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THE PATH WE TAKE
By Howard Vassar Miller

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01 -- SIGNIFICANT QUOTATIONS

Below are quotations from this little publication that hit upon matters pertinent to discussions and decisions being made yet today in Holiness Churches about where to draw the line in Church Manuals so as to require Biblical Standards of behavior for Church members without unnecessarily invading the realm of personal scruples. H. V. Miller saw perils in both directions:

"But the perils of our position are really twofold. On the one hand there is the always impending danger of worldliness, and on the other hand there is the lurking presence of Pharisaism. One frequently wonders if some of our people realize how small a margin exists between Pharisaism and worldliness. It is a paradox we will not elaborate: LEGALISM and SPIRITUALITY are POLES APART; YET in actual living, CLOSE TOGETHER. Herein lies a distinct peril to our ethical position, a FAILURE TO DISCRIMINATE BETWEEN that which is FUNDAMENTAL AND BASIC and THAT WHICH INVADES THE REALM OF PERSONAL SCRUPLE.

"After all, there is a realm of personal scruple which belongs to every individual. There is a domain of personal conscience in this over-all pattern of ethics which must be scrupulously honored if the consistency and strength of the whole are maintained. It is this particular phase of personal liberty, properly respected, which affords flexibility to the whole. It is really the cement which binds the whole together. TO GO TOO FAR IN EITHER DIRECTION is to make a misplaced emphasis which eventually WILL UNDERMINE THE FOUNDATIONS UPON WHICH WE HAVE BUILT OUR SUPERSTRUCTURE OF CONDUCT." [The caps are mine. -- DVM]

On the one hand, Trashing and Ignoring a Church Manual are not the solution, but on the other hand neither is Over-Legislating the conduct of members a wise course. Where is the middle of the road? Where should the line be drawn? If you also consider the discussion of this booklet pertinent in today's Holiness Movement, and if you feel that it is important that the right decisions are made on such matters, I invite you to read the whole of this booklet. In it, I feel that on principle H. V. Miller struck a quite good balance on the subject without getting into the specifics. Alas! however, it is much easier to agree on the right principle than to agree on the specifics of where lines should be drawn. -- DVM

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02 -- ABOUT H. V. MILLER

The following quotation is from hdm0555, "The Second Work of Grace," by D. Shelby Corlett: "Dr. H. V. Miller served the Church of the Nazarene in pastorates at Hartford, Connecticut, and Chicago, Illinois, First Church; as dean of the Bible and Theological Department of Northwest Nazarene College; as the district superintendent of the New England and the New

York districts; and from 1940 to 1948 as general superintendent. He was unexpectedly called to his reward on December 28, 1948."

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03 -- THE APPROXIMATE TIME WHEN "THE PATH WE TAKE" WAS WRITTEN

Internal evidence suggest that this booklet was probably written and published some time close to January, 1948 -- and possibly only a few months before H. V. Miller's death. Thus it would appear that "The Path We Take" may have been his last recorded expression of concern on the subject with which he dealt in this publication. -- DVM

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04 -- EXPLANATION

This little book comes from my pen by sheer necessity -- that of a real concern I have carried for a long time. I am so anxious that our church shall take the path that God has intended we should. It is not an easy path, and there are some rough byways on which we could find ourselves if we are not both cautious and sincerely alert. Obviously these words are directed to Nazarenes, although I would be happy if they should find their way into the hands of people of like precious faith; for I presume that our dangers are more or less common. The dangers of the Church of Jesus Christ today are fundamentally the same as in the yesterdays, and it would be tragic if we should be foolhardy or presumptive enough to ignore the lessons of history. THE PATH WE TAKE as a church now is determining the service we render tomorrow.

H. V. Miller

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05 -- INTRODUCTION

In this pamphlet General Superintendent Miller has brought some very important matters to our attention. The chief emphasis is upon the significance of conduct for the Nazarene Christian. He never can think of his way of life as incidental. The General Rules in our Manual make this clear. They represent the collective conscience of the Church of the Nazarene, and are never to be taken lightly. Further, any church which majors on Christian experience must hold up a high standard of living. Again, a church whose main business is to spread scriptural holiness cannot disregard ethics without being caught in the mesh of worldliness.

