

TRADITION AND MODERNITY: NAZARENE IDENTITY IN A REFLEXIVE AGE

Philip N. LaFountain

Introduction

The question before us is this: shall we reinvent our 100 year old denomination? The answer to this question, of course, lies in who we want to be. Fundamentally, this question is one of religious identity. What does it mean to be a Nazarene? What symbolic language (or story) shall we use to describe it? What religious experience is to be associated with it? Recently, arriving at these answers has not been so easy for our denomination.¹ This paper explores the personal, religious stories of 13 pastors on the New England District of the Church of the Nazarene, asking what they understand to be current Nazarene identity. These “modern” pastors and their dialogue with Nazarene tradition offer insight into the dynamics of constructing a Nazarene religious identity in the 21st century.

Contemporary Nazarene Identity: Crisis or Shift?

It is commonly believed that historically the Church of the Nazarene has enjoyed a fairly well defined, and mostly universal denominational identity, largely because individuals in the denomination shared a common religious identity, which included not only a common symbolic

¹It is interesting to note that denominational studies is enjoying a bit of a resurgence as of late. While pessimistic interpretations of denominationalism affected much thinking about this social form of religion, two developments have occurred that hint at an optimistic appraisal of denominational endurance. First, according to Darren E. Sherkat in “Religious Socialization,” in *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, edited by Michele Dillon, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), writes, “empirical research finds no evidence of declining denominationalism” (p. 159). Second, given the theoretical insight into constructing religious identity in a late modern age, Nancy Ammerman sees no reason why denominations should not have equal opportunity to thrive given the potential “portability” of their narratives into other social fields. See her “New Life for Denominationalism,” *The Christian Century* (March 15, 2000): 302-307.

world view, but also a common religious experience.² That traditional religious narrative plays a unique role in the construction of a contemporary Nazarene identity.

The Traditional Holiness Model

It is not unreasonable to suppose that the traditional model is understood as that expressed as the product of the influence of the 19th century holiness movement in North America. While modifications have been proposed to the traditional model, two aspects of this model may be found in the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene under the headings of “Original Sin”³ and “Entire Sanctification.”⁴

Entire sanctification, from the traditional perspective, then, will be understood as including the following notions:

² See Donald S. Metz, *Some Crucial Issues in the Church of the Nazarene*, (Olathe, K.S.: Wesleyan Heritage Press, 1994): 4. This is, I realize, an oversimplification, given that all religious traditions have some pluralizing element in them.

³ A representative statement of this doctrine can be found in the 2001-2005 Manual of the Church of the Nazarene. Its articles of faith include this statement:

V. Sin, Original and Personal

5. We believe that sin came into the world through the disobedience of our first parents, and death by sin.

5.1 We believe that original sin, or depravity, is that corruption of the nature of all the offspring of Adam original sin continues to exist with the new life of the regenerate, until [eradicat] *the heart is fully cleansed* by the baptism with the Holy Spirit

⁴ A representative statement of this doctrine can be found in the 2001-2005 *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene. Its articles of faith include this statement:

13. We believe that entire sanctification is that act of God, subsequent to regeneration, by which believers are made free from original sin, or depravity, and brought into a state of entire devotion to God, and the holy obedience of love made perfect. It is wrought by the baptism with the Holy Spirit, and comprehends in one experience the cleansing of the heart from sin and the abiding, indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, empowering the believer for life and service. Entire sanctification is provided by the blood of Jesus, is wrought instantaneously by faith, preceded by entire consecration; and to this work and state of grace the Holy Spirit bears witness.

This experience is also known by various terms representing the different phases, such as “Christian perfection,” “perfect love,” “heart purity,” “the baptism with the Holy Spirit,” “the fullness of the blessing,” and “Christian holiness.”

a second work of grace, subsequent to salvation, realized instantly by faith. It cleansed one from inbred sin, thus enabling believers to live free from sin “properly so called,” that is, from willful transgressions of known laws. God granted this sanctification when the two conditions of consecration and faith had been met. The Holy Spirit was then fully given to those who had been sanctified, just as He had been given to the disciples on the day of Pentecost, which was the biblical paradigm and evidence for the doctrine. Assurance that one had been sanctified wholly was to be found in believing the promise

This is to be understood, essentially, as including the notion that entire sanctification is brought about by the instantaneous eradication of the sinful nature. It was often sought after the manner of Phoebe Palmer’s “altar theology” in which Christ is seen as the Christian’s altar, on which the believer was instructed to “lay body, soul and spirit” in entire consecration, and be made holy.⁶

Recently, however, some voices are lamenting what appears to be a significant shift in Nazarene identity, so significant, in fact, that there appears to be a growing affirmation that the Church of the Nazarene is in the midst of an identity ‘crisis.’⁷ Those who have spoken of a crisis in the church often link it to problems regarding the promulgation of the church’s ‘distinctive’⁸ doctrine, entire sanctification. Fundamentally, it appears to be a concern over the changing model of holiness that lies at the heart of the crisis.

Individuals like Keith Drury,⁹ and Donald Metz,¹⁰ have suggested that current Nazarene identity has diverged from its traditional roots and lost its connection with its historic past, a past

⁵ As expressed by Quanstrom, *A Century of Holiness: The Doctrine of Entire Sanctification: 1905-2004*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2004): 29.

⁶ Ibid, 41.

⁷ Of course, using the word ‘crisis’ is a value judgment and will depend on one’s perspective. It may be best to simply get at the details of current Nazarene identity, and then assess the significance.

⁸ There is some serious debate over all aspects of Nazarene identity. Here we recognize the debate over whether any Christian group should have a ‘distinctive’ doctrine. For some, to accentuate our ‘differences’ is to place us outside the mainstream of historic Christianity. A distinctive doctrine belies a parochialism that accentuates the broken, fragmented nature of Christianity in our world today. Even so, one cannot deny that the doctrine of entire sanctification has played a very special role in American holiness identity. Here we use the term to signify that place, and not any ‘baggage’ the term may carry for others.

⁹ Keith Drury, “The Holiness Movement is Dead,” *Holiness Digest* 8:1 (Winter 1994): 13-15.

¹⁰ Donald Metz, *Some Crucial Issues in the Church of the Nazarene*, (Olathe, Ks.: Wesleyan Heritage Press, 1994).

on which it depends for clarity and direction. Drury has proclaimed that the North American Holiness movement is “dead.”¹¹ And Donald Metz has identified what he sees as serious trends, which, allowed to go unchecked, threaten to disrupt the life of the church.¹² It appears to them that we have splintered from within, and are experiencing a time of “vanishing boundaries.”¹³ For both, denominational identity is in serious jeopardy.

Recently, at the 2004 US/Canada Theology Conference held at Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Missouri, General Superintendent Jim Bond accentuated the dilemma. The question is debatable, he said, “whether or not the Church of the Nazarene in North America has fallen victim to the subtle ravages of drift over the past 100 years.”¹⁴ But we are, he declares, “confused and conflicted” today regarding our theology of holiness. We are a church torn between “two divergent and apparently irreconcilable explications of the doctrine of entire sanctification.”¹⁵

¹¹ Drury, *Holiness Movement Dead*, 3.

Drury attributed its demise to loss of interest in promulgating holiness experience and doctrine. The church had allowed too many who do not fully believe in the doctrine to become leaders and pastors. He connects the decline in emphasis to overreaction against earlier theological and practical excesses within the movement, that has influenced preachers and laity, now in their 40’s, 30’s, and late 20’s, from not proclaiming the doctrine.

His ‘prescription’ for the diagnosis was to suggest the use of a “strong hand.” He would leverage out of the denomination those who did not actively promote the 19th century formulation. His primary remedy would be a renewed emphasis on the bold preaching of the holiness ideal of *instantaneous* conversion and *instantaneous* entire sanctification.

¹² Metz, *Crucial Issues*, 1. He writes, “Now there is increasing pressure from articulate academicians, pragmatic pastors, and vocal laypersons to modify the historic doctrines and reshape the traditional mission which served as the foundations of the denomination’s heritage.”

¹³ The term comes from a helpful book by Dean R. Hoge, Benton Johnson and Donald A. Luidens, *Vanishing Boundaries: The Religion of Mainline Protestant Baby Boomers*, (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 1994). The fear for Metz and others is that the Church of the Nazarene will go the way of the mainline Protestant churches.

