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## **NAZARENES -- WHERE ARE WE NOW?**

**By W. Huston Johnson**

A Digital Publication Created From:

"The Church of the Nazarene  
Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow"

By W. H. Johnson

Published in or near 1958

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## **INTRODUCTION TO THE DIGITAL EDITION**

In this little booklet, W. Huston Johnson makes a heartfelt plea for Nazarenes to return to and adhere to the standards of old-fashioned Holiness. No publication date was given, but internal evidence shows that it was written in 1958, and it is likely that it was published during or near that same year. The author's plea is not for legalism, but for a loving and yet firm adherence to the Old-Paths of Scriptural Holiness. He sees Revival as the real solution to the perceived drift in the Church of the Nazarene.

Unfortunately, due to some fluke or error, page 19 of this booklet was not printed, that side of the page being left blank. Therefore, there is an hiatus between the end of what was page 18 text and the beginning of page 20 text. Page 20 is the last page of the booklet.

I have changed the title for this digital version of W. Huston Johnson's booklet for the sake of brevity. Longer titles do not fit well in all of our indexes. Thus, "The Church of the Nazarene -- Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow" has been changed to "Nazarenes -- Where Are We Now?" The latter part of the new title is taken from one of the booklets subdivisions entitled: "Where Are We

Now?". The booklet had no Table of Contents and no numbers were assigned to its 5 divisions. These I have inserted into this edition. -- DVM

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1

## STATEMENT BY THE AUTHOR

For the past thirty-nine years I have given my consecrated best to the Church of the Nazarene. The church has been wonderful to me, giving an open door to preach second blessing Holiness.

The material in this little booklet was first given at the Indianapolis Preachers' meeting, April 10, 1958. I have received a number of requests for it to be put in permanent form. So we are sending it forth, praying that it might help in turning the tide of modernism that we feel is seriously endangering the Holiness movement of our day.

W. H. Johnson  
1049 King Avenue  
Indianapolis, Indiana

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2

## REMAINING A DISTINCT HOLINESS CHURCH

In 1919 I united with the Church of the Nazarene. Some months later I was given my first District license. Since that time, I have been a preacher in this beloved church. Into her, I have given without reserve my strength, time, money and sometimes my heart blood.

Many times I have seen what I felt were her weaknesses and have not held my peace, but at no time have I betrayed her trust. At her tables have I been fed, upon Nazarene beds have I slept, and supported my family on Nazarene tithes. For these years I have preached the Gospel she bade me preach without fear, favor or compromise. I have felt the warmth of personal friendship from the humblest layman to the highest elected officers in the church. There were about 35,000 when I joined her ranks. With this background, perhaps I may be permitted to do some diagnosing and prescribing without seeming boastful or critical, inasmuch as the great burden of my heart is to help the Church I love. I have refused to be flattered by my friends or frightened by foes.

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### THE BEGINNING OF A DISTINCT HOLINESS CHURCH

The Church of the Nazarene had its beginning in the merging of several small groups of ministers and laymen, whose all-consuming desire was to get men and women saved and sanctified and build them up in holy character. The glorious doctrine of Second Blessing Holiness was the heart and backbone of this work. Many ideas and opinions existed among these different merged groups. Many unwritten laws and rules existed among the people called Nazarenes. These concepts varied from those who wore black hose, black dresses with hooks and eyes instead of buttons, who wore sleeves to their wrist and skirts to their ankles, and no jewelry of any kind, believing this was the proper dress for Holiness women; to those who had more liberal views. Everyone seemed to feel that caution was always a good motto. Painted faces and bobbed hair had no place in their ranks. Television was unheard of in those early days, and there is no doubt in my mind what the attitude of its leaders would have been. Total abstinence was their attitude toward the theater. Every argument I have heard for the control or for selectivity in regard to TV programs, the same one I heard in regard to the theater in those early days. "Be not deceived" is still a good admonition. My standing in the church will have no value when I stand before God, but have I "shunned the appearance of evil?" This will have value, for character and conduct do go together. When loyalty to a denomination is stronger than loyalty to principle, something is seriously wrong in the soul.

The first Assembly I attended, there was not a delegate that wore jewelry of any kind, not even a plain wedding band. But from the beginning, there were those with a more liberal attitude in regard to matters of this kind. As a young man in attendance at a District Assembly in southern California, the district secretary came on the platform with a wedding band on. At the next session of the Assembly, I noticed that she was there without the ring. When I asked a leading pastor the reason back of this, he said some of the pastors had gone to the presiding officer with the statement they did not want a leader on the district up before their people wearing a ring, and the presiding officer asked her to leave it off while on the platform.

