters:
 - Better (10.53%)
 - Stay same (52.63%)
 - Worse (31.58%)
 - Unsure (5.26%)
- B. Regional Directors:
 - Better (15.79%)
 - Stay same (73.68%)
 - Worse (5.26%)
 - Unsure (5.26%)
- C. District Superintendents
 - Better (5.26%)
 - Stay same (57.89%)
 - Worse (31.58%)
 - Unsure (5.26%)

13. How do you feel that we handle any authority conflict as a Denomination?

. at headquarters

- 0. (0%)
- 1. (10.53%)
- 2. (31.58%)
- 3. (47.37%)
- 4. (10.53%)

A. Within districts

- 0. (0%)
- 1. (26.32%)
- 2. (42.11%)
- 3. (31.58%)
- 4. (0%)

B. In local churches

- 0. (0%)
- 1. (26.32%)
- 2. (42.11%)
- 3. (31.58%)
- 4. (0%)

14. What issues, related to our basic identity, are we facing now (or will be facing in the future) that have great potential for resulting in conflict?

{Put a star beside the one that, you feel, has the most explosive potential?

. Starred items: (in order of frequency)

- 0. (6 times)_____
- 1. (4 times)_____
- 2. (2 times)_____
- 3. (2 times)_____
- 4. (1 time)_____

A. Unstarred items (in order of frequency)

- 0. (8 times)_____

1. (8 times) _____
2. (5 times) _____
3. (5 times) _____
4. (4 times) _____
5. (3 times) _____
6. (2times) _____
7. (1 time) _____

15. Finally, dream a little on paper. What are the key components of our identity that you'd like for us to change? What are those that we, in your view, should retain. Explain why for each.

16.

. Change

0. (5 times) _____
1. (5 times) _____
2. (3 times) _____
3. (3 times) _____
4. (3 times) _____
5. (2 times) _____
6. (1 time) _____

A. Retain

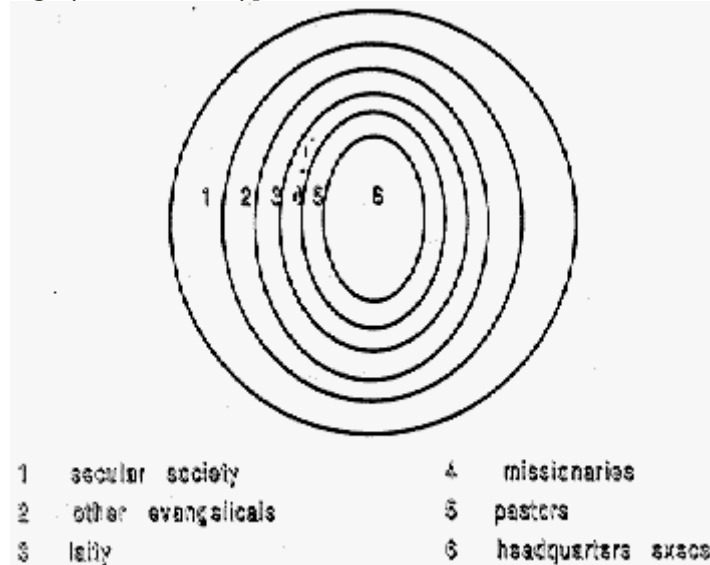
0. (10 times) _____
1. (5 times) _____
2. (4 times) _____
3. (2 times) _____
4. (2 times) _____
5. (2 times) _____
6. (2times) _____
7. (1 time) _____

Summary Conclusions of the Findings:

- A. According to the respondents, our corporate sense of identity is *weak and weakening*. Furthermore, this trend is perceived as *unfortunate*.
- B. The primary variables associated with this reality (in A above) are:
 1. A growing percentage of Nazarenes are new to the church, thus lack sociological ties and traditions associated with our heritage.
 2. A perceivable identifiitiveness, erosion, and lessening proclamation, of our *holiness theology*.
 3. A manifest dilution of *ethical standards*, as related to the traditional holiness lifestyle, is evident—as we increasingly opt for society's value priorities to gain their acceptance/approval.
- C. We're, largely, only distinguishable to those *visitors* who are already familiar with us (i.e. know what to look/listen for).
- D. *Vacationing* Nazarenes are likely to gravitate to our churches; and , *moving* Nazarenes are quite adapt to (at least initially) investigate one/more of our congregations.
- E. Five different *perceiver-types* see us in a variety of distinct ways, in relationship to your key dimensions, (perhaps), according to their proximity to our

theological/sociological identity core.