¹⁴ General Superintendent Jim L. Bond, “This We Believe,” concluding address at 2004 US/Canada Theology Conference held at Nazarene Theological Seminary, Missouri.

¹⁵ Dr. Bond cites Mark Quastrom’s book *A Century of Holiness*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2004): 169. The general thesis of this work will be dealt with later in this paper.

These three individuals, among others, raise serious questions about current Nazarene religious identity. While it is uncertain whether calling the current shift in Nazarene identity a ‘crisis’ is warranted, it is important to take seriously the possibility that a shift in holiness identity has occurred, and to ask whether and to what extent ‘holiness’ identity has changed.

Statement of Thesis

The basic thesis of this paper is that the Church of the Nazarene has indeed experienced a shift in its holiness identity. The traditional 19th century American holiness model is generally seen as implausible by many in the denomination. It is my contention that, in spite of vigorous theological work to arrive at a consensus regarding contemporary holiness doctrine, in effect, the current, socially negotiated holiness identity is a *de facto* identity that is the result of converging social factors. By *de facto* I mean that the current dominant holiness model has not been the result of an *intentional* decision by the denomination. We shall explore the details of that shift by asking what factors may be affecting Nazarene religious identity in the contemporary world. There appear to be at least two clusters of factors. The first cluster centers around the internal problem of religious experience, with its concomitant problems of symbolic expression. There has been a significant reaction to the reification of religious experience that has turned holiness experience into a rigid, highly structured model. However, it appears that a contemporary social development has made religious identity problematic, namely, the reflexivity of the self in contemporary society at the micro level. The second cluster of factors, operating at the macro level, centers around the social context characterized by religious pluralism generally, but more specifically the problems of the presence of “switchers” in many of our congregations, and, what I call, an “evangelical ecumenism,” both of which have relativizing effects on Nazarene distinctives. All of these factors have converged to make religious (holiness) language and religious experience ambiguous at the meso level of the congregation, which, as we shall see, has a significant impact on denominational identity.

Diagnosing the Problem

Reasons for the shift in identity have been offered from historical, theological, and sociological perspectives. Historical work has highlighted problems related to the transition from sect to denomination, and the need to establish unambiguous boundaries of identity vis-a-vis a broader changing social context. Historical work has tracked the internal debates over substantial and relational visions of original sin, along with issues related to the connection between entire sanctification and the Baptism with the Spirit. Theological work has highlighted the need for a moral psychology that functions to inform holiness experience. Sociological work has investigated the current state of religious identity attempting to gain some understanding of the relationship between theological expression and sociological context.

Early Indications

Indications that Nazarene identity was becoming problematic was highlighted a decade and a half ago by Jon Johnston in research he did culminating in his paper, “Crisis of Confidence in Authority and Denominational Self-Perception.” Even then he concluded that the corporate sense of identity was “weak and weakening.” He attributed this to three key developments: a growing percentage of new Nazarenes entering the church who knew little of the Church of the Nazarene; holiness theology was perceived to be indefinite, eroding, and infrequently promoted; and, ethical standards related to the traditional holiness lifestyle were being rejected for a value system derived from the dominant society.¹⁶ These implications of the social context for constructing Nazarene identity will be explored in a later section of this paper.

Johnston develops his model using the construct of “perceivers.” The model is conceptualized as a series of concentric circles moving from outside to inside. These “perceiver-types” are measured, he says, “according to their proximity¹⁷ to our theological/sociological

¹⁶ Jon Johnston, “Crisis of Confidence in Authority and Denominational Self-Perception,” (1989).

¹⁷ It is this idea of the “proximity to our theological/sociological identity core” that will be a key methodological tool in this paper.

identity core.”¹⁸ To outsiders Nazarenes were perceived as “perfectionists” and “holy rollers.” The further to the inside, however, resulted in a clearer traditional Nazarene identity.

Significantly, 60% of perceivers identified *holiness* as the pivotal identifying feature of Nazarenes. However, given the responses of these perceiver-types Johnston projected a number of significant trends. Each of these were seen as detrimental to perceptions of Nazarene identity. One projection indicated that by the year 2000, 40% of Nazarenes believed that holiness identity would erode even more. This self-perception is important to denominational vitality and strength. Regarding the significance of these findings, Johnston suggests:

It is consensually perceived by our leaders, as disclosed by the data in this study, that our While the traditional holiness narrative has by no means disappeared, signs of a “shift” were in the making. Johnston admonishes us to “respond by, either, correcting distorted perceptions or transcend any defensive mind set to make needed corrections.”²⁰ It is my contention that the identity shift is not merely perceived, but is, in fact, actually the case. This study is an attempt to highlight that finding, but also to explore possible reasons for the shift.

Historical Explanations

Historical interpretations of the shifting identity can be found by Ron Emptage and Mark Quanstrom, who have highlighted the trajectory of the problem admirably, from a social and theological perspective, respectively. Emptage, positing three stages in the historical development of the Nazarene denomination, investigates the “major changes in the general leadership of the church,” in order to interpret the church’s shifting identity.²¹ In the first stage

¹⁸ The hypothetical rule is as follows: 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). Johnston, “Crisis of Confidence.”

¹⁹ Johnston, “Crisis of Authority.”

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ron Emptage, “Denominational Identity in Historical Perspective,” (1989).

Emptage points out that the primary identity of the holiness movement was the mission of preaching Christian perfection. Its success (rapid ‘growth’) came primarily from mergers with other holiness groups, and revivals, rather than new converts. In the second stage “the influence of evangelical revivalism was beginning to wane.”²² The new movement was being challenged by modernism, higher criticism, and had to define itself in relation to a protest to these social developments, Fundamentalism. Faced with these issues of “boundary maintenance” the Church of the Nazarene became “a subculture with its own set of norms reflecting nineteenth century religious conservatism.” In the third stage, preoccupied with boundary maintenance, the church struggled with the more conservative element in the denomination who felt that the church was being influenced by the ‘liberal’ tendencies in the culture. And, yet, at the same time, the church struggled with another faction in the denomination that was reacting to the “strict sectarianism” it perceived in the leadership. The church continued to be faced with these issues, as well as defining itself in relationship to the broader society, in spite of the tremendous growth in the decade of the fifties, often considered the Nazarene “golden era.” Identity concerns “now appeared to be the hub of the denomination.”²³ The movement from sect to denomination forced this holiness movement to think deeply, and to struggle forcefully, with the task of identity construction and maintenance. That task is not over. Today it takes the form of dialogue with the holiness tradition, asking how one is to be Nazarene. Yet, as we shall see, the social context is significantly different from that of the past. New issues have arisen.

Mark R. Quanstrom, in his book, *A Century of Holiness Theology*,²⁴ has charted the “gradual change” in the understanding of the doctrine of entire sanctification in the Church of the Nazarene, highlighting the theological aspects of the identity shift. He suggests that there has

²² Emptage, “Denominational Identity.”

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Mark R. Quanstrom, *A Century of Holiness Theology: The Doctrine of Entire Sanctification in the Church of the Nazarene, 1905-2004*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2004).

been a transition from an optimistic, triumphal, view of grace, which enabled the believer to conquer sin, not only in individual human life, but in society as well, to a pessimistic, progressive, negative understanding of the possibility of grace. One key element is the development of the “realistic” view of sin. This new view of sin instigated a new development, “the radical reformulation of the doctrine in relational terms.”²⁵ This reformulation has resulted in a contemporary situation in which there are “two competing definitions of entire sanctification in the Church of the Nazarene.”²⁶ For Quanstrom it is the fact that there are multiple views of entire sanctification that contributes to the ambiguity of Nazarene identity. The sense of ‘crisis’ is heightened because holiness doctrine is so central to Nazarene identity.

Theological Contributions

Recent theological moves by Randy Maddox and H. Ray Dunning contribute to our understanding of a moral psychology consonant with human experience, but they also highlight other concerns that have a bearing on this paper. Maddox emphasizes experience as a test for theological truth, and Dunning suggests the dialectical relationship between sociology and theological development.

For Randy Maddox religious experience can function as a ‘test’ for the plausibility of theological models. In his work he has offered a theological prescription for the current malady. His solution, he suggests, is a plausible alternative to the moral psychology implied in the traditional model. His understanding of a moral psychology arises out of his own existential dilemma, and is validated by his own religious experience. What is telling is that he, like most Nazarenes, find the place of holiness in Nazarene identity to be an essential one, but, personally, he found the traditional model(s) implausible. In “Reconnecting the Means to the End: A Wesleyan Prescription for the Holiness Movement,” he admits:

²⁵ Quanstrom, *Century of Holiness*, 25.