On the other hand, there is personal scruple or conviction -- for which Doctor Miller clearly argues. Every Christian must have this area which is obligatory for him; but it can easily pass into legalism or Pharisaism if he insists on making it hold for every other member of the Church of the Nazarene. We cannot have regimentation or standardization in a church along with a religion that is based on personal experience and guidance. This would tend toward totalitarianism rather than democracy. It seems to me that in this booklet Doctor Miller has set before us the right

way: a way that will keep us in the middle of the road -- away from worldliness on the one hand, and legalism on the other.

Stephen S. White

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06 -- SCRIPTURES

"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." -- Prov. 16:25

"But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." -- Prov. 4:18

"Therefore... "Ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls." -- Jer. 6:16

And Remember... "An highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein." -- Isa. 35:8

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07 -- PATHS WILL BE MADE

Man usually makes paths of his own choosing, then builds a philosophy of religion to justify the way he takes. Sometimes men have deliberately fashioned a philosophy and then built their pattern of life to suit. Japan affords an illustration of this attitude. But more often it has been the former approach. At any rate the fact is clear that men are determined to live as they choose for whatever they esteem to be their best good, and that good is not necessarily based upon principles of truth or honor. For there is always a way that seems to be right to a man, even though that way eventually leads to futility and death.

Some facts are too plain to need evidence of their accuracy or justification for their existence. The paths that man has made are not complimentary to him and are a sad commentary on his persistent and stubborn choice of the ways that lead to death. Some have attempted to explain the devious paths man has taken as his evolutionary strivings to be good. But such a solution is but futile rationalizing. Man's paths have been devious and wandering because his own heart has led him that way. There is but one answer to the bewildering labyrinths of man's paths through history. He has chosen his own ways instead of those of God. He has tried to say that there is no fixed pattern for his conduct, regardless of the clear moral demands of the Bible. So long as he can make himself feel reasonably easy about what he does, he always deems it right.

We are observing a striking instance of just such reactions right now. There has been a shocking breakdown in the basic moral relations between men. As a compensation, a lot of public

agitation has been forthcoming about the importance of sex education. There can be little question but that there has always been a lack in this regard. But it is not the motivation for the present agitation. Back of it all is the subtle desire of those who wish to remove all moral restraints and justify their own actions. Promiscuity has become so common in many circles that it has become necessary to compensate for conditions that seem to be out of moral control. It is another instance of man's choosing a path of his own in flagrant disregard of the warnings of God.

The same pattern is seen in the power politics that now dominate the diplomacies of world powers. For a while there was talk of a great brotherhood among the nations of the earth. And then, once more, personal and national selfishness predominated. Age-long tactics were again adopted, followed by an almost endless array of explanations to justify man's moral failure. Again man has taken the path of his own choosing.

We will not weary you with other examples of the ways of men. To the unprejudiced, the well-being of society has always depended upon man's basic moral integrity. The Bible has always been right in its declaration that "righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34). When men have kept to those clear paths of righteousness marked out by God, society has been peaceful and prosperous. When man, on the other hand, has departed from moral integrity, society has rapidly disintegrated. And it is just as true that, when man has turned back to the paths of righteousness, the pangs and travail of society have been eased. Disregard of these simple facts evidences a flagrant disrespect for the facts of history. Turning back to the days of Rome, we see the quick disintegration of the most powerful nation of history in her time through moral decadence and wanton evil. On the other hand, one cannot read the history of England without sensing the fact that it was the Wesleyan revival that saved the English people and consequently the British Empire from moral destruction. When Wesley began preaching, society in England -- both within the Church and without -- was corrupt and evil. But the challenging call of the Wesleys for a return to the old paths rescued England just in time.

It is difficult to speak dispassionately concerning conditions which prevail today in our own nation. The deliberate turning to drunkenness by a whole nation, until the man or woman who does not partake becomes the social oddity, is not a complimentary comment on our national life. Statistics for 1947 reveal the fact that the United States spent nine and one-half billion dollars for liquor, almost eight billion for recreation (which includes to a large extent morally questionable forms), nearly three and one-half billion for tobacco, while only a little more than one billion and a half was spent for all religious and welfare interests. We may not like the implications of these facts and we may well cringe from their restatement. The fact remains that we are becoming a pagan people with a rapidity that is ominous and alarming. America is taking the paths of her own choosing, regardless of the nobility of her beginnings.