Hypothetical rule: As one approximates the center, there is a greater tendency to identify us as *holiness* (theologically), *upper middle class* (socially), *conservative* (politically) and *highly academic* (educationally). [exception: other evangelicals rate us highly educationally]



- F. The pivotal identifying feature is perceived to be *holiness* by 60% of the respondents, and they sense that Nazarenes (in general) share that perception—and they feel positive.
- G. By the year 2000, it is projected by over 40% that our most significant change will be erosion of (what they perceive to be) our single most identifying factor—the *theology of holiness*. Another half of that of percentage say it will be *internationalization*.
- H. The general and district authority structures are judged to have rather severe *image problems*. On a five point scale (one most favorable), General Superintendents (2.53) and Regional Directors (2.58) are mid-range; Headquarters Directors are the lowest (3.29); and, District Superintendents are in between (2.89). Furthermore, the expected *trajectory* is not good. While nearly 3/4, 2/3 and 1/2 expect Regional Directors, General Superintendents and Headquarters Directors (respectively) to maintain their lackluster image, over 1/4 perceive General Superintendents—and nearly 1/3 see the images of Headquarters Directors and District Superintendents as deteriorating.
- I. Our ability to handle conflict is low in all three environments: on *districts* (3.05) it is only slightly higher than in *local churches* (3.16) —with at *headquarters* sinking to the lowest level of the three (3.58). In comments made, the consensus is that our methods for conflict resolution are Machiavellian —unspiritual and power-based.
- J. The specific issues that have the greatest potential for inciting conflict seem to converge in the *local church* (37.5) There, they seem to relate to their myopic/independent attitudes and financial pressures (i.e. unwillingness to consider assigned budgets a top priority item). Also mentioned is *polity* (25%) on the general level —its centralization, heavy-handed tactics are red tape. Respondents listed other conflict generating issues. In order of frequency:
 - 1. holiness theology erosion (nearly 20%)
 - 2. rules/standards slippage (nearly 20%)

- K. When requested to elaborate a "wish list", which is (in effect) a set of recommendations for producing a more healthy identity, approximately one-third called for radical changes in our ecclesiastical *bureaucracy*. The second change called for (half as frequently) was a more "international" approach to *internationalism* —one that refrains from cosmetology and tokenism. Concerning what they wish to **retain**, over one-third prefer our holiness emphasis —as has been traditionally understood. Mentioned approximately half as often were (certain aspects of) our general church policy and emphasis on evangelism.
- L. **Megacept conclusion: As perceived by our top leaders, the identity of our denomination is very weak —and it should be strengthened by taking some rather drastic measures.**

Recommendations

"We do not know whence we come or wither we go, and what is more important, we do not care; what we do know is that we are moving faster than anyone has ever moved before."
Francis Peabody (Harvard, 1908)

Mobility often gives the illusion of progress. Being on the go —with a multiplicity of conferences, programs, and statistical goals —can "smoke screen" the presence of underlying, acute systematic difficulties.

It is consensually perceived by our leaders, as disclosed by the data in this study, that our church possesses a formidable identity crisis. Whether a justified conclusion or not, the fact remains that it is perceived as reality. And this is very significant.

With this in mind, it seems imperative that we respond by, either, correcting distorted perceptions or transcend any defensive mindset to make needed corrections.

Time is of the essence. We must act now, rather than react to crisis(es) later. And given our current perceived trajectory, sudden crisis(es) as well as gradual dissipation of vitality are predictable —perfectly respond.

It is hoped by the respondents as well as this researcher, that the Nazarene denomination will not become just one more "piece of ecclesiastical furniture" cluttering up this world's overcrowding religious "show-room."

Rather, it is anticipated that it might be perceived —by insiders as well as outsiders —as a distinctive, dynamic spiritual force. A force that "punches holes in the darkness that surrounds."

Who are we? What significant spiritual niche do we have in God's Kingdom on earth? Can our existence, and vast amount of resources that we expend, be justified? If our church disappeared, how much worse off (if any) would our world be?

Why do we seem oblivious to our existence and message, even in the evangelical world? Are we the "best kept secret" around, as many have attested? Or, among those who really know us,

are we a "secret better kept?" Why is our image so distorted in the eyes of outsiders? (ex. perfectionists —in the wrong sense; holy rollers).

How did we come to perceive ourselves in so many inconsistent ways? Which of these perceptions are accurate, and which are illusionary? Productive and counterproductive?

To what extent can (and should) perceptions be altered? How is this best accomplished? What are the costs are rewards?