²⁶ Ibid.

most of my peers shared with me a dissatisfaction with the models of the sanctified life that dominated our upbringing. But our dissatisfaction was not totally reactionary. For many of us it was precisely because we *had* imbibed a conviction of the importance of holiness of heart and life that we were so frustrated: we sympathized with the goal to which we were repeatedly called, but found the means typically offered for achieving it to be ineffective.²⁷

It is this “dissatisfaction with the models” that plays an overwhelming part in the current shift in Nazarene identity, and which I want to explore in this paper. It is not that holiness is seen as unessential. Rather, it is the conviction that holiness *is* essential that prompts attempts to forge a new theological paradigm. The problem for Maddox is the ‘means’ by which one achieves this experience. He writes:

In particular, we sought instantaneous entire sanctification through innumerable trips to the altar, and then puzzled over why the impact of these “experiences” so consistently generations have let the topic of Christian Perfection fade from view. . . .²⁸

So Maddox attributes the current crisis to be caused over accentuation of the crisis event, a focus on the “instant” in religious experience without a proper moral psychology to inform it.²⁹

Two aspects of this are important. First, note the significance of religious experience for Maddox. Experience becomes the criteria by which theology is validated. We should expect to find a similar concern in the interviews of our pastors. Second, note the devotion to holiness expressed in his statement. It is not that holiness is unimportant, but, rather, that a contemporary conception must be expressed. We should also expect a similar response from the pastors interviewed.

H. Ray Dunning, too, has diagnosed the identity problem. Responding to Drury’s assertion that the holiness movement in North America is essentially dead, Dunning suggests that what is dead is a “culturally and historically conditioned form of spiritual experience.”³⁰ He

²⁷ Randy Maddox, “Reconnecting the Means to the End: A Wesleyan Prescription for the Holiness Movement,” *WTJ* 33:2 (Fall 1998): 30-31.

²⁸ Maddox, “Reconnecting the Means,” 30.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁰ H. Ray Dunning, “Christian Perfection: Toward a New Paradigm,” *WTJ* 33:1 (Spring 1998):151.

attributes the present dilemma to the “flow of history” that “virtually makes it inevitable that such would be the case.”³¹ For Dunning, historical and cultural factors make it necessary to continually revise a denomination’s theological model. Essentially, while the traditional model is internally coherent theologically, it is experientially problematic. That is, “pastors have ceased to invite people to live in that [traditional theological] house because so few seem to feel ‘at home’ there.”³² One can fruitfully ask the question, “why is it that so few feel at home in the traditional model?” It is this question that has become so crucial for Nazarene identity. While Dunning seems to agree that a shift in identity has occurred, he attributes it to the inevitable process of history, that requires that the gospel continually be contextualized. Thus, Dunning highlights what is a central feature of this study, the relationship between theological belief (and religious experience) and the particularities of the historical and cultural context. There appears to be a dialectical relationship between ideation and the social milieu. That dialogue will become crucial for understanding the contemporary shift in holiness identity.

Sociological Explanations

Sociological research has been done both to identify what holiness identity currently is, and to offer an explanation for how it got here. We have already noted the sociological implications of the critiques of Drury and Metz. And Johnston was helpful in giving us a sense of recent trends in holiness identity. Such scholarly work, helping us to attain a picture of Nazarene identity strength and vitality, has highlighted the following paradox. The research seems to indicate that there is a high level of religious commitment, but an ambiguous religious identity. A review of some of the sociological research will reveal this.

In particular, Ron Benefiel has suggested that the crisis can be understood as a ‘fragmentation’ in the church. Benefiel, instigated by his own personal observations, and

³¹ Ibid.

³² Dunning, “Christian Perfection,” 156.

hypothesizing from anecdotal evidence, considers it worthwhile to ask how much shift has occurred. The thesis of his paper, “The Church of the Nazarene: the Fragmentation of Identity,” is that “people think differently about being ‘Nazarene’ these days.”³³ While he identifies “root causes”,³⁴ and affirms that “the core denominational identity is eroding” his primary concern is to determine how much identity has fragmented. In order to measure this fragmentation, he constructed an ideal topology, suggesting that there may be six distinct identities in the Church of the Nazarene. His model expected that the “traditional” group would be characterized by “declining numbers” and “may represent only a fraction of the membership of the denomination.”³⁵ He expected the “neo-fundamentalist” group to be the dominant group, implying the influence of contemporary religious culture on the denomination. It is significant that his research failed to find any significant heterogeneity. He writes:

This research has been an attempt to define and measure the splintering of the church’s core identity and value complex. The data failed to identify discrete cohort groups around different value orientations or types.³⁶

While his typological approach did not find significant differences, particularly based on political orientation, his research accents at least two points that should not go unnoticed. First, Benefiel suggested that while no discrete cohorts could be identified, that does not mean there are no trends that may lead to fragmentation of identity in the future. An ambiguous holiness identity is on the horizon. Second, he discovered that a dominant element in the research emphasized the “persistent denominational loyalty” of its adherents.³⁷ These two details are

³³ Ron Benefiel, “The Church of the Nazarene: the Fragmentation of Identity,” (1996).

³⁴ It is my contention that each of his seven root causes could (and should) be submitted to sociological analysis. Benefiel’s intuitions are right on the mark, I believe.

³⁵ Benefiel, “Fragmentation.”

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

extremely significant, for it tells us that the present crisis is not whether or not holiness *should* be a key component of Nazarene identity, but, rather, *how* shall we understand it. This corroborates Maddox’s intuition that the current identity question pertains, not to whether holiness is essential, but, rather, what we shall say about holiness. If, indeed, Nazarenes believe differently about holiness today, it appears to be a matter of ‘plausibility.’ If Nazarenes no longer find the traditional model religiously vital, what makes it implausible for them? Also, what would a ‘plausible’ holiness model look like?

This paradox is indicated in another tool used to understand the vitality and strength of Nazarene identity, the ANSR Poll³⁸ formulated in 1996. One question³⁹ highlighted the level of commitment of pastors to the Church of the Nazarene. 62% of pastors indicated that they could not imagine a time when they would not be a Nazarene. Another 19% expressed commitment to the Church of the Nazarene, but might consider attending another holiness denomination someday. According to this data 81% of pastors indicated a high degree of commitment to the holiness tradition. Based on this data one could expect a high level of commitment from pastors interviewed.

Another important question⁴⁰ in the Poll asks what pastors believe about entire sanctification. The Poll develops what could be, in effect, a typology of holiness views. The

³⁸ In cooperation with the Church Growth Division of the Church of the Nazarene.

³⁹ Question 4 on the survey.

⁴⁰ Question 20 on the survey. “Which one of the following statements most closely describes what you believe about entire sanctification?”

<u>Pastors</u>	<u>Response</u>
30%	It is the distinct second work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer in Christian life and service.
15%	It is the distinct second work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer in which the old sinful nature is cleansed and the believer empowered for Christian life and service.
53%	It is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, both gradual and instantaneous, in which the old sinful nature is cleansed and the believer empowered for Christian life and service.

first, supported by 30% of pastors, can be equated with the traditional model, highlighting such language as ‘distinct’, ‘second’, and ‘eradicated’. This kind of language can imply “instantaneousness.” This cluster of symbols will be helpful in identifying traditional religious identity in the analysis of pastor’s responses to the interview questions.

The second understanding of entire sanctification essentially follows the first, but uses cleansing language, “the old sinful nature is cleansed.” We should expect that this turn to more ‘biblical’ language is important in the interviews, but it should be noted that this view is not substantially different from the first.⁴¹ Having said that, we should note that these first two responses combined constitute 45% of pastors.

The third, and certainly the most popular, chosen by 53% of the respondents, emphasizes both the gradual and instantaneous nature of holiness experience. One would expect that the “relationalists,” identified by Quanstrom, would select this response as the optimum choice. And, given the high percentage of respondents who chose this view, we should expect the majority of pastors in our interviews to give clear indications of this view.⁴²

The fourth, and by far the least popular response is that which focuses on the gradual work of the Spirit in the believer. This strong emphasis on growth and maturity lends itself to the process interpretation. Even though this response is chosen by the fewest pastors we hypothesize that it will be important to our pastors.