If pessimism seems to prevail in this brief review of national conditions, we find no reassurance in other parts of the world. With an even more deliberate course the other peoples of the earth are either taking a path utterly neglectful of the right one or else are deliberately determined to avoid the path which leads to life.

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08 -- THE PATH OF THE CHURCH

This brief appraisal of our world today, and the way man takes, clearly implies the responsibility of the Church. It is the task of the Church to point out to men the safe way, the right way, the way that will eventually issue in man's best good and salvation. This has always been the task of the Church. Christ began His Church on earth for one simple reason -- to show man the way he should take. Very early in the Church's history Christians were referred to as of THE WAY. Jesus expressed it this way: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:13-14). This path that Jesus blazed for His followers is one radically different from the paths man has invariably followed. For the ways of God are foolishness to man. However, those who sought this new way from then till now and have walked in it have found that it is a path of peace and hope.

And so it was that Jesus started out His earthly Church to blaze moral paths through the wilderness and confusion of sin, showing man the path he should take. This is, and always has been, the task of the Church. When the Church fails to lead the way, humanity soon wanders off to make its own path, and ere long finds itself far astray from safety and perpetuity. The tragedy of it all is that the Church has too often followed the paths of the world rather than becoming the moral way-shower for man. One cannot escape the significance of it all -- when the Church has been indecisive in its leadership, humanity has always faltered and turned toward disaster. Man always comes to confusion when he fails to follow the path of God, and the Church has too often been at fault in failing to lead the way. We live in such an age; consequently, the challenge is clearer than ever to those who regard the responsibility of the church with seriousness.

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09 -- THE PATH WE TAKE

Herein lies the challenge to the Church of the Nazarene. If the Church as a whole has to a large degree failed to lead the way and make the path clear, then our church -- which claims to have championed the cause of man's salvation -- is now definitely responsible. This means that around the world the banners of our Zion must mark the path with certainty, calling men from the ways that end in confusion to the way that ends in eternal triumph.

It means not only that we shall teach man about the path of the just that shines more and more unto the perfect day, but that we shall also exemplify the principles thereof by conduct that identifies that way. One of our major responsibilities is a life and conduct consistent with the path that we take. We would not place conduct above sound doctrine and the declaration of that doctrine. However, we do insist that the proclamation of sound doctrine must result in holy living. Otherwise our ministry is in vain, and its promotion becomes futile and confusing. There has always been an unmistakable relationship between the way men conduct themselves and what they teach and believe.

This is most emphatic and logical upon the part of those commonly called holiness people. Those branches of the Church which maintain high standards of personal experience have a

correspondingly high level of ethics. When a church does not major in experiential religion, there is no demand for ethics above the level of the average moral requirements of the world. But when, on the other hand, men are challenged to take the way of the New Testament, the demand for repentance and a consequent change of their pattern of conduct becomes imperative. We readily recall the words of John the Baptist as many came to him, inquiring the way and asking for baptism at his hands. "And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none . . . . Exact no more than that which is appointed . . . . Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:8-13). In other words, the profession of repentance and consequent forgiveness of sins, then as now, implied a changed ethical standard of living. Likewise we read that, if one claims the experience of holiness, the level of his living will be consistent, particularly in regard to his spirit and his attitudes. "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God; ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life" (Rom. 6:22). "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:11-14). The obligations of consistent ethics and holy living are evident in the path that we take as a church.

We fully realize that the discriminations we make as being consistent with the path we take are so foreign to the average understanding of the world that they often seem strange even to the point of repulsion. Nonetheless, if we will point the way to the path of God, we must walk the highway of holiness, whereon is nothing that is unclean. And as we do so, now and then others will be attracted to this way and find for themselves rest for their souls.

So important, then, do we concede ethics to be that we have painstakingly and deliberately written into our official church Manual explicit directions which we call our General Rules. It logically follows that whoever would carry our banner and walk the way with us will gladly accept this position as an accurate expression of our collective conscience, bringing their lives into conformity with this position. So, after all, when the people called Nazarenes walk in unity and harmony in the path we have marked out, the impact of their collective living will have no small effect and influence throughout the world. Thus men will find the path that leads to life instead of wandering on a broad way that leads to destruction. You may recall that it was the almost strange and curious conduct of John and Charles Wesley along with their associates that caused them early to be called Methodists. And do not forget that it was this very power and influence of example that bulwarked their preaching of experiential religion, challenging men from the path of sin to the path of God and meeting England's moral need in one of her historical crises.