Our leaders have respectfully, but forthrightly, spoken. Their responses have been recorded, codified, interpreted, and implemented to formulate some recommendations. All relate to improving our corporate image:

Suggested Internal Revision

1. Executives

"Piety counts in the halographics (biographies of the saints), but in the bureaucracy, nothing counts like connections." - Charles Dahm

"The (Roman Catholics) system fails to produce great prelates. It fails because the one qualification in which the Roman Curia seeks above all others in a candidate is that he is safe." - McKenzie

"The highest offices of the state and church resemble a pyramid whose top is accessible to only two sorts of animals —eagles and reptiles." - John Wesley

suggestion: Promptly respond to the widespread perceptions of "bureaucratitus." The ecclesiastical machinery must be retooled —based on actual needs (streamlining) as well as perceptions (image-polishing) of our denominational matrix.

Implementation:

- A. With assistance from "bureaucracy doctors" (i.e. efficiency experts), or by simply employing suggestions from books like *Megatrends* and *In Search of Excellence*, take deliberate steps to minimize/eliminate vestiges of military and business models. Begin with nomenclature. (Eg. "Headquarters," a military term, changed to "International Center" —as the Wesleyan denomination has recently done; "General Superintendents," which combines military and business terms, to "Bishop which is biblical/consistent with our Methodist roots.
- B. Accentuate servanthood, and decentuate the aire of authoritarianism (eg. Black suits and "stain glass voices") This implies such things as increased decentralization, openness, visual acts of compassion, identification with the lowly, advice seeking —not just giving, and resistance to the powerful temptations of elitism, croynism, nepotism.
- C. Working in close cooperation with our theologians, speak out more on overt, contemporary doctrines and social issues. But, also, we need continuous, wise council on our own doctrines and rules. To avoid these assignments invites pluralism,

uncertainty and confusion throughout our constituency. Help us to fill our ideational gaps, but in a non-decoral (more informal) manner.

2. Theologians

Don't be drawn into the paralysis of analysis. - E. Stanley Jones

Tell us of your certainties; we have enough uncertainties of our own. - anonymous

suggestion: Lead us out of the "forest of theological relativism," which our leaders perceive to be confusing and dispiriting to our constituency. Increasingly, ours is a world of blurred ideology and distorted doctrine. Our people grope for clarity, simplicity and applicability.

Implementation:

- A. Open your so-called professional meetings to pastors, laymen and anyone else who cares to attend. A "closed shop" sends the wrong message —exclusivity, elitism, secrecy. To exclude is to expect to be excluded yourselves, and we can't afford that.
- B. Focus more on what unites us. We realize that you mean well, but your use of restricted jargon to debate the intricacies of our doctrine appears to be, largely, a waste of valuable time/energy. (e.g. the "process vs. event" regarding holiness produces quasi-scholarship, but has also contributed to the departure of more than a few from our denomination)
- C. Target at least one-third of your writing time/energy to laypersons. Provide them with some definition in non-esoteric language. Help them to arrive at some closure in regards to key issues. Show them how to live-out their faith. Don't force them to consult Calvinistic, charismatic, etc. sources —while you communicate with yourselves. For many of you, this will necessitate developing a more captivating writing style, with profound ideas simply stated and applied to everyday life.

3. Pastors

"The final verdict upon life will be founded, not upon our success in gaining achieved seat, but upon our success in encouraging the faint and the weakling." - John Henry Jowett

suggestion: As the most viable model to our laypersons, embody servanthood in all aspects of your personal/professional lives.

Implementation:

1. Reject any vestige of opportunism in relationship to promotions, prized appointments or other preferred assignments. In short, refuse to think in terms of "rungs on the political ladder"—as our Lord so adamantly explained to James and John (Mark 10). Focus instead, on where you are needed and led. This will, in many cases, prompt you to make moves that are not politically expedient. But, hopefully, other pastors and executives will command your courage, rather than question your wisdom. Both you, and they, took the important oath of ordination —which, above all, commits you to this New Testament mindset.

2. Like it or not, you and your entire family are a team in modeling servanthood. Pastors wives aren't to be disinterested bystanders, but active, participating, and dedicated. You, she and your family are obligated to consistently lead in love. And this means giving attention to detail. To flaunt denominational rules (e.g. swear, attend movies, send children to proms) is to send conflicting signals to parishioners. To demonstrate an unloving attitude to one another is to sadly fail. (cf. 1 Timothy 3:4-5)
3. Be authoritative without being authoritarian. Perhaps, as James Garlow's book suggest, you are ready to accept your laity as bonifide ministers. Such an attitude negates paternalism or plateauism on your part. You are on the same level, and deserve to be held accountable as they. Your only distinctive is your special calling to a specific function —which is no more exalted than functions that laymen perform.

Laypersons:

"It is not doing the thing we like to do, but liking the thing we have to do, that makes life blessed." - Goethe

suggestion:Accept, with pride, that you are members of a great church, with a rich heritage, definite theological and ethical positions, and a specific message (holiness) for our day. In short, relish in your identity —don't hide from (or be embarrassed by) it.