That the vast majority of Nazarene pastors are comfortable with the present theological identity of the denomination is indicated by the 80% who feel that the theological identity of the church is about where it should be.⁴³ That in itself is a significant number. It is, however,

.4% It is the gradual work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer in which the believer grows in grace and matures in moral character and spiritual wisdom.

⁴¹ As we shall see it is not substantially antagonistic to a “substantialist” interpretation.

⁴² We have to admit, however, that this language is somewhat ambiguous. Exactly what “instantaneous” and “gradual” means for each respondent may be substantially different. This is why one-on-one interviews can help fill in the details.

⁴³ Question 21 on the survey.

somewhat ambiguous. Does it indicate that holiness should be an essential part of Nazarene theology, or does it indicate a general satisfaction that the Church of the Nazarene is generally Evangelical? My interpretation suggests both may be true. It is important to note that *generally* there is a high level of belief that *some view* of entire sanctification is essential to Nazarene identity, and that where we currently are is acceptable to these pastors.

The Problem of Constructing a Nazarene Religious Identity

Introduction

Constructing Nazarene identity is susceptible to significant challenges today. Theorists have highlighted the peculiar problems of constructing a self-identity under conditions of modernity. Nancy Ammerman has suggested that identities emerge “at the everyday intersections of autobiographical and public narratives.”⁴⁴ Nazarene identity, then, emerges out of the intersections of individual narrative-telling and communal negotiation of a shared story, in the context of a pluralistic society. The social context, characterized by a radical pluralism, impinges on religious identity construction. This is particularly true as individuals are increasingly more open to the effects of religious pluralism, that is, they have more options from which to choose.

For the sake of this paper we will highlight three narratives functioning in Nazarene identity construction.⁴⁵ Certainly we recognize what Ammerman calls “autobiographical” narratives. Religious identity is affected by the stories individuals tell of themselves. Also, “public” narratives are at work as well. Public narratives are those carried by groups, cultures and institutions. Here the internal debate over ‘substantivalism’ and ‘relationalism’ in the Church of the Nazarene, which has been highlighted by Quanstrom, is an example. Yet, this is not the only public narrative available. I would suggest that, as individuals engage their potential as religious consumers, and migrate to other religious contexts, they are introduced to alternative public religious narratives, from which they are free to choose. Not only are traditional

⁴⁴Nancy Ammerman, “Religious Identities and Religious Institutions,” in *Handbook of The Sociology of Religion*, edited by Michele Dillon, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 215.

⁴⁵Ibid, 213-214. I rely on Ammerman’s use of narratives at play suggested by Margaret Somers.

denominational narratives at work here, but also transdenominational narratives. One such narrative impinging on Nazarene identity is Evangelicalism. Finally, “metanarratives,” which are “overarching cultural paradigms” are also influential options for constructing self, and therefore, religious identity.⁴⁶

Nazarene identity construction, then, is confronted with this plurality of narrative options. The stories that individuals tell about their own religious identity will be affected in some way by this range of possibilities. Before we hear those stories we will review what is rather simplistically called “internal and external factors,” with the recognition that the issues are a bit more complex.

Internal Factors Affecting Nazarene Identity

Nazarene identity has been affected by internal factors, namely, the transition from reification to reflexivity. Reification of religious experience has played a significant part in the implausibility of the traditional holiness model. Yet, the issue intensifies because the modern religious person, while reacting to the reifying impulse in the holiness movement, is affected by another social development, reflexivity of the self.

From Reification . . .

The holiness movement has always placed a premium on religious experience. There are good reasons for this. It is an expression of Wesley’s real concern that grace be expressed in real human life.⁴⁷ That this concern for experience has been a central part of the holiness movement has been corroborated by historian Mark Quanstrom. In particular this is highlighted in a passage where Quanstrom notes the role experience plays in the defense of the secondness of entire sanctification by Stephen S. White, “He [White] closed the chapter by sharing his own

⁴⁶ Ammerman, “Religious Identities,” 214-15.

⁴⁷ See Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology*, (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994): 19. Of course it is conceptualized by Maddox as the human *response* to God’s free offer of grace.

personal experience of being entirely sanctified, stating that the argument from experience was the most important evidence of all to the truth of the doctrine.”⁴⁸ White, of course, was relying on experience as a *validation* of the reality of God’s grace in entire sanctification. Yet, one can easily see that experience may also be the same criteria others use who do not experience entire sanctification in the same way? Al Truesdale suggests that, given such an interest in experience in the holiness tradition, particularly as it developed its doctrine of entire sanctification, one would expect that “the existential diversity of human and religious life - the real and complex contexts of experience - would have received careful and sustained attention.”⁴⁹ However, this has not, generally, been the case. What has happened, according to him, is that some in the tradition were guilty of a fallacy, albeit unintentional. That is, they were guilty of mistaking the abstract theological expression of the doctrine of entire sanctification for the actual, substantive, existential, contours of human experience. Thus, “[p]opular and predominantly, a particular form for experiencing entire sanctification has been made synonymous with the doctrine itself.”⁵⁰ One form of religious experience was “reified” and was established as the pattern for all. While religious experience for some members of the tradition fit the reified model, for others it was an uncertain fit (note the comments by Maddox earlier). Truesdale writes:

No doubt many persons who sought entire sanctification under the influence of the holiness movement approximated the reification in their own experience without encountering existential dissonance. But this was not the case at all for many others; not only did the reification fall far short of existence, its imposition on existence was religiously harmful.⁵¹

Just as religious experience was a validation of the authenticity of the experience of entire sanctification for some in the tradition, so religious experience should have been equally a test of

⁴⁸ Quanstrom, 109.

⁴⁹ Al Truesdale, “Reification of the Experience of Entire Sanctification in the American Holiness Movement,” *WTJ* 31:2 (Fall 1996): 95.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 96.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 97.

its inauthenticity for others. The tradition should have listened to those religious voices that suggested that the reified model did not, in fact, accord with their own religious experience. We shall see that the tradition's inability to take seriously these dissenting voices may have contributed to a loss of plausibility for the traditional model, and highlighted the existential dilemma for many.

While the problem of Nazarene identity has a decidedly theological aspect, it may not be entirely theological in origin. Wade Clark Roof, in *Community and Commitment*,⁵² suggests that identity can be affected by cultural factors arising out of the American context. Investigating religious plausibility in mainline Protestant churches (in this case Episcopalians), he found that there were significant differences in plausibility structures between *locals* and *cosmopolitans*. That is, religious commitment was greater in locals than in cosmopolitans. It is not my intent here to apply Roof's specific thesis to the Church of the Nazarene (although, that may very well be a possible research project), rather, to suggest that the fact that contemporary Nazarenes may find the traditional holiness model implausible may be due to a larger social issue, namely a culturally influenced tendency toward the reification of religious experience (a by-product of the tendency to reify *human* experience?).⁵³

The challenges of constructing a Nazarene identity may, then, not be merely an issue of theology, but, rather, also of coming to grips with the broader social reality. I am suggesting in particular the problem of forging a self identity in the late modern age.

To Reflexivity . . .

⁵² Wade Clark Roof, *Community & Commitment: Religious Plausibility in a Liberal Protestant Church*, (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1978). See his chapter on "A Theory of Religious Plausibility."

⁵³ It may in fact be a part of the psychology of being human. John P. Hewitt speaking of the reification of the notion of "society" suggests, "'Society' is spoken of as if it were coercive, an external and constraining entity whose existence is real and solid. Reification is, of course, an inherent part of social life. As human beings talk about the social worlds they inhabit they necessarily act toward them as objects, endowing with solidity and an almost material existence that which in fact consists of their own activities and imaginings" (p. 112-113). Found in his *Dilemmas of the American Self*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989). It is a short leap to the reification of holiness experience.

If reification could be understood as a social factor affecting the construction of Nazarene identity (and not all are affected in the same way!), then so also may the reflexivity of the self be seen in a similar way. Part of the thesis of this paper is that the Church of the Nazarene has transitioned from the influence of reification of holiness identity to a new social context of a late modern age in which the reflexivity of the self has become a significant factor in constructing holiness identity. Reflexivity has both a relativising effect and a strengthening effect on holiness experience.