And so we remind you that the path we take has its proper emphasis on a godly walk that is to be clearly exemplified by a consistency of conduct within proper scriptural limits. One has but to read the General Rules of the Church of the Nazarene to understand the import of what I write. With this clear emphasis is added the importance of a united consistency throughout the church, not only avoiding confusion among ourselves but also making our position strong and influential. Let no one ever say to you that the rules of the church which declare our position regarding ethics and

general conduct are incidental. The integrity of our position, once violated at this point, will eventually demoralize the entire structure of the church we love.

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10 -- A PATH FILLED WITH PERIL

There are, however, many pitfalls and perils in a position such as ours. There is always, as already suggested, the danger of deserting those standards, which would sooner or later result in confusion and hurt to the vital principles of doctrine upon which the church has been built. Our standards cannot be ignored or depreciated without hazard to the whole and an inevitable wandering from the path we have taken. We must maintain our ethics with consistent conscience if we intend to remain invulnerable in our entire position. Anyone who thinks impartially can hardly say that the Church of the Nazarene has gone to extremes in its requirements of conduct for membership. The pattern chosen by our church is one generally accepted by all groups who have kept a definite line of demarcation between the world and Church. That there is such a clear line of cleavage is plainly and consistently taught by the Scriptures. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (I John 2:15).

But the perils of our position are really twofold. On the one hand there is the always impending danger of worldliness, and on the other hand there is the lurking presence of Pharisaism. One frequently wonders if some of our people realize how small a margin exists between Pharisaism and worldliness. It is a paradox we will not elaborate: legalism and spirituality are poles apart; yet in actual living, close together. Herein lies a distinct peril to our ethical position, a failure to discriminate between that which is fundamental and basic and that which invades the realm of personal scruple.

After all, there is a realm of personal scruple which belongs to every individual. There is a domain of personal conscience in this over-all pattern of ethics which must be scrupulously honored if the consistency and strength of the whole are maintained. It is this particular phase of personal liberty, properly respected, which affords flexibility to the whole. It is really the cement which binds the whole together. To go too far in either direction is to make a misplaced emphasis which eventually will undermine the foundations upon which we have built our superstructure of conduct.

Moffatt phrases it well in his translation of Paul's appeal to this point in the Roman letter:

"Welcome a man of weak faith, but not to pass judgment upon his scruples. While one man has enough confidence to eat any food, the man of weak faith eats only vegetables. Well, the eater must not look down upon the non-eater, and the non-eater must not criticize the eater, for God has welcomed him . . . . Certainly keep your own conviction on the matter, as between yourself and God..." (14:1-3, 22).* [* From "The Bible: A New Translation" by James Moffatt. Copyrighted in 1935 by Harper and Brothers. Used by permission.]

Paul's plea is well put: Respect the scruple of your brother and, when you have a personal conviction at variance with his, do not feel compelled to press your conviction upon him as a moral obligation.

I suppose that the two most pointed illustrations are to be found in the realm of dress and adornment. Some would be inclined to exert their own personal convictions through personal influence upon others beyond reasonable limits, and demand either by word or attitude that everyone must come under their particular conscience. Failure to respond frequently brings about a superior attitude on the part of those making the demands, resulting in a false sense of superior spirituality; and, consequently, Pharisaism is born. Such an attitude has sometimes been carried so far that individual criteria have been set as requirements for church membership. To become arbitrary at points where the church takes no stand, or to interpret the concise statement of the church to suit one's particular view, brings nothing but strain and confusion. Whether or not it would be admitted, such a position cultures a sense of superiority leading to spiritual pride. It is here that the seeds of Pharisaism are sown. Strong feelings here lead to the temptation to question the genuineness and sincerity of those who do not agree. To avoid the snare of Pharisaism on the path we take, we must leave some debatable matters to the realm of personal scruple, insisting only upon that which the church clearly demands.