Implementation:

- A. Forsake privatization that makes you "a law unto yourselves." Respected Oxford sociologist and close colleague of the late Francis Schaeffer, in his book entitled *The Gravedigger Files*, reveals the hazards of laity going it alone. Such privatization destroys cohesion and true unity in the Body. It is, in short, anathema to healthy corporate identity. If we have the same identity, our beliefs must be in near-proximity. In short, Nazarene churches must cease being "community churches" where important theological issues are glossed over, ethical standards are never mentioned, non-Nazarene (anti-holiness) educational materials are employed at will, and all do what is right in their own eyes —realizing that they aren't likely to be questioned if their "numbers" are up. Again, such a prescribed trajectory is sociologically unwise. The result is a fused identity. In standing for everything, we end up standing for nothing.
- B. As implied above, privatization leads to a dangerous pluralism which, in turn, easily lead to licentiousness. (freedom from, not in) Sociologically, pluralism invariably issues forth in secularization, liberization and a watering-down of convictions. (cf. Milton Yinger, Bryan Wilson, Os Guinness et al) And once the movement begins, rarely if ever, does it change directions. As one leader remarked: "We're on the happy wagon (going toward) Methodism." If so, pluralism is our problem. And it can only intensify as tomorrow's technology presents us with "permissible facsimiles," (eg. Near-beers, "clean" movies, Christian nightclubs, nicotineless cigarettes, abortion pills) and theologians tell us that our distinctive "aren't all that distinctive."
- C. Laypersons, know why you decided to be a Nazarene —because you truly know what we stand for. Be loyal to the oath you take, in spite of personal preferences. To do otherwise is to weaken you credibility, and to greatly diminish the substantive

effectiveness of our denomination.

{Sociological principle: Deviation from institutional norms leads to permeable boundaries —boundaries that are so very essential to identity-maintenance.}

Suggested External Revision:

1. It is essential that we take sociologically sound measures to get ourselves recognized in society. According to notorious church historian, Martin Marty, this best comes in the forms of:
 - A. a publicized event —preferably of a humanitarian nature (eg. response to a disaster picked-up by the news)
 - B. a high-visibility personality who proudly identifies with his/her church.
(note: Our events tend to be parochial and invisible in society. Our celebrities tend to be, either, derogatory of our/their heritage (e.g. Debbie Reynolds, Gary Hart) or take great pains to keep it a secret (e.g. James Dobson). Why?)
2. We need to decide on precisely what we believe —or at least be definitive regarding the perimeters of our beliefs —and spend time/money/attention on producing effective ways to market this package in an appealing manner.

Suggestions

- A. *Doctrine of holiness*: Presently, most popular books on the subject (which is a topic of great interest) are supplied by Calvinists. Furthermore, many of our own Sunday School classes and Bible study groups use these sources.
- B. *Humanitarian outreach*: The helping hand and compassionate heart image is greatly venerated in our society. There are so many worthwhile spinoffs of this effort (interdenominational cooperation, cultivation of prospects, obedience to a key biblical theme, faithfulness to our Wesleyan/Bresee roots).

V. Conclusion

The recommendations I offer require sacrifice and courage, but promise to pay rich dividends. Granted, we suffer from real identity problems -- at home and elsewhere. Such problems can result in destructive finger-pointing, program-mania, increased rigidity and authoritarianism, turf-consciousness, etc. But when this occurs, we are focusing on derivatives, not root causes. Also, we are only intensifying our difficulties.

We, indeed, have good reason to fear internationalization with such theological and normative vagueness, and political maneuvering on the home front.

But we need no to grope in darkness. Our identity can *be perceived* (by insiders and outsiders) and can *be*, healthy, vibrant and effective.

There was one who suffered from poorer image than the Church of the Nazarene. He was from the backwoods of North Carolina and had great liabilities. He was unknown. but our Lord prompted William Randolph Hearst to order his chain of newspapers to "puff (i.e. publicize) Graham." Soon Billy Graham became well-known.

Nevertheless, his theology, demeanor, motivation and appearance were severely criticized from every direction. But his commitment was far too deep for him to become discouraged or dissuaded.

Through the past 50 years, America's foremost evangelist (now 70 years of age) has held tenaciously to biblical essentials —while altering themes and methods. His identity is not only intact, it is thriving. And tens of thousands are reconciled to Christ.

In the December 19, 1988 issues of "US News and World Report" sociologist William Martin (of Rice University) said this concerning Graham:

"He has consistently taken steps that were somewhat bold, drawn fire, occasionally backed up a bit but always moved in the right direction."

May the Church of the Nazarene follow this pathway in the days ahead. Then, we will chart a course that will result in the kind of positive identity that will maximize our witness for Him.