As we have already recognized, theorizing about self-identity in the context of late modernity⁵⁴ has highlighted the problematic nature of the social construction of religious identity. Loosening of family ties and loss of tradition, both of which were stabilizers of religious identity in the past, have made social identity much less certain. The highly pluralistic nature of modern society deepens this uncertainty. It is possible now to speak of the “post-traditional order of modernity.”⁵⁵ Giddens highlights the dilemma for constructing self-identity:

The more tradition loses its hold, . . . the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options. . . . Yet because of the ‘openness’ of social life today, the pluralisation of contexts of action and the diversity of ‘authorities’, lifestyle choice is increasingly important in the constitution of self-identity and daily

For Giddens, “self-identity becomes a reflexively organised endeavor.” The reflexive project of the self, then, “consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives.”⁵⁶ Thus, life itself becomes a matter of choice and constant revision, characterized by continual openness and assessment.

⁵⁴ Several works address this issue. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*, (New York: Doubleday, 1959); John P. Hewitt, *Dilemmas of the American Self*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); and, Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). A excellent treatment of the implication of these understandings for religious identity can be found in Nancy Ammerman’s entry, “Religious Identities and Religious Institutions,” in *Handbook of The Sociology of Religion* edited by Michele Dillon, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 207-224.

⁵⁵ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

It is this ‘reflexivity of the self’ that has contributed in many ways to significant problems in attaining and maintaining a religious identity. One can see the development as individuals who are most open to the pluralizing effects of modernity,⁵⁷ may make up our congregations, and those congregations our denomination. One such demographic group is the Baby Boom cohort.

Reflexivity and the Baby Boom Influence

Given that the vast majority of pastors interviewed were of the baby boom cohort, something should be said here about the significance of baby boom influence in the Church of the Nazarene. Wade Clark Roof⁵⁸ has contributed much to our understanding of boomer religiosity, some of which may be applied to the Nazarene context. It is precisely at the point of reflexivity that I wish to bring Roof into the discussion. He asserts that boomers have developed a ‘quest’ religious culture. One aspect of that quest culture is “reflexive spirituality”.

He highlights the religious significance of this reflexivity:

Responsibility falls more on the individual--like that of the *bricoleur*-- to cobble together a religious world from available images, symbols, moral codes, and doctrines, thereby This reflexive spirituality becomes deeply aware of the plurality of possibilities available to be used to create a religious identity. It promotes a more “open stance toward religious teachings and spiritual resources.”⁶⁰

Roof sees this as potentially a creative and energetic development. Yet, the dynamics of this will vary depending on the religious context. While a positive aspect of this reflexive spirituality

⁵⁷ Education may be one of those ‘social locations’ that opens a person to the pluralizing effects of modernity.

⁵⁸ Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1993); and, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

⁵⁹ Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*, 75.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

may, and probably does, manifest itself in the Nazarene tradition by a reluctance to accept a once for all religious experience. It also may manifest itself as a vital spiritual impulse to ethical integrity, that is, to allow nothing to pass in religious experience that falls short of the goal of Christlikeness, and, therefore, to remain open to future transformation, which is the processive impulse operating today.

External Factors Affecting Nazarene Identity

A second cluster of factors has affected Nazarene identity. The general effects of the competitive religious market has a general relativising effect on *some* aspects of religious belief. This is especially true as members of our churches (pastors included) are more open to the social influences of pluralism.

Competitive Religious Market

America enjoys a highly competitive religious market.⁶¹ Sociologists of religion have speculated that this religious pluralism has had beneficial results for religious vitality in America.⁶² Indeed, for the most part, this has been true for the Church of the Nazarene. However, has religious pluralism affected the Church of the Nazarene in other ways? I suggest that the competitive religious market has affected the Nazarene denomination as churches are affected by “Evangelical ecumenism” and the phenomenon of “switching.”

⁶¹ Peter L. Berger highlighted this at the end of his *Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1967). He attributes the “religious free enterprise” to the problem of pluralism. He states, “The pluralistic situation presents the religious institutions with two ideal-typical options. . . . play the pluralistic game of religious free enterprise, . . . or refuse to accommodate themselves, entrench themselves behind whatever socio-religious structures they can maintain or construct, and continue to profess the old objectivities as much as possible as if nothing had happened” (p. 153). Of course there Berger sets it in the context of secularization. Theorists today realize that the secularizing model does not fit the highly religious American context. Thus pluralism has had an invigorating effect on religious life, generating a competitive market.

⁶² This is in direct contrast to the secularization thesis that sees modernity as corrosive of religious life. See Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America 1776-1850: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

Evangelical Ecumenism

The enormous success of Evangelicalism⁶³ in the American religious market has instigated a significant body of research. Often the Church of the Nazarene is included in this transdenominational religious entity, and in many ways there is good reason for this.⁶⁴ The Wesleyan narrative shares much in common with the religious narrative of Evangelicalism. Yet, as some Wesleyans have pointed out, there are significant differences. There is a paradox here. As we shall see, being linked with Evangelicals has both positive and negative aspects. It is positive in the sense that in as much as Nazarenes identify with Evangelicalism, it reaps the benefits of that association.⁶⁵ Yet, as Nazarenes incorporate elements from the Evangelical narrative some aspects of the Nazarene story are minimized. Evangelical ecumenism is often manifested in the statement made by many Nazarenes, “I am a Christian first, and a Nazarene second.” This subordination of denominational identity to a more general, even less distinctive, religious identity has a significant impact on Nazarene identity.

In this way, the religious market functions to limit the more extreme aspects of theological identity. For example, double predestination in Calvinist theology is suppressed in a radical individualistic religious environment.⁶⁶ And, one can see how a “radical” notion of eradication of the sinful nature could become a problem in the context of Evangelicalism that looks for some common Christian (an Evangelical ecumenism) ground. Denominational

⁶³ Reasons for this success have been theorized by many scholars beginning with such works as Dean M. Kelley’s *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing: A Study in Sociology of Religion*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1972), and continuing with works like Joseph B. Tamney’s, *The Resilience of Conservative Religion: The Case of Popular, Conservative Protestant Congregations*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998). Two points need to be made here. First, all three of these writers tend to incorporate Nazarenes into their models. They see Nazarenes as conservative and/or evangelical. Second, these works tend toward a theory of religious identity strength and vitality. What is needed is a theory or model of Nazarene identity vitality and strength which arises out of the social location of Nazarenes in the modern context.

⁶⁴ See Tamney, *The Resilience of Conservative Religion*, 41.

⁶⁵ For some of the reasons Christian Smith points out, *American Evangelicalism*, 240.

⁶⁶ See Tamney, *Resilience of Conservative Religion*.

distinctives may be suppressed by consumers in a religious market that are sensitive to extremes, enjoy a highly individualistic religious context, and live in an environment characterized by the reflexivity of the self.

Switchers

That which is related to Evangelical ecumenism, but is itself a distinct phenomenon, is “switching.”⁶⁷ Switching is the movement of individuals from one church to another, often popularized as “shopping around.” Switching, too, has positive and negative effects. On the one hand, switching can have a positive effect on the life of a congregation. It generates growth, influx of financial support, workers, and religious vitality in general. Some pastors work hard to bring in switchers, hoping to keep them. On the other hand, switching can have adverse effects on denominational identity. Switchers are less attached to denominational identities.

Ammerman writes, “Congregations full of ‘switchers’ often report that they have given up on maintaining the narratives of the denominational tradition, *emphasizing a more generic Christian story* (emphasis mine).”⁶⁸

The fact that switchers “vote with their feet” causes many pastors to tone down denominational distinctives in order to preserve the presence of switchers in the congregation. Some times distinctive doctrines are not emphasized with the same zeal as the more common elements of Christian faith.

⁶⁷ See Nancy Ammerman, “Religious Identities,” 219.

⁶⁸ Ammerman, “Religious Identities,” 219.

Lived Religion: Holiness and Life

Introduction and Methodology

The purpose of this research was to get a sense of current Nazarene identity. Its focus is quite narrow. It asks the question, what is the relationship between Nazarene identity and the doctrine of entire sanctification? Its secondary goal is to offer an explanation for *why* people think differently about being Nazarene today. It is an investigation into “lived religion.”⁶⁹ What do Nazarenes actually believe about entire sanctification, and in what way is this related to the religious experiences they have? I chose, therefore, the interview method, asking pastors open-ended questions about Nazarene identity.⁷⁰ With this goal in mind, I chose 10 churches at

⁶⁹David D. Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

⁷⁰The following are the questions I posed:

1. What does it mean to be a Nazarene?
2. What has been your experience being a member of the Church of the Nazarene?
3. How is being a Nazarene related to the doctrine of entire sanctification?
4. Can one be a Nazarene and have different views on this doctrine?
5. What does it mean to be entirely sanctified?
6. What language would you use to describe this experience?
7. Do you have any questions about the doctrine?
8. What do you think about the *Manual* statement concerning this doctrine?
9. Do you think this doctrine should be emphasized more or less?
10. What social structures have you established to promote your understanding of Nazarene identity?
11. What is the relationship between congregation and denomination?

random from the approximately 100 churches on the New England district. In order to facilitate the research project I chose only those churches that were English speaking. Since two of the churches had husband and wife pastoral teams, I decided to interview both individuals. I also interviewed the two district leaders: the district superintendent and the assistant to the district superintendent. Therefore, the total number interviewed is 13.