Often I have heard someone say, The Nazarenes used to do this or that, or didn't do this or that, and my reply was it depended a great deal upon the merged group or the section of the merged group with which you came in contact. There was enough variety to make it very interesting in any of these groups. In the efforts of some to streamline the church, unintentionally I believe, they have crushed and curbed the zeal and enthusiasm of many. We are in a war and men do not fight wars with guns, ammunition, brains, and brawn alone. As vital as these are, there is that quality of spirit that the army calls morale, which means they have a will to fight. The lack of willingness to fight is one of the most serious lacks in our church today. Some seem to have forgotten that Jesus Christ is still the Lion of the tribe of Juda. Who ever heard of a Lion scratching backs or cuddling his enemies? While men slept, the enemy has been shearing locks, and many are not aware that the Lord has departed.

In those early days no one was invested with power to interpret the simple statements of doctrine which constituted largely the Manual of the Church. Many felt and still feel that no man or set of men have a right to rule against the highest tribunal God has ever given, the sanctified conscience of man. I know of no General Superintendent that wanted such power. When there was liberty of thought and action in these matters, Holiness of heart and life was the keynote. The Glory of God was on our people and progress was evident everywhere. Everyone preached and practiced what he believed the Manual taught and what he felt under God was the best, and I know in those early days of no one being discriminated against for being too liberal or too radical, although there was a large marginal difference. In trying to crystallize the machinery, much of the fire and enthusiasm so vital to the progress of our Zion has been curbed.

Getting the Presence of God on the people or breaking through in a revival, or praying the Glory down, were common expressions. Holy boldness was a common characteristic of the people. The outreach for souls was constant and pressing. No one seemed to think compromise had any place. All seemed to be going somewhere and knew where they were going. However, there were many speeds in evidence. Everything seemed to converge upon one point; College speech, Sunday School promotion, Missionary Convention, Revivals, all seemed to say, "get the people saved and sanctified and keep them blessed."

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#### A DANGEROUS TREND

A dangerous trend started to be noticeable to me in the late thirties. Emphases were changed; from better men to better trained men; better programs in place of deeper passion; building a great denomination instead of an evangelistic movement. Emphasis placed on numbers and members overshadowed getting people saved and sanctified. Sunday Schools climbed while prayer meeting declined. Freedom of the Spirit was curbed by cute little statements reflecting upon some old grandma or some inconsistent shouter, and a barb was often given those with strong convictions in regard to externals. They were pressed to endorse instead of tolerate.

Youth services started to drifting into a social function. Then the athletic began to take prominence. At first they played in modest apparel, but now so-called sanctified leaders will vote

to put shorts on young men to play out in front of a crowd of spectators. These same men that did the voting would have been greatly embarrassed for their own daughters or sisters to have seen them in such a garb within the walls of their own home -- that is, twenty years ago.

Within the last twelve months, I stood by the graves of two men. These men were, a few years ago, the two most wanted men by the F.B.I. in this nation. I thought as I stood by their graves, I would rather be them with their limited light at the judgment, than to have gone blind staring at the light of full salvation and not be able to discern right from wrong; to become so blind that the sense of modesty was completely obliterated from my vision. The man who supports such a program knowingly is in danger of becoming as guilty as the actual participator, for he becomes partaker of the other man's sins. I would rather meet God at the Judgment having sunk a great ocean liner than to help sink a great Holiness church.

Caution seemed to be the watchword instead of courage. Suspicion began to be in evidence. The more liberals cautioned against the radical element in the church, while the radical waved the red flag of warning. Charity was not as much in evidence as I would have been glad to have seen in either group. When it became necessary for me to make a choice, the radicals were always my preference, but many times my heart has greatly grieved by the apparent lack of charity manifested by some of the most radical who were some of my closest friends. No doubt but what they were more charitable than they appeared.

On the other hand, I have watched with a bleeding heart that apparently sweet but subtle power [of liberalism] at work -- gradually but surely turning the church from a rugged evangelistic force to an educational, social, recreational institution, too anemic to reproduce real red-blooded Nazarenes. Those involved don't seem to be aware of what is being done: "How many accepted Christ, or how many professions did you have?" -- these are common expressions now in Nazarene ranks. The terminology is not what bothers me, it is what is back of this; light conviction, little repentance, no restitution, weak and anemic conversions. Back-scratching has become an art. Polish is almost a must. Both of these are applied under the label of diplomacy, tact or strategy; only God knows the real motive.