Is it not significant that Jesus always taught in principle and never in detail? He honored and respected the rights of human personality. If we, then, likewise will adjust our thinking to the principles of the Kingdom, we will not bring confusion on the path we take. We should never forget that, after all, "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17). As to dress: let it always be with genuine modesty. As to adornment: let it be with a deliberate avoidance of display. These principles, highlighting the specific statements of our General Rules, will be sufficient to index a consistency of conduct that should be acceptable to all. We must make up our minds sincerely to turn neither to the right hand nor the left. We should be solicitous for the welfare of one another, determined not to offend by careless tendencies toward either worldliness or legalism.

Remember that the pressures of life are relentless and subtle. Dangers will always lurk along the path we have chosen. Discriminations must always be kept clear and Scripturally logical. We must not stray from the highway of holiness wherein God has called us to walk as a church. God, in olden days, forbade His people to intermarry with neighboring nations. It was not that God had repudiated marriage, but rather that the insinuations of such mixed relationships would eventually wear down the vital convictions of His people until they became like their pagan neighbors. There always has been and always will be the danger of the insinuation of worldliness -- the gradual invasion of little things, tiny indiscretions, until the accumulation has gathered weight and acceleration and the tide cannot be turned back. We must always be tirelessly and jealously alert for the integrity of our cause and the path we have taken.

Yes, the realm of ethics is important to genuine spirituality. The more particular the emphasis on personal experience, the more exacting are the ethics to justify that experience. We repeat that we, as a church, have chosen to take the path of the highway of holiness. Since this is the path of our deliberate choosing, we must guard the boundaries of that path with care and mutual sincerity by insisting that the collective conscience of our church has been settled beyond debate.

But we must also insist that, within this concept of conduct, there is a realm of personal scruple as plainly taught by Scripture. This position must be honored with due respect and confidence, with a definite loyalty to one another and to our common cause.

This path we take is one foundationed in religious democracy rather than on religious totalitarianism. This analogy should be clear in the light of current thinking. There is a political ideology which places all rights in the hands of the state, and the individual is completely subservient. In some ways the totalitarian concept would simplify life if it did not destroy, at the same time, the basic principle of personal sovereignty. If life could be operated successfully on this level, much of the stress and strain of personality relations would be avoided. But the hazards of democracy are wisely to be chosen rather than totalitarianism.

Transferred to the religious realm, we repeat, the analogy is apt and pertinent. There are those who would choose to operate the kingdom of God on earth as a totalitarian regime. This was a fundamental problem our founding fathers faced in the beginning as the basic philosophy upon which the church should operate. Although this particular terminology was not in vogue, its basic principles were. Our fathers chose a path for us wherein a greater service could be given humanity with full recognition of the many hazards involved. It was the choice between a path removed from all perils by drawing the lines close and a wider path of service where hazards must be taken to give the larger ministry. It was a choice between serving humanity lavishly and recklessly or offering to man a small, circumscribed ministry that feared the dangers of the larger way. The former is the path of religious democracy.

Legislating life and conduct to the extent that individual liberty and thought cannot function within the realm of our accepted conscience is antagonistic to the principles laid down by our founding fathers. This leads to totalitarianism. Within this realm a man's life must be regulated not only in terms of spiritual principles, but also in such exacting detail that a restricted pattern of conduct removes all genuine freedom and individual rights. We believe, after all, that the democratic way of life is as fundamentally sound in the spiritual realm as in the political. We can agree on certain principles of truth that will determine our general conduct. But beyond that the individual must say what he will do.

This is the hard way, involving personality differences, calling for far more grace to accept one another's views in the application of godly conduct. But this attitude will not only grant the individual a native freedom God intended him to enjoy, but it will also give latitude to the Holy Spirit to culture the soul in ways that will please God. When this basic freedom is unduly restricted, God's function through human personality by the Holy Spirit is hindered. Every man is to be safeguarded in the fundamental privileges God intended him to enjoy in building himself up on his own most holy faith. There is a unique balance between personal spontaneity and the function of the Holy Spirit. This was the spiritual ideology upon which our church was founded. It is the path our fathers intended we should take. Let us guard it jealously and maintain the rights of spiritual democracy, not only for the sake of our own unique existence as a church, but also because it does mark the plain path God intended man to take. Our task is to show man the way he must go to find present peace and eternal happiness. This is the path we take.

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THE END