To facilitate this empirical research I chose to interview Nazarene pastors. I asked them face-to-face what they thought Nazarene identity *currently* was, and what it *should* be.⁷¹ Why pastors? I believe pastors play a significant role in the life of any congregation, and, thus, significantly affect the identity of any denomination. Pastors are the interface between congregation life and denominational concerns. The view of the pastor regarding denominational identity will significantly affect the congregation's understanding of Nazarene identity. Finding out what the pastor's think, then, is essential for establishing the details of contemporary Nazarene identity.

In order to determine the proximity⁷² of the pastors to the traditional model I used the following method. I assumed that a difference in religious symbolic language and religious experience would sufficiently indicate a measure of distance from the traditional model. A pastor will be considered closer to the traditional holiness model as he or she expresses religious symbolism that includes notions such as "distinct," "eradication," "instantaneous," "filled with love," "decisiveness," "immediate," or other such "crisis" terms. In the same way, a pastor will be considered further from the traditional model as he or she expresses religious symbolism that includes notions contrary to these.

⁷¹ The research itself is a part of a larger project done for a class at Boston University, Church and Theology in the Contemporary World, led by Peter Berger and Claire Wolfteich. The original project included questionnaires given to the pastor's congregations regarding the same question of Nazarene identity. This material yielded some very interesting results, but will not be used in this paper.

⁷² I am indebted to John Johnston for this concept.

The primary aspect we are testing is whether individuals have moved substantially away from the traditional model of the 19th century formulation of holiness, from holiness ‘roots.’

Typology

In this section I want to introduce the typology for identifying the four types of pastors, and to describe the four types using the information from the in-depth interviews. Each type is measured according to proximity to the traditional 19th century holiness model. I took into consideration language describing both religious symbol and religious experience. Those individuals born before 1946 were classified as being in the builder generation. Individuals born between 1946 and 1954 were classified as early baby boom, and those born between 1955 and 1964 as later baby boom. Finally, those born between 1965 and 1985 were classified as busters.

Type I Traditional Builder/Boomer

This type showed the closest proximity to the traditional model. Two out of the thirteen pastors could be said to comprise this type. These tended to be near the builder age or older baby boomers who had significant contact with the traditional holiness model. I found that this type demonstrated little difficulty, or had few disagreements with the traditional formulation.

Religious language used to characterize the doctrine was traditional. And religious experience was nonproblematic. Each felt that his life conformed to the substance of the traditional model. For this reason one respondent expressed a great of frustration over the inability of some to accept the traditional model. For him it was “a matter of commitment.” “There’s no commitment in today’s generation,” he replied. “God is faithful, and He will not let us fall.”

I classified another pastor as the traditional boomer. This pastor was born in 1943 and considers himself on the “cusp” of the boomer age. He resonates with both the builder *and* (early) boomer mentality. The reason for this is that, while his religious experience *generally* fit the traditional model, there is at least one difference. He has also modified his symbolic language substantially on key, sensitive issues. For example, note this comment on original sin:

I saw in your questionnaire a question on eradication. That's not a term I am comfortable with, because it implies wiping out totally. It may be cleansed from our lives as the controlling factor. It may be, I like the term 'crucified' better, because it has to do with the self and all of that. And it can be resurrected, so to speak, or not fully crucified. I think that is a more biblical term than eradication. I understand where they were coming from and all of that. I just think some of that early language - it does not eradicate Satan from the world. It helps to crucify the power of the evil one in our lives and allowing us to be governed by the Holy Spirit, but it does not eradicate temptation which is almost implied. If you eradicate something, it's gone! That's what I grew up with. But that has not been my experience, temptation is still there. You have to work with that and allow the Spirit to keep you from yielding to temptation.

What distinguishes this baby boom pastor from later boomers is that, while he has questioned the 'logic' of eradication of original sin, and rejects that notion, he affirms that something like a 'crucifixion' may occur which substantially deals with 'sin' even though temptation may remain. It is the emphasis on the second, decisive, distinctive experience that places him in the traditional type. Yet, there are signs of a moderation of the optimistic language of the 19th century holiness proponents. Ultimately, for this type, Christlikeness *is* possible. It requires, however, a decision of the will to submit to God's Spirit and allow God to 'cleanse' us from all sin.

Another characteristic that may differentiate this type from others is the role of the "special rules" in identity formation. This type recognizes a legitimate role for objective guidelines of religious behavior. One pastor sees the special rules as "an external structure that will help them [young people] internalize" the Christian faith. He points to Paul who "speaks of the law being a schoolmaster, in preparation of the gospel." He has a serious concern though. He writes:

My fear is that as we move away from some of the American holiness aspects if we're not careful we will not have people who understand that there are standards we need to live by. We don't have to order every jot and tittle, but we do need to let people know there is a standard scripturally.

What other church social structures were established to promote and encourage Nazarene identity? In this type, as for all the types, there was an ambiguity regarding social structures for creating Nazarene religious identity. Certainly preaching was one method. However, the infrequency of explicit 'holiness' sermons was evident. The general consensus was that *all* sermons were holiness sermons. This generalizing of the holiness message attributed to the

modification of holiness identity, even as this type had a traditional experience. Other ways to socialize individuals were membership classes, and the use of denominational Sunday School literature. These were important aspects of churches of type 1 pastors.

Three characteristics stand out, then, for this type. For the most part traditional symbolic language and religious experience is expressed. Where there is a modification of traditional language it does not reflect a difference in substance, but in a desire to be more ‘biblical’ language. In some way this may be seen as a “concession” to the relationalists and those more interested in process. In the mind of this type this may allow future generations to be comfortable with the denominational distinctive. Finally, this type is characterized by appreciation for the objective standards such as the special rules in guiding moral and ethical behavior.

Type II Transitioning Boomer

A transitioning boomer is one who is aware of the traditional model, but whose religious experience diverges from that model. This type feels the most existential pain over the tradition. Two out of thirteen fit this type. This type, however, includes two sub-types, neither of which have settled on a new holiness paradigm. The first finds the tradition problematic, but, generally, submits to its authoritative status. The other finds the tradition authoritative, but finds religious experience problematic.

Both tend to be older boomers who lived through the “golden” age⁷³ period of Nazarene history. In their religious imaginations and memories they remember growing up in the 50’s and 60’s with the traditional revival services, camp meetings, special speakers, holiness revivals, and “Nazarene only” rally. Fathers and mothers, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and saints of the church, all gave testimony to being fully sanctified instantaneously, original sin having been

⁷³ See Emptage, “Denominational Identity in Historical Perspective.”

eradicated, and heart fully filled with the love of God in Christ. These powerful and lively memories are not easily dismissed.

Biblically and theologically this type still believes the traditional model is correct in its substantial form. It does indeed point to a valid experience, but their own lives do not or have not yet been aligned with that model. The inner lives of these are characterized by deep and profound levels of grief and guilt over the inability to inhabit the traditional world view. They still, often after many long years, tearful prayers, and existential frustration, actively seek and pursue the experience of holiness manifested in the traditional model.

Note the response of this type to the question of Nazarene identity:

I like what you are doing in studying Nazarene identity. I struggle with those issues myself. The identity that I took on from the Church of the Nazarene was that we a setting of the boundaries between me, the church and the world out there.

While this negative definition of holiness was initially seen as excessive, he later became grateful for it. He says, "I thank God for that. I am grateful for the boundaries that kept me from doing a lot of things my friends did. A holy person was one who did not participate in those things." In spite of the negative description of holiness (dangerous because it may lead to 'legalism'), this pastor believed that the traditional model could be effective. The weakness, however, was an improper model he attributed to entire sanctification. The model he accepted was that displayed by his father, yet it was, ultimately, not healthy. It was characterized in this way:

I felt my father had the better way of dealing with things, quiet, reflective. Yet, this infuriated my wife and frustrated me. The spiritual models I learned growing up more like the holy to me. His always calm presence, with rare exception, was the model for me. I felt that resembled Christ more than somebody who just spewed things out. My interpretation of being holy was being more like my father. When that model didn't work I went into crisis. I experienced burn out. I had to learn that my view of holiness did not work, and that was difficult.