Wars have always been fought by courageous, daring men and we are in a war. God help us to be as kind as a sweet, Christian mother and as fearless and bold as a seasoned combat soldier, for we must soon give an account unto God for our stewardship.

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WHERE ARE WE NOW?

We have a great organization, many lovely buildings, lots of good literature, the best trained men mentally the Holiness movement has ever had. This includes laymen and preachers alike. Money is going through Nazarene coffers at a tremendous rate. We have reached a membership of around 290,000 and a Sunday School of more than 600,000. No one can truthfully say that this does not denote progress, and for all legitimate gains we are all humbly grateful. But I

would remind us that there are some losses and these are what disturb my sleep and give me great anxiety in the day, for I deeply love my church.

Those of our ministry possess gifts galore, are good entertainers, are pleasant to listen to, are known in their community as mixers, are great story-tellers, and apparently have made much of Dale Carnegie's book on "Making Friends and Influencing People." But their preaching has lost its punch, if it ever had a punch. Too many eyes are dry and many souls are void of birth pains. Children have come to birth and there is not strength to bring forth, and when children are born in this atmosphere, they are weak and sickly with little or no strength to reproduce. A Polly Parrot crowd is the result with rubber stamps in their hands and yeses on their lips. Too many leaders only want men as they say, "who fit my program." It might help to find God's program and try it. God's program never fails. It is easy to forget that God called a distinct variety of men to preach His Gospel and build His Church. Woe is me if I fail my generation.

Another danger sign is the lack of romance in the work of God. Work has become a drudgery. A sleeping sickness has its grip upon the people. They can be only partially awakened and that just momentarily. A defensive faith is in evidence -- just enough to keep saved -- but very little attacking faith is found in the church. "God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." II Tim. 1:7.

Catering to the man with the money. The slogan is, "Mark the Man with the Money," instead of, "Mark the Perfect Man." Men are promoted on gifts and greenbacks instead of Grace. This statement will immediately bring a rebuttal from some quarters, but this is not just a flash of criticism, but a conclusion reached after close observation. I do not mean to infer that this is a universal practice, but altogether too common. Gifts and greenbacks have their place, but "God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty." "For it is not by might nor by power" and that includes the power of oratory, "but by MY SPIRIT saith the Lord of Hosts." I read in God's Word that if there come to your assembly a man in goodly apparel and also a man in vile raiment and you have respect to the man in gay clothing, are you not partial in your heart and become judges of evil thoughts?

If we remain a distinct Holiness church and fill the place God has called us to fill, some barricades against sin are necessary. Just where to build these have been a controversial point in all ages of man's history. Meat offered to idols was one of the early church's problems. Should circumcision be practiced by the early Christians was another controversial point. Our day has certainly had its battleground in these matters. Too many tragedies are in the records. Just what is always the best for me and the cause of Christ has not always been easy to decide.

The colors are dangerously mixed these days. Here is Satan's grand strategy for our complex age. Not all that is dangerously unethical is black sin. If it were all black and clearly so, then every true Christian would stop immediately. Many things are mixed with white and black until it looks gray. Color blindness is the real danger here.

Does what you are doing and about to do have enough good in it to justify the risk? Should I participate as a spiritual leader remembering the far-reaching effect of my influence? It is not usually the outright wicked or vile person that wrecks the church. It is the strong-gifted preacher or

layman affected with near-sightedness or color-blindness giving wrong or confusing directions that wrecks the church.

Our beloved church has made some things clear in our manual. Intoxicating liquor, tobacco, secret orders, quarreling, dishonesty, and theater attendance are listed in the manual. Total abstinence is our unqualified position on these things. No one argues otherwise.

Then we come to another part of the general rules that are very clear to me, but seem to be confusing to some. On page 37 and section 6 in our 1956 manual says our people are to dress with Christian simplicity and modesty. The only major question involved is:-- Does it mean what it says? If it does, exposing the body to public gaze on the street, on the ball-court, or at mixed bathing places is plainly forbidden. The people that do the gazing become guilty with the transgressors. Some argue that where you are makes the difference. If that is so, then the man that wants to can drink a bottle of beer or a "highball" at a social function or smoke an occasional cigarette. He doesn't intend to go to excess and become a drunkard or chain smoker -- the other folks do, why be so different? The fallacy of this is easily seen if we want to build our defenses according to the Bible and our church manual.