What was the fundamental problem with the traditional holiness model he grew up with? He says, "My view of Christlikeness changed, and the holiness movement did not really understand the complexity of the human psyche." Yet, it is extremely difficult to overcome the dominant

influence of the traditional symbols and narrative experience. His discomfort with this is evident in the following comment, “I was not comfortable to share this with the church, or my district superintendent. That did not fit the holiness model. . . . At that time I could not give myself permission to experience what I was experiencing [emotional crash] because it did not fit my vision of holiness.” His existential dilemma is heightened to self blame:

Holiness for me was, well I preached the old Nazarene line, it was fitting to the *Manual* and cleansing out original sin. When I knew I was entirely sanctified there was the understanding that original sin was gone, and I kept wondering, if it was gone why did I feel as I did. Why I felt so frustrated, why I was not able to be the father, or the provider I should be. My concept of holiness, well I didn’t feel that God was helping me in that area I needed Him, and I called into question my entire sanctification, yet I blamed myself, tried to do everything myself.

Fundamentally, for this pastor, the problem stemmed from a too simplistic view of the human being. I asked one pastor, “What do you think is the fundamental issue? Is it a matter of not understanding the depth and intricacies of the human psyche?” He leaned intentionally over to me and spoke directly into the microphone, “Yes! Definitely!” The traditional model did not fully grasp the depth and complexity of the human mind in relation to sin and salvation.

In sum, then, this type has three characteristics. This type has vivid memories of the “golden age” of Nazarene history, but they struggle the most internally with the tradition. They desire to substantially agree with the traditional formulation, but here is the presence of a great deal of existential doubt and grief, due to their inability to “inhabit” that world view. And, they have not yet fully developed a new holiness model, and quite possibly never will.

Type III Transitioned Boomer

Transitioned boomers are those who have responded in some way to the traditional holiness model and have definitely moved to an alternative one. Six of the thirteen fit this typology. These respondents tended to be middle and younger boomers, born between 1954 and 1960. They tend not to have had elaborate involvement with the traditional model, but they are

clearly informed about its details. They are more likely to have had significant mentors (teachers or pastors) that already had or were dealing with the traditional model.

This type has two sub-types. The first has clearly transitioned to a new paradigm. They predominantly consider themselves 'relationalists' in regard to Nazarene identity. These have been influenced by the intentional development in the denomination instigated by Wynkoop, Dunning and a host of younger scholars and pastors. The second could be called 'pluralists.' These have arrived at the conclusion that multiple paradigms can be used to express holiness theology. This group either has worked through the existential problems to actively engage a new paradigm, or have not had social context in which the traditional model was dominant.

The first sub-type, the 'relationalists,' included four out of the six pastors. In one sense this group can be considered a 'success' story for the Church of the Nazarene. This is explicitly stated by this pastor:

Theologically I am thoroughly Wesleyan. Whether you like it or not I am a product of the Church of the Nazarene in the sense that I am educated through the educational institutions and traditions of the church. I am a product of the college system. I am a product of the seminary. And so I hope I'm doing justice to my teachers when I say this and I think I am. I think I'm in good company that I'm thoroughly Wesleyan as opposed to American Holiness movement, Phoebe Palmer thinking person.

There is here a clear transitioned identity in relation to the traditional model. The relationalists he encountered in his educational process were successful in socializing him into Nazarene relational theology.

This pastor made some of the clearest statements of Nazarene identity of all the types.

Note the statement of this pastor when asked about the details of Nazarene identity:

This is something I have some pretty clear opinions about mainly because I had to think about that myself. Before coming into something you want to know what it is. Especially if you are comparing it to other options. We were looking at Baptist churches and Pentecostal churches and what not. I would boil it down to this, that the Church of the Nazarene theologically is, and I think, our theological identity has everything to do with our practical identity, the way we express ourselves practically. So I want to start with that. I see our church as a two-pronged church. First of all, salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. And in that respect, hey, Evangelical, that relationship with Christ by grace through faith is something that changes your life here and now, and not just later, sometime in the future, after this life is over. And if that sounds vaguely familiar to you, yes, I'm talking about holiness. Those are the non-negotiables. That's the core, the thing that doesn't change, that is the absolute

epicenter of the Nazarene churches identity.

Here we see a clear theological expression of Nazarene identity. What he calls the “core” beliefs. But what is the problem with the traditional narrative? Does it relate to human experience? On the first point he states:⁷⁴

In other words I have a lot more patience with people. I see the salvation and the sanctification experience as a process, and I'm a lot more, I think I'm a lot more sensitive and a lot more patient theologically as well as socially with people. I'm a lot more tolerant. I can put up with a lot more in terms of the rough edges that people have; at the same time that I am also challenging them and pointing out what those rough edges are. It's kind of a very tricky, pastoring's more an art than an science, you've heard that right? It's a very tricky, tight-rope walk, but my understanding of a Phoebe Palmer, American holiness movement kind of deal is that things are a lot more compressed.

They're a lot more categorized. I'll tell you, in terms of holiness, in terms of sanctification, one of the things I constantly emphasize and preach against is this whole, and it's not just an American holiness movement thing, I think it's an American Evangelical thing, is that this whole concept of, this who perception of being a Christian or being sanctified as being something that you arrive at. That it's something that you, that I've got, that it's something that I possess. It's a badge. It's a possession. It's a medal. It's some sort of status point that I've passed in my life and now I have this. And, the reason why I preach and teach as contrary over and against that is that, yes, there are certain seminal points and definite turning points in a person's life that you can identify as yeah let's celebrate this anniversary when you made this commitment. Terrific, but what I preach and teach is that being a Christian, and or being sanctified, is a process that will never end. If God is infinite, and He is, I think, and we're not, then we are never, ever going to get to a place where we can say, "Whew, that was good. I'm sure glad that I got here and now I'm here and you're here. Isn't this great. We can just kind of sit down and relax and wait for everybody else to get here, because we've arrived. We're done." To me that's deadly to Christianity. I think that's poison. That's a poison pill. As soon as you start preaching and teaching and encouraging people to think that way you have basically encouraged them to stop growing, and to stop becoming more godly, becoming more like Christ.

This pastor has clear opinions on aspects of entire sanctification. For example, as a relationalist he sees instantaneous sanctification as detrimental to real religious growth and discipleship from a motivational aspect. On the second point, when asked if he thinks his model is more plausible than the 19th century holiness model, he replied, “Yes, I think it is truer to life experience!” It is not just that it is truer to his own religious experience, but, as he says, ”to human experience!”

⁷⁴I include an extensive excerpt because these issues are essentially repeated in the type 4 pastor.

The second sub-type can be identified as the pluralists. Two out of the six pastors approximate this type. Even the pluralists in this type are relationalists. However, there is one major difference that distinguishes them from the first sub-type, they are reluctant to emphasize any model or means to entire sanctification. One pastor emphasizes this very clearly, “As far as I’m concerned how you express it, *In my mind everything is up for grabs!* (emphasis mine).” This is just the kind of response to the means question that is characteristic of this type.

In both the sub-types there was a surprising aspect. There appeared to be a resurgence of “eradication” language. And, from a relational perspective, for them, it makes perfect sense. If original sin is the result of a broken relationship, then it makes sense to say that when that relationship is restored original sin is gone. Yet, it is not to be seen in any substantival way, and it is a moment by moment reality. Our relational pastor said in response to the question whether original sin was eradicated at entire sanctification:

Yes, as I understand original sin. I believe that original sin isn’t a thing, it isn’t a disease or a sickness. It is a disposition. It’s an attitude. It’s a relational category, I believe. Spiritual, relational. And I believe that in the process of entire sanctification that disposition is in the process of being eradicated. But, I would never say, I would only say that that only happens, and only continues to happen moment to moment. Again, point to point as the grace of God is relied on to do that.