Further, some tell us that certain rings and some other things are exceptions. If so, why did God inspire Holy men to write and mention specifically gold, pearls and costly array. Also, why did our early fathers see that it was quoted specifically in the manual? No doubt but what they thought this was the best place for a Holiness church to draw its lines between Holiness and the world. If this does not mean what it says, then what can we believe? Suppose we say, Thou shalt not steal only on special occasions. Lie not at all except when it will keep me from being embarrassed. Thou shalt not commit adultery except by special permit. Someone says that is a rather strong position and I agree that it is, but the rule of reasoning is the same. These things should be taken out of the manual or observed. If it was removed from the manual, it would still be in God's Word.

One of my great uncles believed in dram drinking -- kept a bottle of whiskey in the old wooden safe. He never was drunk in his entire life. But the records read like this; all of his sons made drunkards of themselves and several grandsons also. He drew the line at the wrong place.

The home is the most sacred institution in the world besides the church. The minister's influence is far-reaching here. Shall we have cards in the home and supervise the playing? Not all have made gamblers that tried this, but the risk is too great. The theater had better be kept down the street rather than brought into the home. Many have tried moving it into the home and lost much more than they gained. Try moving it out and you will find out how many worshippers it has bowing at its confusing shrine.

"Safety First" is a slogan used almost everywhere. It could do no harm to bring it into your church life. Have you drawn the line in the safest place for you and your family, and for the future interest of our beloved church? The soul you save may be your own.

There are some things I don't know. I don't know how a Nazarene Preacher feels at a ball-game. I don't know how he feels at a skating party or a bowling alley, and I don't know how

he feels looking at wrestling matches, cigarette or liquor advertisements, Hollywood shoot 'em up shows, or nearly nude men and women putting on vulgar acts for the entertainment of lustful world on television. I don't know how a preacher feels raising or giving money to build a kitchen in his church, or asking a church to put money in a recreation building, while starving souls and bony fingers reach out to him to give them the Bread of Life. I don't want to know by experience how he feels, but I do know what it is to love God with all of my heart, and love the church that has given me a place in her ranks to preach rugged second blessing Holiness these years. To sincerely enjoy shunning every appearance of evil, loving every man on earth and keeping every motive pure.

When the personal convictions of a preacher or layman can be shifted to conform to the general conscience of a denomination or change his views to match a local situation, his soul is in great peril. When compromise ceases to cause heart pains then the soul is asleep or dead. God did not call us to be conformers but through His divine power to be transformers. It is as wrong to lower a standard and by this reflect upon the experience of heart Holiness as it is to compromise a doctrine. The letter killeth but the consistent life gives safe direction.

There have been those things that I might have done and kept some grace. But my dangers were less by leaving them off. I know it is safer where I am for me. The inner feeling of security that is undisturbed is mine -- the battle-line straight, and my barricades against sin and the world are unmovable. I will be charitable, but I shall not be moved.

1958 is our denomination's Golden Anniversary year. As we reflect on the past, there are many stories of mighty manifestations of God at home and abroad that read a lot like the Book of Acts. We are at the place where if we go farther with God as a denomination, it will first be necessary to go deeper. Our doctrine must be clearly stated, and our barricades against sin and the world maintained. I have some suggestions to make; they are old true and tried methods. The pressure is strong on my heart that here is our way. It is not easy, but God will help if we make our slogan "devotion rather than promotion." Remembering we are fully dependent on God.

[At this point what should have been page 19 of the printed booklet began. For some reason, page 19 is totally blank. The opposite side of the sheet contains the last page of the booklet, page 20 which begins as seen below. -- DVM]

Agonizing prayer is our chief weapon. God help us to use it.

Jesus chose men with calluses on their hands and salt brine on their sun-tanned faces to lead the forces of the early church. He has never called men to fight in this war who were cushioned on ease or lulled in the stupor of extravagance. Our Saviour led the way in all-night of prayer.

I still believe that enough people praying enough, will bring enough of God in our midst to produce an old-fashioned Revival. And, an old-fashioned Revival will give a fresh consciousness of the terribleness of sin; clear our minds of the unpleasant accumulation of the past, cure any trend toward worldliness; give a new sense of the Value of Souls; and a clearer conception of the hugeness of our task and the all-sufficiency of our God. "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and they



spoke the Word of God with boldness." We are well able under the blessing of God to go up and possess the land. Let us bathe our swords with tears and with a heart passion for the lost beat a charge for God and Holiness that will cause consternation in the ranks of Satan and glorious victory for God's distinct Holy Church.

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THE END