If there were any type closest to an intentional product in the Church of the Nazarene it would have to be this type. A product of Nazarene education at a time when the substantival model was being severely criticized, and the relational model dominant in some Nazarene educational institutions. This type has two primary characteristics. First, they express holiness identity in relational categories. They tend not to identify a ‘time’ of entire sanctification, but, rather, ask “what is my religious experience right now.” Thus, original sin may be clearly eradicated, properly understood. And second, there is a firm belief that one can be entirely sanctified. Christlikeness is “doable, livable, possible, here and now in this life, and now. It isn’t just imputed righteousness, it’s imparted righteousness, and to really take that seriously. What makes us distinct, is that we really take it seriously.”

Type IV Independent Boomer/Buster

This type is labeled “Independent” because they have had the least exposure to, and are the farthest removed from, the traditional model. This type is not really plagued with existential doubts about the doctrine, as other types may be. They evidence a “matter of fact” approach to the holy life. For them it is a journey, a quest. Glorification is the goal. We can make progress, but we never quite arrive. The type is the most expressive of evangelical ecumenism. The remaining three out of the thirteen are associated with this type.

One repeated phrase occurring again and again in this type is the comment, “I am a Christian first, and a Nazarene second.” And it could be added, a Nazarene second, if at all.

There is clear expression of the fact of sin after sanctification. One pastor responded to my question of sin following sanctification in this way:

I have willfully sinned after going to the altar and beginning that process of entire sanctification. So, I believe in my journey there's been a progression upward, if you are going to use glorification in heaven as the ultimate goal. There's been in my walk some dips where there's been, I've been disobedient, there's been a willful act of sin. Now, I haven't killed anyone, or that, but still its sin. I've needed God's forgiveness, I've had to confess sin. And bring it before God again. I've gone back on my desire to have God lead my life, and my will. There are those little battles we have day to day, week to week where I think I know better in the situation or I don't feel like being obedient.

When asked if he thought one could be a Nazarene and have different views of entire sanctification, he states:

Well I think there are different views on entire sanctification in the Nazarene church, so, go to credentials board and they have different views. My understanding is that even the Generals in the past have had some differing views. Maybe I'm off base, but I understand there have been some that specific date it, second crisis experience, that basically you've dealt with all the issues there, and the rest is kind of a faithful walk in God's Spirit. Whereas this would be the idea of the Holy Spirit eradicating sin. Whereas I resonate more with those who would say there is a second work, but I believe it is a beginning process of committing one's mind and heart and will to God, but we are human that takes process to continue to strip away layers and surrender more and more of our hearts as we journey, with God. I see it more as a process.

When asked what he thinks happens to ‘original sin’ he responds:

I would say original sin, its power is broken. I would not say it is eradicated, but I would say its power is broken as necessary rule in my life. Yeah, that would resonate me too. Cleanse from sin has more meaning to me than the term eradication, but even

cleanse, I'm not sure if even that covers it. Sin has been dealt a death blow, but it is still a wounded animal that you need to be a bit wary of, and not rest.

So acts of sin are committed after entire sanctification? “Yes! I do in fact sin after sanctification, but that’s life.” Another respondent attempts to identify what he means by Nazarene identity:

Nazarene identity has been for me, personally, this idea of being committed to pursuing a relationship with Jesus Christ and developing a lifestyle that is reflective of Him, that reflects the kind of purity and love and investment of time that Christ exemplifies for us. And, of course, in that call is the call to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. That’s not a light call. ‘Be holy’ is not a light call by any means.

One would think, given the emphasis on ‘call’ and ‘perfection’ that there may be a clear means to this end, but this type eschews such a method, preferring the language of uniqueness and process. Note the primary metaphor of ‘journey.’ He continues, “But it can’t be so narrow as to define how that journey is going to be for each person. As we encourage people to walk along that journey, once they’ve experienced salvation, they’re going to come to that other part where they truly do struggle with the sin nature in their heart.”

There is in this type the greatest appreciation for diversity and plurality. While recognizing tension (they are not blind to the problems) they also realize that it is in difference that real creativity can happen. A monochrome denomination is not the goal of this type.

There is much less emphasis placed on secondness (if at all), but a great deal of focus on the religious journey. Also, tolerance of views on holiness is central to the religious narrative of this type. There is the common belief that the tradition has always been pluralistic. That is the nature of life itself.

Some in this type are acutely aware of the difference of their own view in relation to the traditional. While speaking with two of these pastors I was aware of a certain discomfort in their responses. Pursuing this I asked if they felt uncomfortable talking about these issues. One pastor responded:

[Laughter] Yeah, well, it does matter to me, because it does make me feel uneasy at points. [Why?] Because there are times when in my own thinking where I'm not sure I really fit within the Nazarene church, with there being very clear lines that are being

Part of the reason for this discomfort relates to theological preparedness. This pastor just sees himself as a “let's live the ‘Christian life’ kind of guy.” His ‘evangelical ecumenism’ is evident when he says “I'm focused on those issues more than I am on this broad theology. So that makes me feel uneasy, and I think that there are so many people who this is their gift. That's what they think about. That's what they are called to. But, my passion is really getting people to pursue this relationship, and the application of theology in that way.” One may think that it is merely a matter of theological training, but this type is quite clear that the issue is difference of interpretation of the nature of religious experience. Why, then, do they not go elsewhere? Why not join another denomination? He responds, “I make the Church of the Nazarene my home, not because I agree with everything, but because I've not found anything better, and I choose to belong.” It is this matter of “choice” that is so characteristic of this type. Within their own reflexivity they find sufficient commonality so that adherence is possible.

Conclusions

Our thesis has been that the *de facto* holiness of the Church of the Nazarene has been the result of the convergence of two clusters of factors. First, the internal problem of religious experience at the micro level, with its concomitant problems of theological expression, especially in light of the reification of religious experience into a rigid, highly structured model, a model too restrictive for the majority in the denomination, and the complexification of that by reflexivity. Second, the problems of the competitive religious market at the macro level of the broader society, which itself has relativizing effects, but which for the Church of the Nazarene has resulted in both a large number of switchers, and an evangelical ecumenism, that eschews a narrowly defined, and what is perceived as a restrictive, theological doctrine. We suggest that these have converged to make religious (holiness) language and religious experience ambiguous at the meso level of the congregation. The more congregations that are affected by this the more this influences denominational identity. Generally, we have suggested that these factors are related to the problem of forging a self identity under the conditions of late modernity, in particular its radical pluralism.

What shall we say, then, about current Nazarene identity in light of its comparison to the traditional 19th century model? Three general conclusions can be drawn. First, there appears to be a widespread loss of plausibility for the 19th century holiness model. Crucial elements of this narrative are not included in the stories of the majority of Nazarene pastors.

Second, there is an interesting paradox. While there appears to be evidence of a high level of denominational commitment, that is, to the *idea* that holiness *should* be a central feature of Nazarene identity, there appears to be no common view of Nazarene identity that is common to all the types. This may indicate a dangerously low level of denominational vitality.

Third, there seems to be a trend developing as pastors are more and more removed from social locations that place them in contact with the traditional holiness narrative. “Holiness” is becoming more and more conceived as a “process” of life, a journey toward a distant goal.

Regarding the *defacto* model of holiness, it is one that engages the imaginations of the majority of Nazarenes as a result of their own religious experience, apprehensive of decisiveness in holiness, and as a result of influence from significant numbers of Christians from outside the tradition,⁷⁵ namely Evangelicalism. It is *not* one that is intentionally negotiated by significant members of the denomination. The lack of intentionality, the generic nature, and vague language, is what contributes to the lessening vitality and strength of Nazarene identity.

What are the implications of this kind of empirical research? The generalizability of these findings is, I think, is both limited, but useful. First, it is limited in that it is a small sampling of Nazarene pastors from only one district in the Church of the Nazarene. A much more extensive research project would be needed.

Second, in general it does indicate a contemporary negotiation with the traditional holiness narrative. It is not that the traditional story has disappeared. It is, as Roof suggests, being “continuously revised and reformulated.”⁷⁶⁷⁷ He suggests three strategies for negotiating with tradition: reconnecting, reframing, and retraditionalizing. The dominant approach of these pastors is retraditionalizing, taking the traditional narrative and creating “new cultural formulations that provide alternative visions”⁷⁸ of holiness experience. They develop new narratives that fit their own personal experience. Further research can only highlight and clarify the details and extent of such interaction with the past.

⁷⁵ My hypothesis is that the presence of high numbers of ‘switchers’ and an Evangelical ecumenism account for this, highlighting the permeable boundaries of our contemporary religious situation.

⁷⁶

⁷⁷ Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*, 166-169.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 169.